

HUMAN RIGHTS MUDDLE | KATHMANDU PARTIES | DANGEROUS MINES

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# nation

WEEKLY

## ELECTION ON THE CARDS

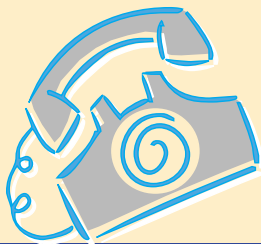
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Once seen as the most promising emerging nation, Nepal seems to have lost its way. But it still has a chance to qualify for the 2007 World Cup.

## Special fares for January and February 2005

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## Letters



“We treat guests as gods while disrespecting our own kin”

NETRA RANA

### Only for tourists

NEPAL IS A PERFECT HUB FOR MANY tourists who can see the very best in natural beauty on offer and all this at an extremely low cost (“All for the Local Economy,” by Nick Meynen, Jan. 9). No wonder many Nepalis depend on tourism for their livelihood despite living in an agrarian society. The article vividly depicts a country the where the foreign tourist can travel without any fear of violence, while the security situation is bleak for the locals themselves. My question is: Does this country exist only for the pleasure of the tourist? The Maoists would do well to mull over the question. Over the years, many people have been made homeless; countless others orphaned, maimed for the life. Many have fled the country altogether simply for their safety. What revolution this that forces its own people to abandon their homes? Why does tourism matter when our own people aren't safe in their homes and are forced to live the life of refugees inside their own country and foreign lands? Though the tourist can contribute a lot to our economy, he can't achieve peace for us. Yes, Meynen is right when he says there is a huge gap between the safety of tourists and the locals. We treat guests as gods while disrespecting our own kin.

For a tourist, all this makes for an exciting story to tell back home: How they bought their safety with a “little donation?” But to readers, the story also offers a poignant tale of what Nepalis have made of Nepal. Before the Maoists make their “people's war” “pro-tourist,” they should make it “pro-people.”

NETRA RANA  
 VIA EMAIL

### Great sports articles

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, YOUR PUBLICATION is a pioneer in good sports writing,

with Sudesh Shrestha leading the way. He is not only insightful, but writes beautifully and conveys his passions with conviction. How many periodicals can boast of a regular sports column that is so consistently readable? Thank you, Shrestha, and keep up the good work.

M. TULADHAR  
 VIA EMAIL

### Love for Nepali

IF ANYONE ASKS ME TO PICK ONE bilingual literary figure of renown in Nepal, my vote would go to Taranath Sharma (“Old Hand,” Khula Manch, Dhriti Bhatta, Jan. 9). The younger generation, which is getting increasingly sucked into kitsch culture, should especially take note his one advice: The new generation should get more engrossed in Nepali literature for the long-term continuity of our language. Some of Nation's young writers would do well to heed Sharma's advice, too. Let me quote the sentence that inspired me the most: “...my love for my mother tongue is reflected in my English texts, which retain, if not all, some originality.”

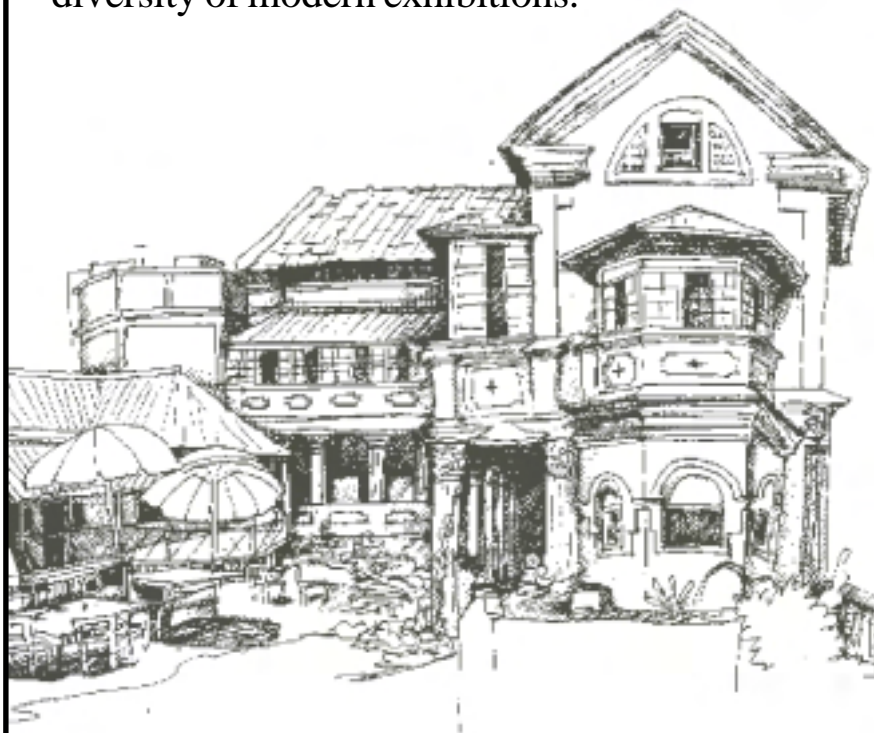
RAMESH PATHAK  
 VIA EMAIL

### CORRECTION:

The letter to the U.S. Congress, asking it to stop unchecked military aid to Nepal, cited in our article “Maoist Conundrum” by John Narayan Parajuli (Cover Story, Jan. 9) was erroneously attributed to “an American academic.” The letter is the collective work of International Nepal Solidarity Network, an action group based in Kathmandu. The academic in question is a member of that group.

# Indigo Gallery & Mike's Breakfast

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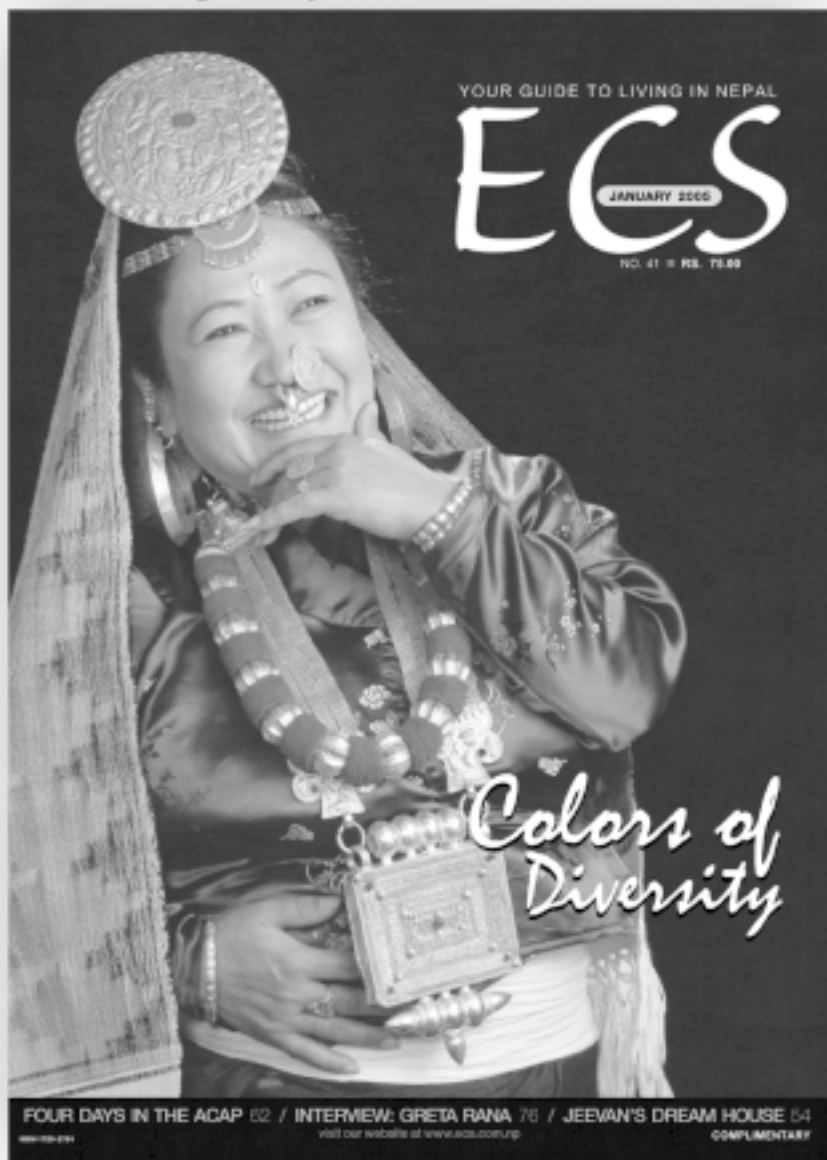
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**SEIZED:** The Army displaying things that it said had been retrieved from various Maoist hideouts in the Valley



B Rai



**DANCING DAMSEL:** A foreigner doing the Chandi nach, a traditional dance of Kiratis



SS/NU



**CIRCLE OF LIGHT:** Boudhanath, lit up on a cold winter night

**UNSEEN JEWELS:** Photographs of paintings from the famous Anjanta Caves in western India, on show at the Nepal Art Council



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**NO ARGUING:** The final of the San Miguel Cup between East Bengal, (India) and Hannam University (South Korea). East Bengal prevailed, winning the match 4-2.

## Picture of the Week



**REMEMBERING ROBIN:** A child at a gathering in Boudhanath in memoriam of Robin Needham, country director of CARE Nepal, who perished in the tsunami waves in Phuket, Thailand. Needham was on a Christmas break with his family.



# Vigil for Peace

Kathmandu is rife with constant calls for peace. But hardly anyone notices, and even less take any action toward that end.

This simple vigil is a paradox because, even though Kathmandu is rife with constant calls for peace, hardly anyone notices, and even less take any action. The sparse attendance at the ceremony

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

**A** recent poll has found that 93 percent of all Nepalis think the country is headed in the wrong direction. Their biggest concern is the lack of jobs, followed by the Maoist violence. The people, the poll found, yearn for peace and want the King, political parties and the Maoists to sit down and negotiate a peaceful settlement in the interests of the nation.

This might sound surprising because, as some might note, you don't need a poll to discern the people's desire for peace. Peace is everywhere—at least the word "peace"—in newspapers, on television and on radio; in theaters, art galleries and in cinema halls. Peace also routinely spouts forth from the lips of Palace officials, government ministers and, yes, even the Maoists. Countless community groups, NGOs and clubs have sprung up to work for peace. It is also



the new development mantra. You can't talk to a development worker without encountering the word peace several times: "No development without peace."

And yet, Kathmanduites' foremost desire for peace is not matched by their actions. It seems that merely wanting peace is one thing, but doing something for it is entirely another. This is the paradox of our Kathmandu society, a paradox evident to anyone who ventures out to attend the monthly candle-light peace vigil at Maitighar.

For those who don't know about it, the "Campaign Against Violence" vigil is held at the Mandala at Maitighar on the first day of each Nepali month. It is held to mark the deaths of all Nepalis who have died in this senseless conflict in the previous month. Sometimes those being remembered are 20 in number, sometimes 45. Last month it was more than 80. It could soon surpass a hundred, given the course the conflict is taking. Needless deaths of fellow Nepalis unfortunate enough to be caught in a brutal war.

But where is the outcry? Where is the anger?

speaks volumes about our attitude. When it comes to devoting a little time and effort, most of us just don't care. The conflict is eating at our social fabric, our livelihoods, our family and friends. But aside from the occasional *tsk tsk tsk*, we don't care.

This is not to belittle the many other small and big efforts towards peace, like the recent peace march organized by the CPN-UML and its sister groups. Nor is it to say that more attendance at the monthly vigil would miraculously resolve the conflict. It won't. For that to happen, more common citizens must band together, whether at Maitighar or at other places, and demand to be heard by all sides in the conflict. And this banding together must be done regularly, routinely and with increasingly louder calls for peace.

But this too is unlikely to happen until more Kathmanduites get affected by the conflict. The simple logic of conflict is that it is always the affected who yearn for peace the most. Thus we have

Dailekh, where mothers have been at the forefront of anti-Maoist campaigns after their children were forcibly taken away. Thus we have the Jana Morcha party, whose harassment by the Maoists has led to a counter-Maoist campaign. Thus, indeed, we have the UML, which is now so concerned about the Maoists' effect on its grassroots cadres that the party wants peace at all costs—though the cost apparently is not high enough for it to quit the government.

But unlike them, the elites of this Valley are far too little affected to be serious about peace. The capital in fact bore little consequences of the conflict until very recently, when the Maoists began to impose indiscriminate blockades and bandas to disrupt normal life. Small businesses, schools, public transport are now adequately affected to concern the general Valley population. This could provide the incentive for a stronger civil society movement for peace. But alas, we don't yet see signs of that happening. We don't yet see more people pouring out to Maitighar to hold silent vigils for peace.

What more will it take to arouse the people into action? **N**

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THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.

### Tsunami aid

The government donated \$100,000 to help Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunamis that devastated much of Asia. Separately, the Confederation of Nepali Industrialists contributed relief material worth Rs.1 million and Laxmi Bank put in another Rs.100,000. The government has also provided \$50,000 to the Maldives, another South Asian country hit hard by the tsunamis. To mourn for those who lost their lives in the disaster, flags in all the government buildings and diplomatic missions were flown at half-mast on Friday, Jan. 7.

### American dream

The American Embassy in Kathmandu made it clear that winning the Diversity Visa lottery alone did not guarantee visas, even if the winners met all the qualifications. The embassy was responding to allegations by the "DV Lottery Victim Association," with some 200 members, that the embassy was unjustly denying them visas. The embassy said that the winners of the DV lottery must be able to support themselves and their families in United States until they secure jobs. Those who couldn't fulfill this requirement would not get visas.

### Maoist mistreatment

The Maoists allegedly manhandled a French freelance journalist, Vincent S Prado, and a Nepalgunj-based journalist, Netra KC, on Dec. 30 in Rukum. The journalists were on a tour of the mid-western districts of Rolpa and Rukum to monitor the situation of insurgency there. K.C. is also a reporter for the BBC Nepali service. After a half-an-hour scuffle, the

Maoists returned the radio transmitters they had seized from the two.

### Chinese stance

Sun Heping, the Chinese envoy to Nepal, said that China has no intentions of interfering in the Maoist problem in Nepal. Nepal can resolve the problems it faces without any outside help, he said. China's policy was one of noninterference in the domestic affairs of others, said Heping. At the same time, Heping stressed the importance of attracting Chinese tourists to Nepal.

### Exports down

The export of readymade garments to the United States fell by over 30 percent in 2004 compared to the year before. According to Garment Association of Nepal, readymade clothes worth \$85.71 million were exported to the United States in the past year, down from \$123 million in 2003. United States is the largest buyer of Nepali readymade apparels, taking in 90 percent of the total exports. The export to the European Union, however, bucked the trend, registering a growth of 17 percent. The figure reached \$19.4 million.

### Fresh clashes

More than 500 Maoists attacked an Army outpost in western district of Kailali, sparking a fierce clash that left at least three-dozen rebels dead and 150 others injured, according to the Army. The attack took place in the early hours of Wednesday, Jan. 5. The Army said that it had recovered the bodies of 41 rebels while scores of remaining bodies were carried away by their comrades. The Army also said that the Maoist casualties could rise

above 100, possibly as high as 150. None of the security forces were killed in the attack, according to the Army, though eight sustained injuries.

### On the run

The government has issued an arrest warrant against Sarita Karki, the daughter of former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, on charges of fraud. She has reportedly been cheating people of their money, luring them with the promise of employment abroad. Karki, 57, has reportedly duped Rs.100,000 each from at least 80 people, after guaranteeing them employment in South Korea. The victims have filed a writ petition at the appellate court for compensations. Karki remains at large.

### Permission granted

Detainees at the Detention Centre in Sundarijal will now be allowed to see relatives and human rights activists. Among those human rights groups, which have

been granted access to the inmates, are the National Human Rights Commission, the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights and the International Red Cross Society. The visitors will be barred from taking pictures, recording voices and talking on cellphones inside the center.

### New chief

The Constitutional Council recommended Hari Prasad Sharma for the post of chief justice of the Supreme Court. Sharma is set to succeed Govinda Bahadur Shrestha who retires on Jan. 13. The decision to appoint Sharma was reached on Wednesday, Jan.5, following a heated debate between the council members, said newsreports. Sharma's name was forwarded to the Royal Palace for approval on the day after.

### Chopper crash

An Air Dynasty helicopter bound for Lukla in Solukhumbu district crashed at Thonse VDC of

Ramechhap on Tuesday, Jan. 4. All three onboard including the pilot were killed. The French Aeropatale AS350 helicopter, chartered by Trans Himalayan Travels and Tours, was scheduled to bring Japanese tourists from Lukla to Kathmandu. The helicopter left the Kathmandu airport at eight in the morning and crashed at a height of 9,500 feet, about half an hour later.

### Games pushed back

After the devastation caused by tsunamis, the hosts, Sri Lanka, postponed the 10<sup>th</sup> South Asian Games, scheduled to begin on Aug. 15, by a year. Sri Lanka was the hardest hit South Asian country in the recent disaster. All seven SAARC nations plus newcomers Afghanistan, which began participating from last time around, were slated to take part in the upcoming games.



UNTINGING: NC President Koirala at the four-party demonstrations at Ratna park

### Free Treatment

Neonatal ailments will now be treated for free at the Kanti Children Hospital. The availability of free treatment started on Thursday, Jan. 6—the day the hospital celebrated its 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary. The hospital also has plans to establish itself as an institute for child healthcare with teaching and research facilities.

### Load shedding

The Nepal Electricity Authority has temporarily withdrawn the load shedding that started on Tuesday, Jan. 3. The load shedding took place due to a technical glitch in one of turbines in Kaligandaki 'A', the largest in the country at 144 MW. The load shedding will restart in February when the turbines will be shut down again for repair work.

### Cricket captain

Binod Das has been appointed the captain of the national team for the Cricket World Cup Qualifying Series Division II matches to be held in Malaysia in February. Shakti Gauchan is the new vice captain. Paresh Lohani, who captained the team in only one game, was freed from the job considering his importance as a batsman. Meanwhile, Biratnagar defeated Kathmandu in the finals of the Birendra Memorial National League to lift the trophy on Jan. 1.



KIDNAPPED: The Maoists abducted students from various districts all over the country—Accham, Doti, Makwanpur, Taplejung. The girl, an eight-grader, from Basladevi Lower Secondary School in Sisneri, Makwanpur was left behind by the rebels as she is deaf.

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**FIT RITE SPORT SHOES**

Birat Shoe Company, the producers of Fit Rite shoes in Nepal, has brought out new sport shoes in the market. These shoes are designed for jogging, walking and other sporting activities. "Fit Rite... The Rite Walk," is the new slogan of the company. The new Fit Right shoes are made with European technology. They will soon be available in all the major markets in the country for affordable prices, the company says.



tsunami victims in Sri Lanka. Binod Kumar Chaudhary, president of CNI, said that the relief materials comprising noodles, medicines, wearables, tents and blankets. These would be provided to those in dire need of immediate help. The Sri Lankan envoy

lauded the private sector's effort and believed that this would further strengthen the two countries' bilateral relationship.

**LUMBINI LURES**

Lumbini saw a 35.07 percent increase in the number of tourist arrivals in 2004, as compared to the previous year. According to the data provided by the Information Center at the Lumbini Development Fund, 37,892 tourists from 70 countries, excluding those from India, visited Lumbini in 2004. The largest number of visitors was from Sri Lanka—12,217 tourists came to Lumbini from the island country. While the increase in the number of the tourists has been credited to the efforts of the government and its plan to develop Lumbini, the Second World Buddhist Summit is believed to have contributed equally to the rise. Meanwhile, Nepal has also witnessed an overall nine percent hike in tourist arrivals in the year 2004, as compared to 2003.

**CAN'S NEW SITE**

Computer Association of Nepal has launched its new website, [www.can.org.np](http://www.can.org.np). The new site is an upgraded version of its existing website. Biplav Man Singh, CAN's president, unveiled the new site amid a function in Lumbini. Attention has been given to aesthetics while designing the new site. It contains information on Electronic Transaction Ordinance and CAN's policies on Information Technology and Telecommunication. The website also contains the details of the working of the organization along with its news and reports.

**PRIVILEGE CARD**

Photo Concern has launched new privilege cards. The cards will give customers exclusive discounts and additional facilities at Photo Concern and its 66 other associate partners.



**NATIONAL'S INSURANCE POLICIES**

National insurance Company Limited has introduced several insurance schemes, including the health insurance, student personal accident cover and personal accident insurance policy. Under the health insurance scheme, those in the age group of five to 60 can choose



to be insured for as little as Rs.10,000 and up to Rs.100,000. The insurance covers the treatment of many kinds of illness, though it excludes pre-existing medical conditions and has certain clauses clarifying what is not included. The accident insurance scheme covers road/rail/air accidents, violent collision and falls, fire injuries, snakebites, frostbites, drowning and poisoning. There is a similar student accident insurance policy.

**IFB EXCHANGE OFFER**

Old washing machines can now be exchanged with new IFB front-load automatic washing machines. This is the first such exchange offer for washing machines in Nepal, said Sagtani Exim P. Ltd, dealers of IFB Home Appliances. Exchanges may be made in all the leading department stores. The introductory offer is valid for the month of January. IFB washing machines are top sellers in India, the company claims. Each IFB washing machine comes with a one-year warranty and assured service for 10 additional years.

**CNI HELP**

Confederation of Nepalese Industries, CNI, provided relief materials worth Rs.1 million to Grace A Asinwatham, Sri Lankan envoy to Nepal on Saturday, Jan.1. The aid is for the assistance

**DIED**



NSW/SS

Shanker Lal Kedia, an eminent industrialist and a social worker, passed away due to heart failure on Jan. 1. Kedia, 68, was undergoing heart surgery in Mumbai.

Kedia came from a Marwari family in Rajasthan. His father, Brij Lal Kedia, brought the family to Birgunj and later established the Kedia Organization in 1920. Shanker Lal Kedia led the organization until his death. His businesses ranged from sugar and pulse mills to industries of carpets, dairy, vanaspati ghee, oil, corrugated sheets and furniture industries. He was the proprietor of Sunder Steels, Sunder Wire and Nails, Yeti fabrics, Sitaram Gokul Milk, Indushekhar Chini Udyog, Brijlal Chamal Udyog, Birgunj Khadya Udyog, Anmol Oils, Ram Dal Udyog and Sushil Vanashpati Ghee. Kedia was also the promoter of Siddhartha Bank in Kathmandu. He chaired the National Marwari Council for two-year terms in 2001-02 and 2003-04.

A prominent business tycoon, Kedia was also a social benefactor. He established the Brijlal Kedia Sewa Trust in Birgunj and Sushil Kedia Sewa Foundation in Kathmandu for social service. Kedia also formed the network of DAV Sushil Kedia Vishwa Bharati schools in Kathmandu, Sarlahi and Birgunj. He also established the Brij Lal Kedia Hindu University and the Kedia Eye Hospital in Birgunj. Strongly religious, Kedia was the founder member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Nepal.

He has authored many books on religion, social service and literature. He was the founder of Kautilya, a vernacular business weekly published from Birgunj.

Kedia is survived by a wife, two sons and three daughters.

# WILLFUL MISREADING

It is one thing to be thankful that our economy has not yet sunk into a sinkhole like Sudan's or Ethiopia's. It is quite another to say that it is performing well.

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

**M**UCH HAS BEEN SAID about the resilience of our economy during the conflict. The government has used this argument to buttress its claim that all is well with the country. The private sector has used it to boast about its role in keeping the country going. Last month, a leading daily joined the fray with a front-page article, citing several economic indicators revealing a healthy economy.

A careful review reveals that all is not well with the economy, though; that Nepal is indeed paying a huge economic cost for the conflict. Moreover, this also reveals a worrying trend of a willful misreading of the situation by the government and some sections of the media.

Economic growth has averaged 3.0 percent during the conflict compared with 5.1 before it started. To the uninitiated, a 2.1 percent growth rate loss would appear to be no big deal. But check out

these facts. At an average growth rate of three percent, it would take Nepal 24 years to double its current per capita income of \$270. By contrast, a 5.1 percent average growth rate would enable Nepal to get there in just 14 years—a difference of 10 years. Ten long years.

The economic costs appear even higher if some hypothetical scenarios are considered. Nepal's economy was on an upward climb when the conflict started.

Without the conflict, the economy could possibly have grown by eight percent, as India's, or by 10 percent, as China's. An average growth rate of eight percent would have enabled Nepal to double its per capita income in nine years; a 10 percent growth rate would make that possible in just about seven years.

People convinced about the resilience of the economy are perhaps comparing Nepal's economic growth rates with those of the European Union, Ja-

pan and the United States, all of whose growth rate range from one to four percent. But such comparisons are misleading. The EU, Japan and the United States are all operating very close to their production possibilities frontiers, making optimal use of almost all their labor and natural resources. By contrast, Nepal is operating well below its potential—much like other developing countries such as India and China. Nepal thus has much higher potential for growth and would normally be growing much more strongly.

The economic indicators of the current fiscal year also paint no rosy picture.

By all accounts, the lackluster performance of the industrial sector in FY2004 has extended into the first quarter of FY2005. Industrial imports such as raw materials, construction materials, textile, and machinery—all indicators of the level of industrial activity—have declined. Manufacturing activity has particularly slowed down due to disruptions such as bandas, forced closure of businesses and blockades of key access roads from border areas to hinterlands—the growth in the manu-







**HALT:** Bandas and blockades have severely affected manufacturing, tourism and transport

facturing production index in the first quarter of FY2005 was 3.8 percent compared with 4.9 percent in the first quarter of FY2004.

Service sector growth, earlier resilient in the conflict, has begun to slow down during FY2005, reflecting the downward slide in tourism and transport. Tourist arrivals were 10 percent lower during the first quarter of FY2005 than the first quarter of FY2004, primarily due to conflict-related disruptions, including a Kathmandu blockade in August 2004, just before the peak tourist season. Transport services have also been adversely affected by the deteriorating security situation, particularly by the frequent bandas and blockades in different parts of the country.

Agriculture, which has buffered the economy from severe impacts of the conflict in the past, has been adversely affected by the weather. Agricultural growth in FY2005 is likely to decline from last year, reflecting the fall in paddy production, which accounts for almost a quarter of the agricultural GDP. Paddy production is expected to be lower by about four percent compared to last year, after floods affected paddy fields in east-

ern Tarai and a drought deferred paddy plantation in western Tarai.

The situations in the fiscal, financial and external sectors are similar. The government has been unable to hike up its development spending in the conflict-ridden environment, with only three percent utilization of the government's annual capital budget during the first quarter of FY2005. Much needed spending on education, health and infrastructure has not materialized, with significant short-term and long-term economic costs for the country.

Nepal's banks have been unable to make good use of their liquidity—choosing instead to park their resources in low-yielding government bonds. This has resulted in a sharp decline in interest rates with negative implications for saving rates.

Growth of exports has been sluggish while imports have declined, reflecting the weakness of the economy. On a broader level, Nepal remains ill prepared to compete in the freer global trading system brought on by the expiration of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement and Nepal's entry into international trading blocks such as the SAFTA, WTO and BIMSTEC. For instance, the garment and

the carpet industries, two of the most important export industries, face serious problems. The carpet industry has nearly collapsed in the last five years, having lost over half its market. The garment industry has also fallen following the phase-out of the quotas under the MFA.

Overall, the trends reveal an economy under stress from the effects of conflict and unfavorable weather. On one hand, agriculture growth is likely to decline from last year, reflecting the fall in paddy production. On the other, services and industry, especially tourism, transport and manufacturing, have been adversely affected by the escalating conflict and related internal disruptions. On the aggregate demand side, both public and private investments are sluggish.

The picture painted by the government and some sections of the media of an economy cruising along despite the conflict is not just counterintuitive, but also incorrect. While it is one thing to be thankful that our economy has not yet sunk into a sinkhole like Sudan's, Ethiopia's or Rwanda's, it is quite another to say that our economy is performing well in the conflict. **N**

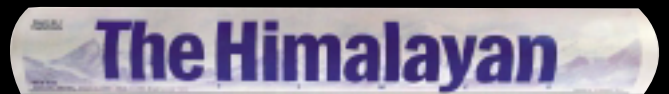


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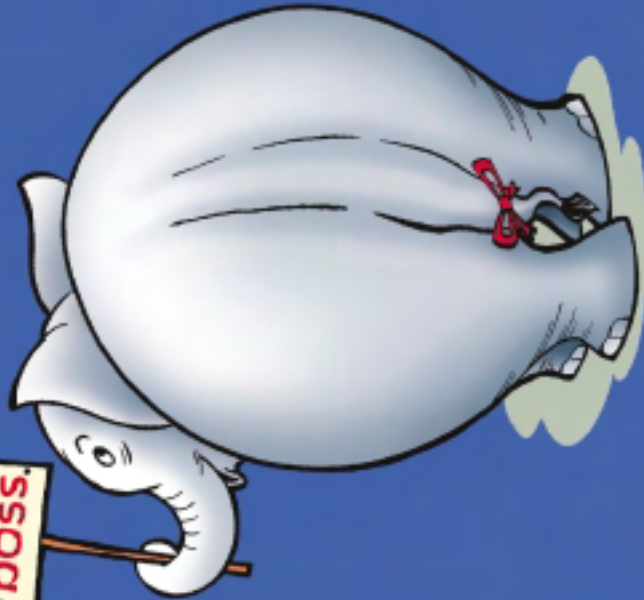
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# HUMAN RIGHTS M

Recent reports about the Army targeting human rights activists remain unproven. Rights workers should at least tell their side of the story.

BY KOSHRAJ KOIRALA

**R**UMORS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE in present-day Nepal and it is not always easy to verify the stories. The latest is that the Army is compiling a secret list of human rights activists who it believes are internationalizing the Royal Nepal Army's poor human rights records.

Both national and international media have carried sketchy reports, claiming that the RNA has issued threats to rights activists. According to the Nepali press, 19 unnamed activists are on the RNA "hit list." The Army has dismissed the allegation; it believes that the activists are falling prey to Maoist propaganda.

What's the truth? Are the activists really under threat?

"We are not in a position to confirm these allegations against the Army," says Sushil Pyakurel, a member of the National Human Rights Commission, the NHRC. "Though we can't rule out the possibility."

Ever since Kantipur daily reported on Jan. 1 that security personnel were hounding rights workers, rumors are rife that many human rights workers are fleeing the country.

Three of those reported to have gone into hiding told Nation Weekly that they had neither received threats from the security personnel, nor had plans to flee the country. This, however, doesn't mean that the rights workers, much like the journalists outside the Valley, are not working under extreme duress.

Mandira Sharma, the coordinator of Advocacy Forum, denies having received any direct threats. "It is obvious that all rights activists feel relatively insecure in the face of threats from the warring par-



# UDDLE

ties,” she says. “But I have not received any death threats from security personnel.”

As for her recent absence, Sharma explains that she was in Europe to coordinate the activities of Nepal Support Group, which is lobbying to improve human rights situation in Nepal. “I was in Europe to seek help for the support group,” says Sharma.

But substantiated or not, the rights workers are deeply worried for their safety. “If there is any grain of truth in these stories,” says a rights worker, “it is certainly scary.”

Whatever the motive behind the recent campaign and whoever is responsible for it, the alleged threat by the Army is going to have a chilling effect on the human rights movement in Nepal, activists say. And the fact that many of them have had some differences with the officialdom at some point or the other adds to the paranoia.

Last January, some Army personnel allegedly beat up Dinesh Prasai, the president of Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP). The RNA however denied the allegation.

“Following the incident, he repeatedly received threats on his life through telephone,” says Bijay Guindel, Prasai’s colleague at COCAP. “We however do not have knowledge about who they [the callers] are.”

Guindel dismisses suggestions that Prasai is currently in India to avoid the Army’s reported pursuit. According to him, Prasai had left for Europe and his visit to India was scheduled during the lead-up of King Gyanendra’s aborted India visit late last December.

Prasai was lobbying New Delhi to pressure the Palace to take initiatives to

improve the human rights situation in Nepal, according to Guindel.

Gobinda Bandi, a member of Advocacy Forum who was also reported earlier to have fled the country, is now in Kathmandu. He had accompanied Prasai during his stay in India. A lawyer, Bandi has been documenting cases of involuntary disappearances and arbitrary detention, among others, which have been carried out by the security forces.

Lieutenant Colonel Raju Nepali, of the Army’s Human Rights Cell, dismisses suggestions that the Army has a “hit list” of human rights workers. “There is no reason why we should threaten the rights activists,” says Nepali. “We believe this is just another propaganda fanned by the Maoists.”

He says none of the human rights activists allegedly threatened by the Army have yet informed its Human Rights Cell, a logical course of action in case of threats.

Purushottam Dahal, the president of Human Rights and Peace Society, believes it to be a case of “sponsored rumor.” “It is unfortunate that they [those reportedly fleeing the country] should remain mute in the face of a raging controversy,” says Dahal, “instead of offering their side of the story.”

In November, Amnesty International, Hu-

man Rights Watch and International Commission for Jurists issued a statement, saying “human rights defenders” in Nepal are under threat. Later, Kofi Annan, the U.N. secretary general, also expressed concern over the human rights violations in Nepal. “The safety and ability of the national human rights activists to carry out their essential works should be guaranteed,” Annan said in his statement.

Observers say the alleged threats have to be substantiated independently and safety concerns need to be immediately addressed.

In a country torn with conflict rights activists often wage a lone battle to document and then publicize state atrocities. Human rights defenders in Nepal play an indispensable role in protecting people against the appalling abuse committed by both the security forces and the Maoist insurgents, says the joint statement issued recently by Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and the Commission for Jurists.

“I suspect some people are trying to create psychological terror among us,” says Mandira Sharma, the coordinator of Advocacy Forum. All the more reason then for the rights workers who have been allegedly threatened to come out in the open. The onus lies on the human rights workers to clear the air of confusion; for the sake of credibility in the public eye, something that is central to their survival. **N**



**NOT ON THE RUN:** COCAP’s Prasai is not running away from the Army as reported (above)



mw/ss



nw/Sagar Shrestha

# ELECTION ON

Amid an escalating Maoist offensive and fractious politics both within and beyond his party, Prime Minister Deuba's Jan. 13 ultimatum expires this week. Will Deuba play his final card?

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**W**inter came in without a hint of rain, and meteorologists looked pleasantly surprised. The government might be hoping for similar surprises on the peace front as well, though there are storm clouds all around.

As the Jan. 13 deadline approaches, that hope seems unlikely. Prime Minister Deuba has already laid down his cards on the table: The Maoists have to come to talks by Jan. 13 or risk an elec-



**STICKING TO HIS GUNS:**  
Deuba eventually got his party, the NC-D, to endorse his plan for elections

# THE CARDS

tion. We'll soon see if the prime minister will stick to his guns.

NC-D ministers have an affirmative answer. "When the prime minister says that he will hold elections," says Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Tek Bahadur Chogyal, "he is serious." Deuba's determination to go ahead with his plan was also reflected during the Central Working Committee meeting of the NC-D, the first since the party came to power in June last year.

Deuba resisted calls from some quarters of his party's central committee to reinstate Parliament; eventually the cadres endorsed his election ultimatum. But before that, the meeting saw heated exchanges, including calls for the prime minister to quit. "This government cannot risk big undertakings," said NC-D central committee member Bal Bahadur KC. "The government should quit when it cannot fulfill its mandate." Though the prime minister prevailed in the end, he is acutely aware of his shaky position: If

he fails to hold elections this time, even the NC-D faithful are not going to spare him. Back in October when Deuba incorporated the peace or polls refrain in his agenda, he surely knew the gravity of his statement. He understands how difficult it is going to be to conduct polls in such a precarious situation. Nonetheless he responded to growing pressure by issuing an ultimatum to the Maoists in November. Observers say they won't be surprised if the government announces a date for polls. Even those who say elec-

tions are impossible are starting to believe in Deuba's resolve. "This government came with the mandate to hold elections," says Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat.

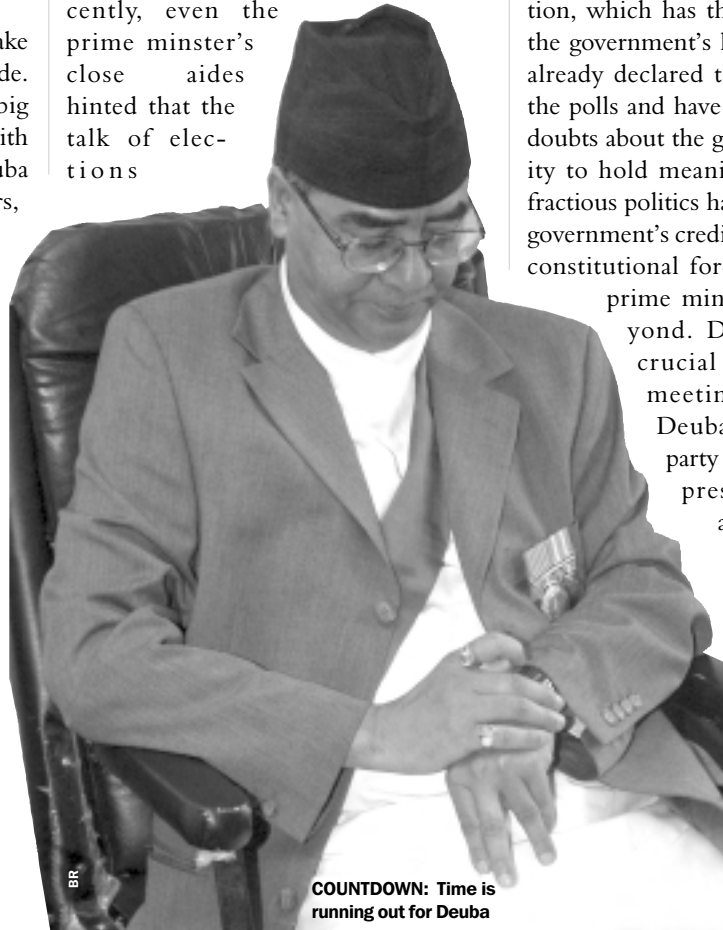
But holding elections is going to take a lot more than just a one-man crusade. It will take consensus among the big players to agree on getting started with polls, a Herculean task indeed. Deuba needs to convince his coalition partners, at a minimum. The UML and the RPP have already aired dissenting views. UML leaders say the government hasn't consulted them on polls. "The government hasn't exhausted all options yet," says UML's Bhim Rawal, who resigned from the High Level Peace Committee last week accusing the government and the committee of failing to prioritize the peace process. "Let's exhaust all options first," he says, "both nationally and internationally before going to polls."

There is even speculation that the UML might quit the government if Deuba pushes ahead with polls. That would put the government in more trouble, weakening its appeal and placing its legitimacy in doubt. It's again hard to tell which way the UML will go.

The party famous for its inconsistencies and double takes on almost every issue is, not surprisingly, divided over elections. Dissident groups in the UML are as active as ever in sending mixed signals. The UML's stand is crucial for Deuba and his plans for elections. But the friction between Deuba and UML ministers is slowly unfolding. The prime minister and the UML ministers aren't on the same page and perhaps not even in the same book when it comes to elections. UML boss Madhav Kumar Nepal has time and again criticized Deuba for choosing parliamentary elections over peace. And this time, not surprisingly, Nepal smells conspiracy from all sides to "stifle democracy."

According to the terms of the prime minister's appointment, he has to restore peace and start elections by April or risk dismissal. Realizing his difficult task, the

prime minister issued the ultimatum in November. With only four months remaining, a defiant Deuba seems committed to play his last card. Until recently, even the prime minister's close aides hinted that the talk of elections



COUNTDOWN: Time is running out for Deuba

was a pressure tactic; they remained hopeful that talks would take place and that they wouldn't have to gamble on elections.

No one could be more ambivalent about elections than the prime minister himself: The issue has deeply damaged his political reputation in the past and could do so again. Since elections are crucial to his tenure as prime minister, he is likely to do everything to champion them. The government is now left with no option: The Maoists have so far spurned the ultimatum; analysts believe it's unlikely that they will suddenly change their position in the next few days. Even the government might be finding it hard to believe that the Maoists will come to the table before Thursday.

As it heads into the crucial week, the government seems to have concluded that elections are inevitable. That's not surprising, since the Maoists have never

seemed inclined to accept the government's ultimatum. Instead they have intensified their offensive and are likely to do their best to subvert an election, which has the potential to renew the government's legitimacy. They have already declared that they will disrupt the polls and have also made clear their doubts about the government's credibility to hold meaningful dialogue. The fractious politics has taken its toll on the government's credibility even among the constitutional forces, both within the prime minister's party and beyond. During the NC-D's crucial central committee meeting that authorized Deuba to go to the polls, party leaders indirectly expressed reservations about their party president's democratic credentials.

"Party workers have reached the conclusion that Deuba has come to an understanding with the King," said NC-D General Secretary Bijaya Kumar Gachedhar, during the meeting. "They are saying that the prime minister has submitted democracy to the Palace." Six months ago the party workers were firmly behind their party president. More emphatically so when the King had unceremoniously sacked Deuba.

When King Gyanendra ousted Sher Bahadur Deuba in Oct. 4, 2002 on charges of incompetence, the NC-D was the first party to call the King's move unconstitutional. Other parties, who had implicitly incited the King's move, took days to react officially to the move. Suddenly in June 2004, the monarch cleared Deuba of all charges and found him competent again to head the third royal government within a span of less than two years. The NC-D described the King's move as "correction of regression."

The jubilant party declared Deuba's return to the helm a reinstatement and made it sound as if the King had reversed the wheels of time and had, in fact, accepted the situation prior to Oct. 4, 2002.

**See Last Page**  
**Page, 50**



The party regained its lost power after 20 months on the streets of the capital. At the time many wondered whether Deuba's appointment had come with strings attached.

Now after more than six months in power, the prime minister's party had its first central committee meeting since the comeback, and some members openly asked Prime Minister Deuba to step down.

Deuba perhaps hasn't heard such sharp criticism from within his party for some time. Some NC-D members blame the government of being ineffectual and are concerned that Deuba's apparent appeasement of the Palace has sent a bad signal to their cadres. The overriding fear in the party is that it is losing its popular base by giving in to pressure from the Palace.

Despite the hue and cry, the NC-D central committee endorsed Deuba's plan to go ahead with elections. "The prime minister has said he will hold elections," said Narayan Khadka, an NC-D leader, in an in-



ROYAL MANDATE: The King's election deadline is April

BR

terview with Dristi, a vernacular weekly. "We should give him the benefit of the doubt." Khadka also said that the prime minister has agreed to reinstatement as an alternative if he fails to hold elections. Since that would almost surely put Deuba's archrival Girija Prasad Koirala in the prime minister's chair, the promise makes the election an even greater gamble for Deuba. Why would he risk so much?

He may have no choice. Government spokesman and Palace point man in the present Cabinet, Minister Mohammed Mohsin has been saying all along that Deuba must push ahead. "The government will have to quit if elections cannot be held," Mohsin said in an interview with the BBC Nepali Service last week. His words carry a lot of weight: The election has reached do or die proportions for Deuba. Failing to go to the polls could be fatal for his administration.

Last week Deuba dismissed suggestions that he was pro-Palace. In his defense, he said that he would vindicate himself when the time came. Perhaps Deuba sees elections as an opportunity to prove his democratic credentials, never mind how tough they will be. **N**



MS/SS

TOUGH TASK: With the Maoists vowing disruptions, the Election Commission faces the Herculean task of conducting polls



# BLOCKADE BUSINESS

Why do the Maoists call blockades? One reason is to choke the cities; the other is to open up their own supply lines.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

SIX DAYS INTO THEIR SECOND blockade of the Valley, the Maoists withdrew in dramatic fashion on Dec. 29. Like the previous time, they said they were giving in to

pressure from civil society and human rights activists. The Maoists have proven that they have the ability to choke the capital, at least for short durations, whenever they want. The experience of living under a blockade is a new one for city dwellers, but it has

already become part of daily life in Nepal's other districts.

The frequency of blockades and bandas has skyrocketed during the last few years. Why do the Maoists call so many of them so often? The propaganda value of flexing their muscles and the open threat to the government are obvious, but there is another reason. "The Maoists need blockades to ensure their

own channel of supply,” says an Army officer, “especially in the areas leading to the Maoists heartland of Rolpa and Rukum.” With the security forces preoccupied with keeping the roads open and protecting the cities, there is less opportunity to carry out search and destroy operations elsewhere. The Maoists use the breathing space provided by blockades for transporting supplies—provisions, explosives and arms.

In September, military analysts say the Maoists not only succeeded in sending a message that they have the ability to call the shots, even in the capital, but also managed to hold a party central committee meeting. While the media and the civil society were preoccupied with the blockade, the Maoists were in Rolpa discussing the insurrection’s future, free from Army interference. “I don’t know if that’s true,” says the Army’s spokesman, Brigadier General Deepak Gurung. “I can’t say if there are any intelligence reports about it.”

The ambush on the Prithvi Highway at Krishnabir on Nov.22 and the subsequent clash with security forces was a feint, intended to cover the movement of a Maoist brigade to the East, say the military sources. Waves of insurgents who are members of the Maoist Special Task Force, the STF, charged with infiltrating the Valley reportedly come and go under the cover of blockades, when the security forces are focusing their energy on keeping the roads open. The unified command, comprising all security forces, claims that it has neutralized the Maoist special taskforce in the Valley: Last week, military commanders invited journalists to see a large cache of arms, explosives, and communication equipment recovered from different locations in the Valley over the period of

last two months. Though the Army refuses to divulge how many STF members have been arrested so far, security sources say all the actions followed tip-offs from locals and the intelligence gained from Maoists arrested earlier. The Army claims that after the arrest of Prashant, the Maoist point man in the capital, many members of the Maoist task force have retreated. A new Maoist leader, a member of the Newa Rastriya Mukti Morcha—a Maoist affiliate organization—is in charge of the Maoists forces in the capital, says an Army officer. Observers say that the security forces’ refusal to mention the number of arrestees probably means that only a

Maoists, say security officials. Kohalpur is significant because of its proximity to India, from where the Maoists get most of their arms and other war supplies. From Kohalpur, the Maoists have easy access to the Dang Valley. From there, they spread out in their base areas of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan and Jajarkot.

During Maoist blockades, the security forces become extra-cautious about ambushes and sudden offensives: This slows down the security forces’ responses. The roadblocks are also very dangerous. One Army officer told civilians who were impatient with slow progress in clearing a road blockade in Mahendra Highway near Kanepokhari of



**OPEN, YET CLOSED: Mahendra Highway during one of the Maoist blockades**

few of the reported 300 STF members are actually in custody and the rest might have retreated or melted into the local population.

Army officers do admit that blockades divide their energy and that the Maoists utilize them as opportunities for large-scale movement of supplies and equipment. Places like Kailabas, Bhaluwang and Kohalpur have the highest rates of blockades: That’s because these areas are the supply arteries for the

Morang: “We understand you are late, but no one wants to die in vain. We can’t just clear it off. No one knows what’s in there.” The extra caution is understandable, but that’s how the Maoists get breathing space for their activities.

“The Maoists divert our energy and concentration during blockades,” says the Army spokesman Deepak Gurung. That’s how the Maoists seem to outsmart the state’s security apparatus to get their things done. ■

# A STITCH IN TIME

The recent disaster in the Indian Ocean tells us that we ignore nature's threats at our own peril

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

THE POWERFUL UNDERWATER earthquake off the island of Sumatra and the resulting tsunamis devastated Asian countries from Indonesia to Sri Lanka and caused damage as far away as Somalia and Kenya.

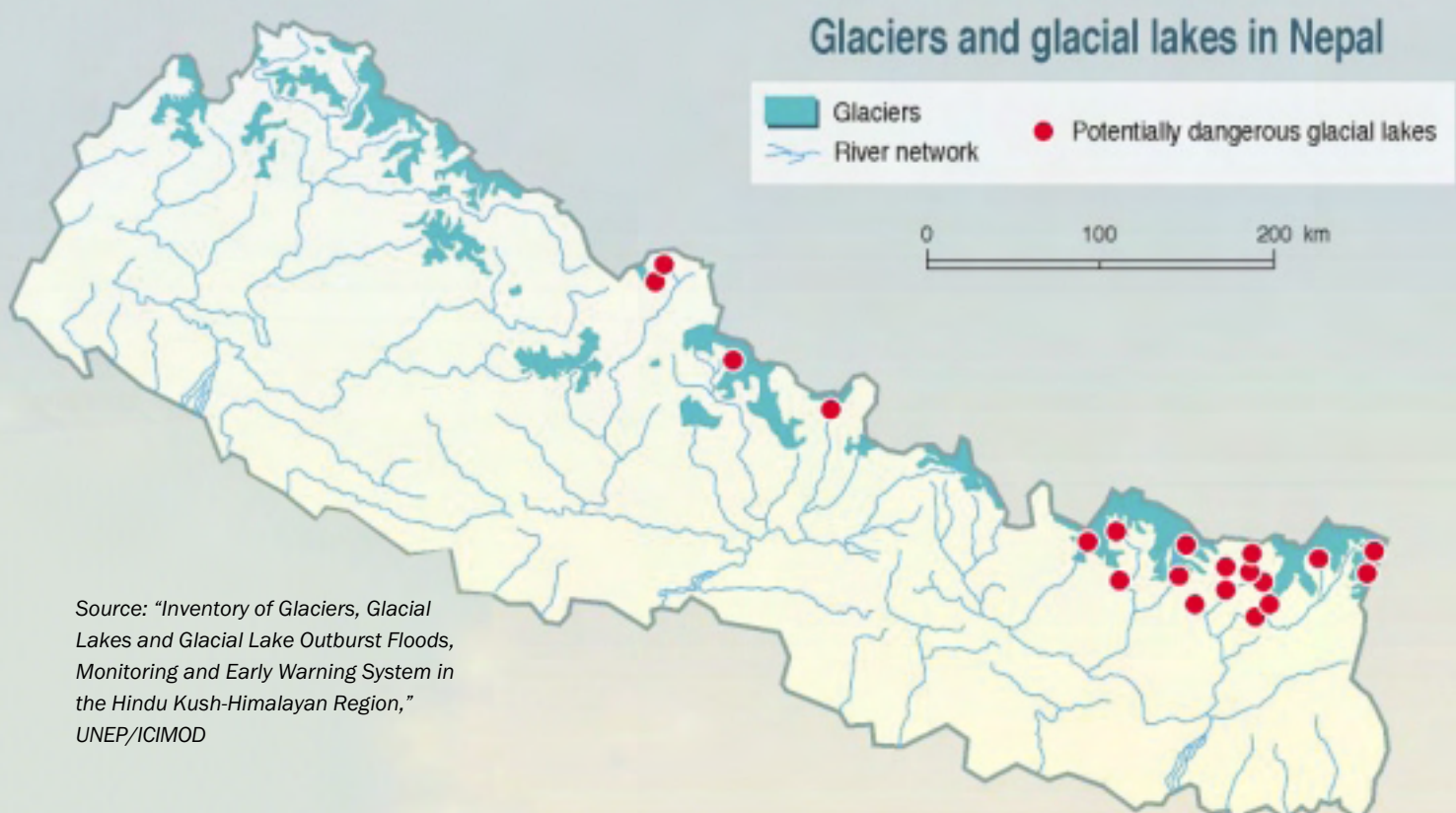
Nepal also faces a threat from earthquakes. We live in fear of a big quake: An equally powerful quake could strike Nepal any time. But it wouldn't take a big one to cause havoc in the high mountains in the north of the country. There are over 2,000 glacial lakes there, according to a study carried out by ICIMOD with support from the United Nations Environment Program between June 1999 and March 2002. The study identified 20 of these as "potentially dangerous." Small disturbances in the region—

earthquakes, landslides or avalanches—could cause one of these to break through its natural dam, resulting in a "glacial lake outburst flood," GLOF in short. And at times even a small disturbance is unnecessary. The natural dams that hold these lakes can fall apart simply due to ageing, releasing great amounts of stored water.

"Rapid processes are unstable," says Arun Bhakta Shrestha, with the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. Shrestha, an engineer and hydrologist with Snow and Glacial Hydrology Section of the department, is talking about the phenomenon occurring high in the mountains. These glacial lakes—some less than half a century old—are fed by rapidly retreating glaciers. The process is accelerating: Climate change and global warming are speeding up the rate at which the glaciers melt. Shrestha points to a study carried out for his department in 1999 that showed "warming trends after 1977 ranging 0.06 to 0.12 degrees Celsius per year in most of the Himalayan region." The rates of warming were greater in the highest regions of the country.

With such increasing temperatures, many lakes are growing rapidly, some to the point of bursting, while some have already burst. The outbursts are even more dangerous when they feed streams that are the sources of rivers: An outburst from one of them could cause damage far downstream. As much was evident when the Zhanzangbo Cho lake in Tibet burst in July 1981 and destroyed three bridges, including the Nepal-China Friendship Bridge at the border, and also caused damages to the Sun Koshi Hydropower Plant. It also damaged extensive sections of the Arniko Highway, causing losses of around \$3 million.

There are several things that can be done to mitigate the effect of such outbursts. Early warning systems can be installed in danger areas. The dangers of such outbursts can be minimized by letting the water stored in the lakes escape in a controlled manner. Both methods have been tested. Tsho Rolpa has been a prominent example in this regard. The Tsho Rolpa lake, the head stream of the Rowaling Khola, located at 4,580 meters in Dolakha, comprised a few small ponds



Source: "Inventory of Glaciers, Glacial Lakes and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods, Monitoring and Early Warning System in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region," UNEP/ICIMOD



in the 1950s. By 1997 it covered an area of 1.39 sq. km.

If Tsho Rolpa's natural dam were breached, the resulting flood would cause damage more than 100 kilometers downstream along the river, affecting thousands of people and threatening bridges and also the \$138 million, 60-megawatt Khimti Hydropower plant, located about 80 kilometers downstream from the lake.

In 1998, an early warning system was placed in 17 villages that would be affected if Tsho Rolpa lake were to burst. By mid-2000 the lake level had been lowered by three meters by constructing an open channel and letting the water flow out in a regulated manner. The project is still maintained by the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. It provided much needed experience of working in remote, high-altitude areas and managing GLOF risk. "It helped our confidence and increased our knowledge of the subject," says Kamal P. Budhathoki, the project's assistant director, who now looks after what remains of the project.

Curiously, there has been no significant follow-up. Tsho Rolpa is only one of the 20 lakes cited in the ICIMOD report as being "potentially dangerous." Rising concerns have brought about attempts to attract attention to the situation. About two months ago, organizations like Pro Public and International Public Interest Defenders put forward a petition to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee requesting the inclusion of

the Sagarmatha National Park in the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger. Their concern: Thirteen glacial lakes in the Sagarmatha National Park are "potentially dangerous," they say, pointing to the UNEP/ICIMOD study.

Prakash Mani Sharma, a public interest lawyer and executive director of Pro Public, was in the United Kingdom recently to gather support for the petition. "We don't have the resources to do something about the dangers ourselves," says Sharma. Putting the park on the endangered list, he argues, would make the World Heritage Committee responsible for the protection of the park.

Sharma got a good hearing abroad, but at home the petition has received a lukewarm response. Its detractors say that it was done hastily and without much consultation at the local levels. Also the petitioners have been accused of crying wolf. The department's Shrestha says that within the Sagarmatha National Park there are only two potentially dangerous lakes, not 13. "The petition has caught public imagination by bringing something as widely recognized as the Everest into the issue," says Shrestha. "But it's not good to make the whole exercise a publicity stunt." Putting wrong information on the table is surely not the best way to present a case to an international body like the World Heritage Committee.

But the petitioners have a point. The problem's roots—climate change and global warming—are beyond our con-

trol, and their solutions lie beyond our means.

Conducting simple field visits to study these remote lakes is difficult; work to minimize the dangers is doubly so. "The efficiency of both man and machine decreases at high altitudes," says Bhandari, who was involved in the project at Tsho Rolpa. For that project alone, the Netherlands provided about \$3 million, over Rs.200 million at current exchange rates. That is 200 times what the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology's budget this year is for studies of glacial lakes, glacial activity and flooding.

It comes down to a question of priorities. If the government

can't afford to fight poverty and reduce social inequality, which are the driving forces behind the insurgency that plagues the country, how can it manage to find funds for disaster prevention? The funds, experts say, will have to come from outside. The UNDP in its Disaster Risk Analysis calls Nepal a disaster-prone country "mainly due to its young geology, mountainous terrain and widespread poverty." And because the country remains disaster prone, proper infrastructure cannot be put in place to tackle poverty and bring equality to all. The situation smells like a "vicious cycle."

It's a cycle that has to be broken. The recent tsunami pointed out the dangers of not preparing for natural disasters. Tsunamis in the Indian Ocean are very rare—the last one of note occurred in 1945. It originated off the Mekran coast in Pakistan and caused deaths as far away as Mumbai. Even so, rare events can have disastrous effects. Greater awareness and even a rudimentary warning system could have saved many lives. A tragic event such as the one that occurred in the Indian Ocean carries an important lesson: At times, a stitch in time can save more than nine.

We ignore obvious and far more likely risks, like GLOF disasters, at our own peril. Human ingenuity cannot, at the moment, prevent natural disasters. But human foresight can lessen the extent of the tragedy. A relatively small investment in the high Himalaya could save many lives and much more. **N**

# PROTECTING OUR HERITAGE

Unsupervised constructions and modern housing in the vicinity of World Heritage Sites are posing big challenges for preservation efforts

BY BISWAS BARAL

**S**IR, THIS KASTAMANDAP WAS built from a single tree 800 years ago," says the tourist guide. "Just imagine the size of that tree!" The tourist inside the Kastamandap at the Kathmandu Durbar Square remains uninterested.

Perhaps the huge buildings at the back of Kastamandap divert the attention of the tourist. Or, maybe, it is those hoarding boards trying to sell everything from momos to toothpaste.

Modern houses, with little room for tradition, are just about everywhere around Kathmandu Durbar Square. Huge, gaudy cemented buildings flanking the heritage site indeed are a sore sight.

"The houses have been built illegally; I am sure those houses do not have the approval of the municipality or the Department of Archeology," says Suraj Sakya, the program manager of the Kathmandu Durbar Square Area Conservation Program. "But after they are

constructed we cannot do anything. That is the responsibility of the Department of Archeology."

Rajesh Mathema, an archeologist and the chief of the World Heritage Section of the Department of Archeology, says the department is quite helpless, too. "Yes, such houses are illegal but the department didn't approve their blueprints," he says. "Those have been built without our consent." According to Mathema, such houses are constructed either during the night or on holidays to escape the department's supervision. "Once the construction is complete, there is little the department can do," says Mathema.



# HERITAGE

Kathmandu Durbar Square is one of the seven sites in Kathmandu that have been classified as World Heritage Sites along with the Durbar squares of Bhaktapur and Patan; Chagu Narayan; Pashupatinath; Syayambhunath and Boudhanath. But UNESCO, during its 27<sup>th</sup> convention in 2003, degraded the status of the sites in Kathmandu to "World Heritage Sites in Danger."

It wasn't the monuments that the UNESCO had problems with; it found their condition satisfactory. But not the environs around them. A survey team from UNESCO, in 2003, was satisfied with the condition of Bhaktapur Durbar Square; the Changu Narayan and Patan Square were in pretty good shape as well, the team said. But it found that the modern constructions had significantly undermined the beauty of Boudhanath and Kathmandu Durbar Square.

**WELL PRESERVED:** Bhaktapur Durbar Square is the best managed of the World Heritage Sites in the Valley



In response, the Department of Archaeology agreed on a 10-year plan to be carried out in cooperation with UNESCO to safeguard the seven threatened sites in May 2004. According to the U.N. body, the structures of many indiscriminately built private houses were incompatible with the architecture of the monuments they surrounded. UNESCO has given special mention to 131 monuments inside Kathmandu that

need preservation if Kathmandu is to hold on to its World Heritage Site status.

Delegates at the 2003 UNESCO convention that enlisted Kathmandu among the endangered sites gave the government three clear mandates: It called for the redefinition of the existing boundaries of heritage sites; the redefining of the core (the area with the monuments and the artifacts) and buffer

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(supporting) zones in those sites; and the improvement in the management system for their proper maintenance. The 28<sup>th</sup> convention in China in 2004 has given the government clear guidelines to respond to its mandates and reassess our preservation efforts.

But first, the need is to identify what is to be changed. The department has started the categorization of the houses. The ones incompatible with the environment of the monuments will be renovated. This includes replacing the doors and windows with the traditional wood-carved structures, taking down the extra stories of the buildings that exceed the recommended height of 32 feet, rebuilding the façade of the houses to match the surrounding structures and so forth. The old and dilapidated houses will be completely rebuilt.

New buildings in the areas surrounding the monuments can be built with the permission of the department, but old houses may only be renovated in special circumstances with traditional materials. The law prohibits demolishing the old structures to replace them with the new ones in culturally sensitive places.

The Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, the KVPT, an American INGO, which has been working since 1990 to safeguard “the extraordinary and threatened architectural heritage of Nepal,” works in close collaboration with the department.

The KVPT helps in the restoration and maintenance of old monuments in various heritage sites. It uses traditional materials—mud, brick and timber—to repair old houses and restructure the new ones.

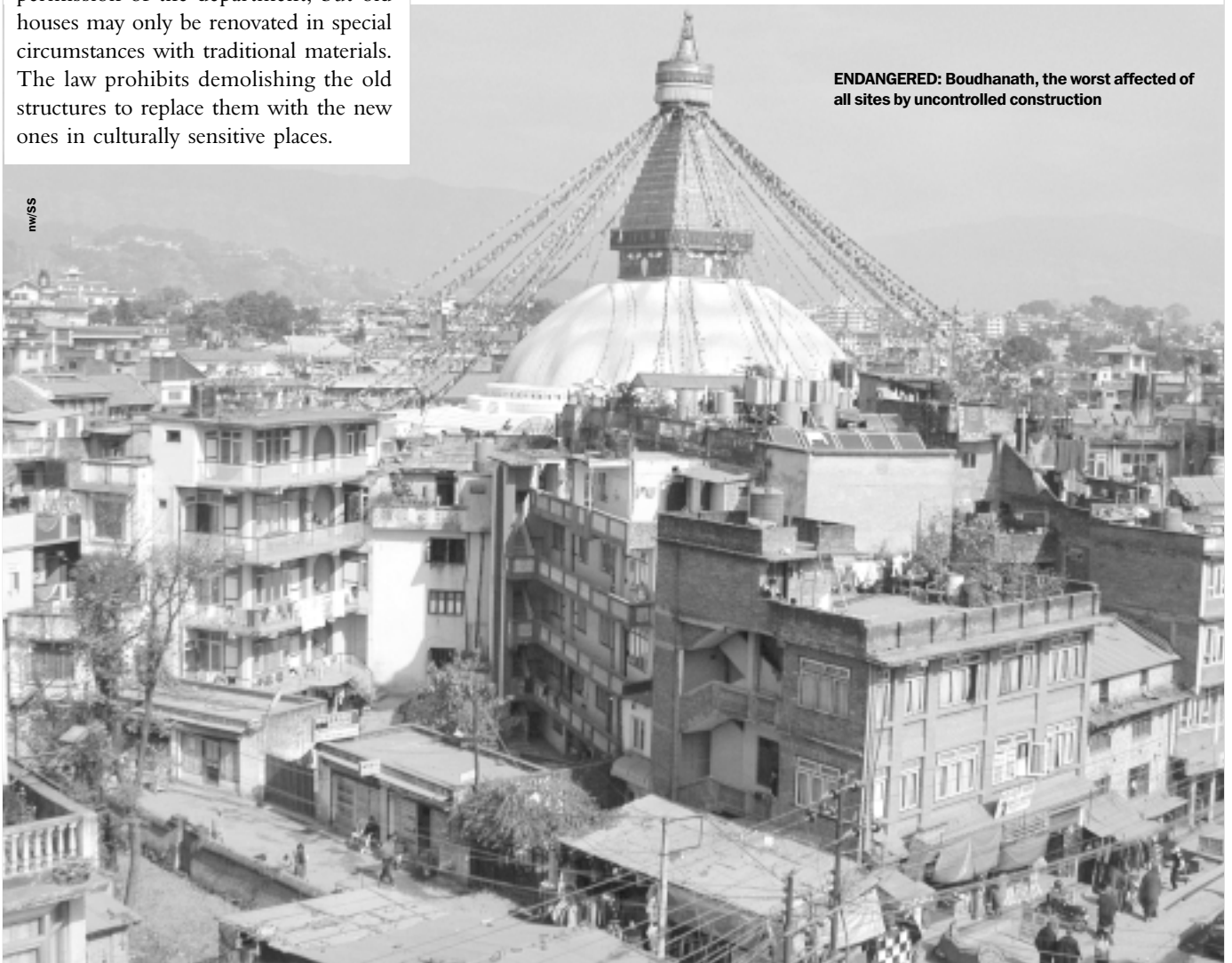
“Though we are not directly involved with the World Heritage program, we are actively participating in the restoration of the monuments at many of the heritage sites,” says Raju Roka, a management official at KVPT. The trust is also involved in various awareness and fundraising programs.

There have been steps to address the problems, but many glitches still remain. New buildings in the vicinity of the monuments need to get their blueprints approved by the Department of

Archeology, which nearly all the builders do, but very few follow the guidelines given. The houses are often different to the blueprints submitted. Though the department supervises the construction, its efforts have not been effective so far. The government is now considering new legal procedures to bring the perpetrators to justice. “The existing ones have too many loopholes,” says Mathema of the department. People, it seems, find different ways to get around the law.

The indifference of the people is the main obstacle the preservation efforts face. People are unsupportive and the co-ordination between various government agencies in stopping the law violators is poor. Without the realization among people that the sites are important and inescapably linked to their own identities, the preservation efforts won’t go anywhere. ■

**ENDANGERED:** Boudhanath, the worst affected of all sites by uncontrolled construction



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# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS

### WAVE WEB WINNER 2004

The entries for the third annual Wave Web Winner, Nepal's first and biggest web designing contest, have started to come in. The contest is open to all Nepalis under 30 living inside Nepal. All sites, including corporate sites, hosted on free servers like Geocities are acceptable. However, socially sensitive, political and adult oriented sites will not be accepted. A participant may submit multiple entrees. The submitted sites can be in any local language, but only Nepali and English sites will be eligible for the Best Site Content Award. Participating sites must have the tag <!—WWW 2004 participant—> at the top of their homepage. To provide



all participants a fair playing field, a contestant may submit more than one site for the individual categories—visual appeal, user friendliness, content and technicality. It will be compulsory for the participants to design the sites using the contents of www2004.zip to be eligible to win the Wave Web Winner 2004 title. For further information: 554-3333. Or log on to: [www.www.com.np](http://www.www.com.np).

#### Basketball Training

The Godhavari Alumuni Association is organizing a basketball training camp at the GAA Hall, Thamel. Children between 6 to 14 years are eligible to participate. Date: Dec. 22 to Jan. 22.

Price: Rs.500. Limited seats only. For information: 441-4785.

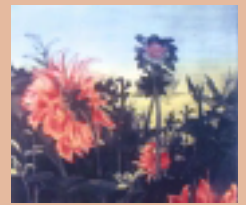
#### Cine club

Movie: Le Libertin (2000). Director: Gabriel Aghion. Starring: Vincent Perez. At the Alliance Francaise,

### Emerging Voices

Three young artists, Sushma Shakya, Rukmani Maskey and Dal Bahadur Rai exhibit a total of 48 prints in a group exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. These three aspiring artists are students of the famous printmaking husband-wife team Uma Shanker Shah and Seema Sharma. Printmaking is not easy. These young printmakers have immersed themselves in learning the technicality of time bite, gum bite, colograph, wood block and sugar-lifting to understand the crux of this modern graphic artwork. Dal Bahadur Rai has depicted the natural heritage of Nepal; Rukmani Maskey has her work influenced by religion and culture and Sushma Shakya surprises the viewers with elements of mystery in pictures that might seem conventional at first glance. Till Jan. 18. For information: 421-8048.

### PRINT EXHIBITION

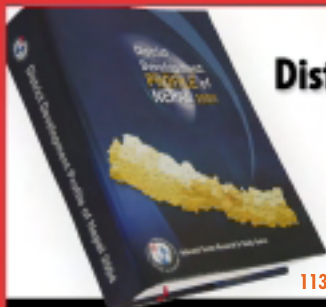


Tripureshwore. Date: Jan. 16. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 424-1163.

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### Dwarika's treat

Krishnarpan, the Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, offers ceremonial dining cuisine. Four to 16 courses of the most wanted ceremonial dishes will be served for lunch and dinner. Also enjoy the Dwarika's Thali for Lunch at The Heritage courtyard. For information: 447-9488.

### Jomsom Trip

For just Rs.5999 for Nepalis and \$199 for expatriates, the Jomsom Mountain Resort provides two nights and three days accommodations. The price will also include round-about airfare from Pokhara to Jomsom, daily buffet breakfast and dinner, pick up and drop from the airport to resort and a walking tour of the Marpha village in Jomsom. For information: 449-7569.

## ONGOING

### Shahanshah Winter Splash

Want to sweat in the winter? Go and experience Shahanshah's indoor heated pool and relax in the steam and sauna. At Rs.350. Exclusive ladies' day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Time: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

### Nepali Platter

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come and enjoy this special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin and Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 441-1818.

### Jukebox Experience

The jukebox experience with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar. For information: 449-1234.

### Seasons Specials

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian cuisine, daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Date: Dec. 1 onwards. Price: Rs.450 per person, includes a bottle of mineral water or a soft drink.

### Tickling Taste buds

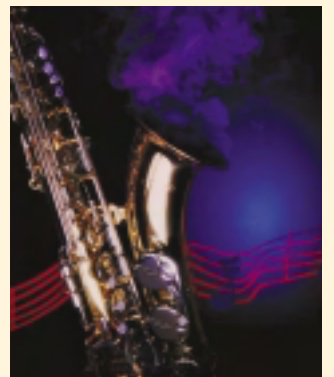
Barbeque every Friday Evening. At the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 441-2999.

### Fusion Night

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# Doin' What Comes Inevitably

Some resolutions are meant to be broken

BY KUNAL LAMA

As 2004 began to disappear with unseemly haste, a crucial high-level meeting took place in my flat. Chaired by yours truly and consisting of a motley menagerie of multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic friends spanning an interesting range of ages and sexual preferences, a decision was reached after much deliberation: We would, under no circumstances, fork out obscene sums of money to attend a New Year's Eve party in any of the 5-star hotels, discotheques or clubs in the city. No, no, no. We knew—from our collective past experiences—that these parties quickly degenerated into evenings headlined by the highly annoying music of Mr. Marshall Mathers (aka Eminem) and his hip-hop-cum-rap buddies; overcrowded with lurching party animals unable to cope with the rapid ingestion of vast quantities of alcohol (not very surprising, considering most of them were barely out of the nursery and just recently weaned); ending in free-for-all fight fests featuring khukris, swords and helmets. What's worse, the bottomless bars and unending buffets included in the ticket prices ran out within hours. In any case, the bars only served dodgy local spirits well past sell-by dates and buffets laid out in a zero-watt-lit hall with zero cost, zero taste and zero culinary accomplishment. Now wait a second: Don't get us wrong. We are not over-the-hill codgers who complain ceaselessly, having lost the ability to have fun *and* sex. We can still shuffle to music, stay up late without collapsing over ourselves, and, yes, hold down our drinks, bought with our own hard-earned cash, without ending headfirst in a toilet bowl. However, the time had come, we decided, for a radical new plan: Collect money from close friends; decamp to a private venue; serve drinks and food which wouldn't cause us to wake up early in the new year with a splitting hangover or a belly-bursting ache; play music which would be kind to our ears; and look forward to the year change with excitement and optimism. Alas, more easily said than done.

The December days rolled by easily; our much-vaunted plans didn't. The local dailies began to fill with advertisements for all manners of parties in all kinds of places that could hold more than 10 people. Our resolute defenses began to crumble. We had no chance, up against the

determined generosity of McDowell's No. 1 to give us "40 reasons to celebrate," a cunning list of—you got it—40 restaurants and bars. Real Fruit Juices countered with their "Eleven (cocktails and mocktails) hotspots to shake you... way past twelve." If ads are to be believed, all we want for New Year is... Carlsberg; "The king of good times" is Vijay Mallya (oops, sorry, Kingfisher); "Fine men surrender to" Director's Special Black Deluxe Whiskey; and Seagram's Royal Stag wants us to "Make it large." Oh dear. As if this was not enough, the Red Onion Bar touted itself as the "Perfect place for perfect union," apparently with the Prism Band. With "The Phantom of the Opera" lurking inside instead of Kubla Khan, Radisson welcomed us to "Xanadu," while a "Neurotic" party held in Nagarkot tantalized us with "maximum freedom minimum governance," neatly describing the state of our nation. Celebrities, reasons only known to

themselves, were at the "F-Party." No one seemed to know what "F" stood for, and I wouldn't want to venture a guess. Mukti & Revival were "Live & Full Throttle" at the Shangri-La, though the mind boggles at how they could possibly hope to achieve that, supported as they were by DJ Massacre & Maddox.

Unable to resist the devious temptations of fun and revelry, we decided to hit Freedom Zones 2, 3 and 4 of the partynepal.com-organized night at the J-Bar/Himalayan Java complex in Thamel. It turned out to be a judicious choice. We got there just before midnight, our bellies full of Café Mitra's delicious "Festive Season Menu" offerings. The Zones were alive with an equally festive crowd. It was a nice change to see the super-modern J-Bar full of revelers, though the resident DJ was a bit mean with his music. My mates dissipated into the crowd, some seeking brand new partners for a brand new year, others trying to relight the fire with ex-lovers. Black-overcoated dudes with pointed shoes vied for the attention



of mini-skirted babes teetering on unforgiving stilettos. Merry party people were in a fun, celebratory mood, jousting with their friends, boogieing to house music, jamming up the bar which, occasionally, went up in flames that sent them back, their noses twitching with the smell of methylated spirit hanging in the air. By the time we went back to our homes, relieved that we didn't have to clear ashtrays, dirty dishes and empty bottles, the new year was already a few hours old. So were we. Sigh. Happy 2005! **N**

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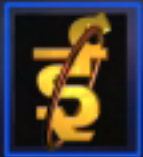
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# Party On

The Kathmandu party scene is exploding, to the delight of almost everyone

BY DHRITI BHATTA

It's a quiet Tuesday evening at the Funky Buddha Bar & Café in Thamel. The café is empty except for a few youngsters, probably in their late teens. On New Year's Eve, though, the place was jumping to funky sounds and an electronic beat. One of the open

bamboo sheds at the back of the garden had been converted into a DJ booth. All eight tables in the garden had been moved, and the chairs were lined up around the sides to accommodate more than 250 partygoers.

Kathmandu saw many similar parties on the eve of the New Year. Almost every club in Thamel plus big hotels like the Radisson, the Everest and the Hyatt hosted parties that night.

The Subterranea Club in Thamel had one of the largest. The club, perhaps the oldest nightclub in Kathmandu, was packed with more than 400 people. Launched in 1997 as the Jolly Blues Night Club by Mukhiya Ghale and Thomas Kilroy, it had almost no competition when it started. Club Galaxy at Hotel Everest and small-scale discotheques inside the Casino Royal and Casino Annapurna were the only other places for partygoers to get down.

Nearly eight years on, more than a dozen clubs, pubs and bars in Kathmandu have at least one party every weekend. The party scene in the capital is burgeoning, to the delight of an increasing number of partygoers and nightclub owners too. It's a big turn-



around for the increasingly profitable industry.

"Six or seven years ago, there used to be small turnouts, not more than 100 to 150 per party," says Bhusan Thapa of partynepal.com. Partynepal has become one of the biggest party organizers in the Valley. Since their establishment in April 2003, they have organized more than 40 parties. Thapa is one of the three founding members of the organization. He recalls the days when clubs had empty dance floors and guests retreated to dark corners with their drinks. Not anymore.

Thapa speaks from experience. Partynepal organizes all kinds of parties, big and small, from intimate affairs to





open-air dance parties for huge crowds. Thapa claims that more than 30,000 people showed up for the second annual Peace Project dance party in November last year.

The swelling numbers aren't the only change: The party-going crowd is dramatically different too. Sunil Gurung, owner of the Funky Buddha Club & Bar, has been in the business for six years. "Mostly foreigners used come to the parties in the early days," says Gurung. "The domestic crowd was pretty small," and they were mostly Nepalis who had jobs or homes overseas and had come home on a holiday. Today, neither group dominates the crowd at Gurung's club.

Youngsters, both teenagers and working professionals, have replaced the earlier clients. And business is booming year-round, not just in the tourist season. Good crowds are on hand even during monsoon or the cold season. The club organizes an Electronic Open Air Party every Friday. Gurung says, 200 to 250 partiers show up each week.

More people are opting to let their hair down and go out to a big party once

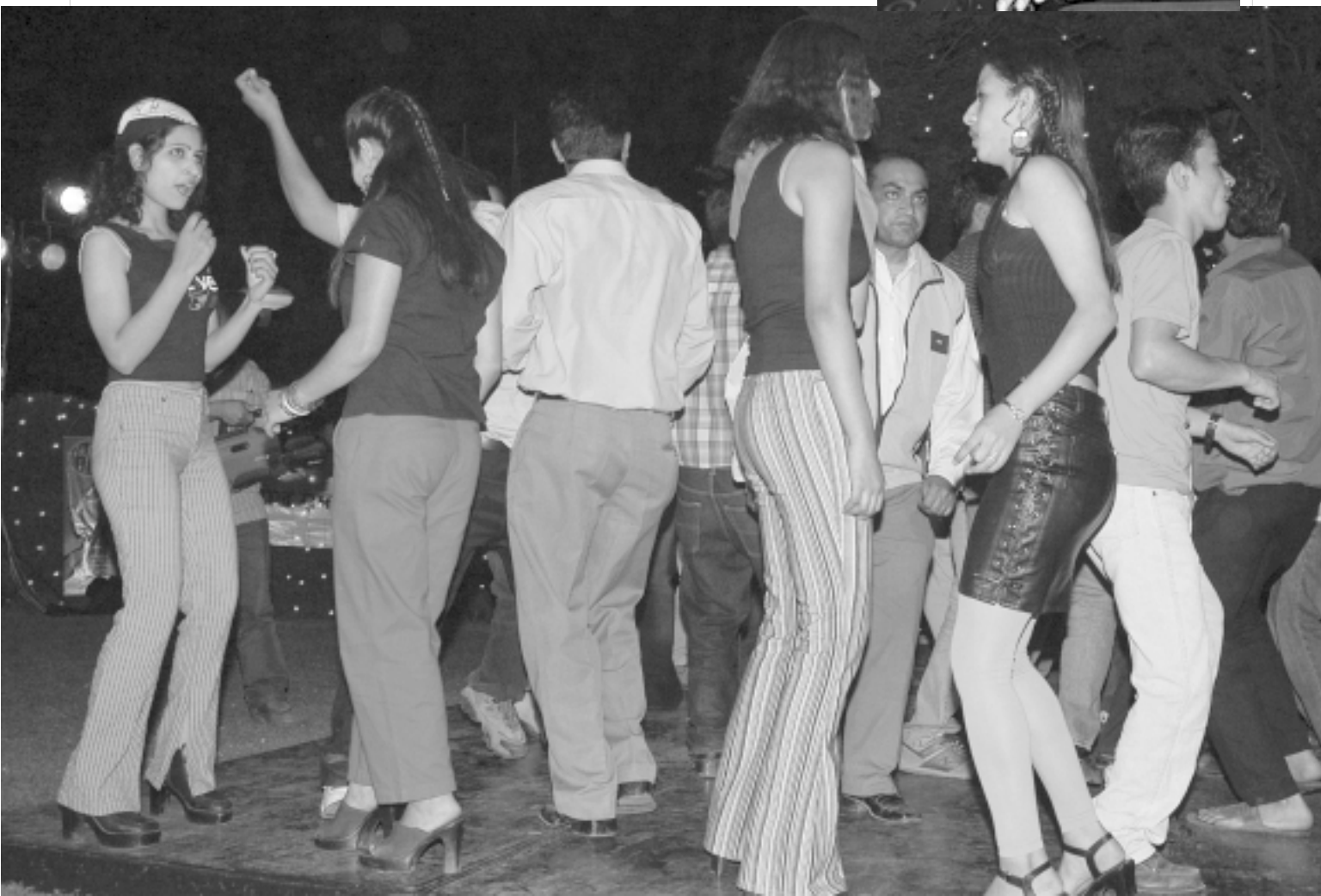
in a while. "Clubbing is looked on as a healthy pastime now," says partynepal's Thapa. The change in attitude is not the only reason that clubs draw bigger crowds these days, though. The quality of music has gone up now that better sound systems and better performers are common. Only a few professional DJs worked in the Valley five years ago: Today almost every club has its own, and big-name international DJs are routinely invited by party organizers to bring in big crowds.

One thing hasn't changed: The revelry often leads to brawls and fights. Security is a serious concern for some partygoers. Srijana Gurung, a 12<sup>th</sup>-grade party buff, says that there has been a fight at virtually every party she has attended. "At one of the parties I went to, two girls ended up bashing each other for a guy's attention," she says. "When the guy came back later with his girlfriend, both girls went after her."

Party organizers try to keep things under control. Most clubs hire bouncers to keep things quiet. Rowdy patrons are given a warning or, if necessary,

shown the door. That helps, but the organizers believe that it's ultimately up to the crowd to behave themselves.

Some unpleasantness notwithstanding, the festivities continue. At the Funky Buddha, Quiet Tuesday gives way to Electronic Friday. Thousands of neon lights swirl around the otherwise dark dance floor. The ear splitting, electronic music gets the people moving. The show must go on. **N**



# Road to Redemption

Once seen as the most promising emerging nation, Nepal seems to have lost its way. But it still has a chance to qualify for the 2007 World Cup.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

When the Asian Cricket Council, the ACC, entrusted Nepal to host the Second ACC Trophy in 1998, detractors expressed doubts whether the newly enthroned associate member would rise up to the challenge.

Jai Kumar Nath Shah, president of Cricket Association of Nepal, had one firm answer to all of them: "We've got everything—the interest in the game, the talent and hardworking people. I'm sure we can stand up to the test."

Indeed he did. Nepal's own dismal performance aside, the tournament turned out to be a grand success. It was possible because of an exemplary coordination among Nepali cricket officials.

More evidence of Nepal's potential as an international cricket venue followed with the success of the Under-19 Youth Asia Cup in 2001. This one even thrilled the local fans. The Under-19 team asserted Nepal's claim as the most promising emerging nation in cricket. The youth brigade made it all the way to the plate championship final of the U-19 World Cup in New Zealand.

Naturally, the newfound success added to the aspirations of cricket officials to press for one-day international status. Shah even went a step further, saying Nepal would win a voting power at the ICC and be the 12<sup>th</sup> country to reach cricket's most elite league—that of Test-playing nations. "We will get there within five to 10 years," Shah predicted.

Sadly, that prediction has gone awry. For an association that was once seen as a trailblazer in Nepali sports, CAN seems to have lost its magical touch. The association has, in fact, been accused of financial irregularity and the CIAA has stepped in to investigate the allegation.

Shah, along with CAN Secretary Pradip Raj Pandey and Treasurer Sashi Subedi, has been implicated

in the irregularity concerning the purchase of cricket equipment from Redstone International, an Indian supplier based in Meerut.

Ignoring its own rulebook, CAN had paid more than Rs.2 million through several bearer checks for the purchase of pitch rollers, cricket mats and nets. For any purchase that exceeds Rs.10,000, CAN needs to issue account payee checks.

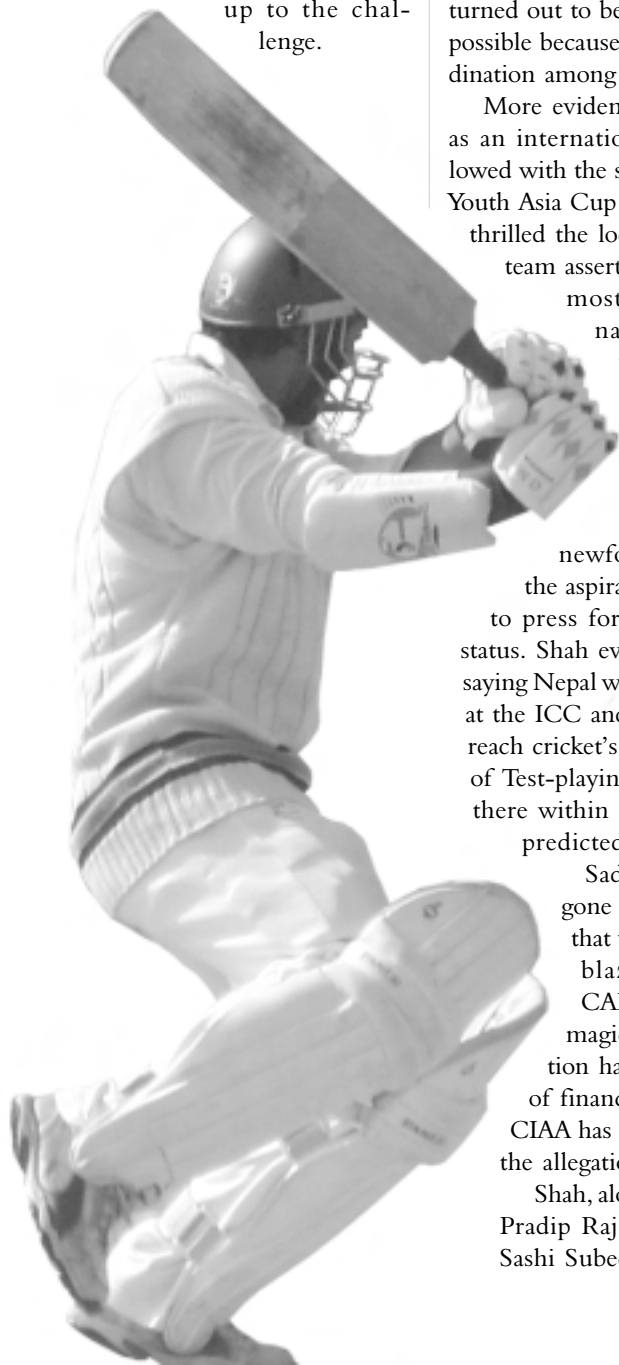
Then there are other worries, too. Although CAN has been constantly encouraged by the game's world governing body, the ICC, and its Asian chapter, the ACC, its imprudent ways of dealing with sponsors, event partners and international dole-outs worry those who are anxious to see the Nepali cricket go far.

Nepal started receiving \$30,000 in annual grant from the ICC since 1997, a year after it entered the cricket headquarters at Lord's as an associate member. The grant was later increased to \$40,000. But the constant increase in demand to improve the game's domestic structure and international commitments meant the grant alone would be insufficient to foot all the bills.

The 10-year deal that CAN struck in 2002 with the leading Indian sports management and marketing company, Percept D'Mark, was expected to further boost cricket in the country.

Under the deal, CAN would avail grounds for the Percept D'Mark to host international cricket events as well as bring renowned cricketers to Nepal. The event organizer had guaranteed at least two international cricket tournaments each year. The proceeds would have allowed CAN to pay more attention to strengthen the domestic cricket.

The deal would have been a watershed, but it fell through after the 2003 tour of the Indian U-19 team when the two parties failed to agree on terms and conditions. The Indian tour turned out



to be the last big draw to be hosted by Nepal.

Percept D'Mark started in 1994 as an events division of Percept IMC, a joint venture with Aegis Group Plc, UK. Its clients are among the largest sponsors of cricket in India. Sahara, one of them, has signed the world's single largest deal ever in cricket valued at about IRs.1 billion with the BCCI, cricket's ruling body in India.

Last month, CAN gave more evidence of its casual approach to business management during the lead-up to the national league, the Birendra Memorial National League. It decided to hold the competition from Dec. 15 - Dec. 30, much earlier than its original schedule. Carlsberg has a sponsorship agreement for the running of the league with CAN for one more tournament.

While the decision might have upset the sponsor, it has been generous in ruling out suggestions that it would withdraw its support for the league. Besides annual sponsorship fee amounting to Rs.700,000, Gorkha Brewery, the producer of Carlsberg beer in Nepal, also bears the cost for the national team's outfit and other promotional activities.

"We're committed to promoting cricket in Nepal," assures Ashish Bista, marketing manager at Gorkha Brewery. "However, as sponsors, we would much appreciate if the programs are carried out decently."

For now, Carlsberg's unstinted support must have relieved the cricket officials. But the officials will do well to realize that as any other sponsors, Carlsberg would like to get due mileage for its investments. And nothing would be better than seeing Nepali national team get back to its winning ways at international level.

The two-week-long national league is now over and cricketers are preparing

for a big challenge to retain a place among cricket's fast-track nations.

They face a potentially more difficult assignment in the qualifier for the ICC Trophy, starting Feb. 21 in Malaysia.

With the ICC announcement that there would be two additional slots in the World Cup, cricket officials predict Nepal has a decent chance to qualify for the tournament scheduled for 2007 in the West Indies. But disappointing results in the last ACC Trophy deprived Nepal of automatic qualification to the ICC Trophy, which serves as the qualifier for the World Cup.

"It's quite unfortunate that we couldn't wrap up the matches we should have," says Binod Das, the newly appointed captain of the Nepali cricket team. "Nevertheless our guys are all set to give a good performance whoever the opposition."

Das, who has started training in the camp under coach Roy Dias since Jan. 7 along with other 13 teammates, knows failure this time around means other competitors in the pool of cricket's emerging nations would nose ahead. Let's hope cricket officials, too, will change their ways to redeem Nepal's flagging stature. **N**



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## Snapshots BY DHRITI BHATTA



### For Peace

The Kathmandu Municipality has given the first-ever "Peace Award Kathmandu" to Daisaku Ikeda, a Japanese philosopher and president of the Sokka Gakki International. The Sokka Gakki, which also has a branch in Kathmandu, is a Buddhist organization actively involved in establishing institutions related to peace, culture and education in more than 170 countries. Why the award for Ikeda? "By presenting a peace award to a figure known the world over, we thought convey our message easier," says a Kathmandu city official. And the message? "That peace is really important for Nepal today."

### Long Stretch

If you go on writing, someone will eventually notice. This is what **Sudha Tripathi** who's been writing for newspapers and books for more than two decades believes. She was awarded the "Sahityik Stambha Lekhan Award" by the Press Council on Jan. 2. This has left her pleasantly surprised. "It seems that sooner or later, someone will notice you and your work," she said. The lecturer of Nepali is presently working for her doctorate and has been teaching at the Tribhuvan University for the last 19 years. Well, that's a long time indeed.



### THE IRON GATE

Lemi Lama, 16, was rapturous with joy when she was crowned the first Miss Teen Sherpa on Dec. 30. Lama presently has got bigger things in mind as any other 10<sup>th</sup>-grader would. It's the much-feared Iron Gate—the School Leaving Certificate exams—in four months time. So how is this student from Young Hearts School preparing for the SLC? "I don't study for long hours," says Lama. "But when I'm with books, it's all about concentration and dedication." Lama aspires to be a doctor someday and says the walk down the ramp helps her build her confidence for walks down life's long roads.

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- The incumbent should be MBA with excellent communication and Public Relation skills with 3-5 years of working experience in similar position in any reputed organization, preferably in a 4/5 Star Property.

## OTHER OPENINGS:

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The incumbent should be graduate in hotel management with 2-3 years of working experience in a similar position in 4/5 Star Property. Should have a good staffing skill and should be able to independently manage kitchen. Basic computer knowledge and other related trainings would be a merit.

### 5. EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

The incumbent should be a female graduate with a pleasing personality, excellent communication skills (both English and Nepali), a high standard of proficiency in computers with good typing speed, and preferably, knowledge of shorthand. Preference will be given to the candidates who have done secretarial courses.

### 6. COMMERCIAL SALES EXECUTIVE

The incumbent should be a graduate, preferably MBA, with very good communication skills (both English and Nepali), pleasing personality, basic computer skills, and a very good attitude to deal with different customers. Preference will be given to candidates having hotel management background and experience of working in similar position but freshers are also encouraged to apply. Female candidates would be given preference.

### 7. FRONT OFFICE ASSISTANT

The incumbent should be a graduate, preferably in hotel management, with very good communication skills (both English and Nepali), pleasing personality, basic computer skills, and a very good attitude to deal with different customers. Preference will be given to candidates having experience of working in similar position but freshers are also encouraged to apply. Female candidates would be given preference.

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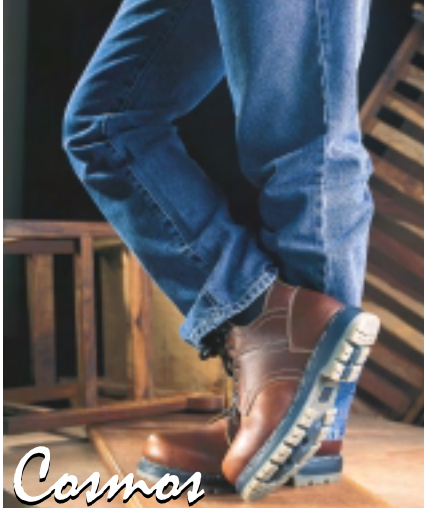
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# Dangerous Mines

**W**hen **Purnashova Chitrakar** started the Ban Landmines Campaign Nepal in June 1995, the exercise seemed pointless to some; the "people's war," and the violence that has prevailed since, started on February 1996. Nearly a decade on, Chitrakar has been credited with displaying foresight uncommon to many.

Today, landmines pose serious threats to people's lives. During 2003, 48 civilians died in landmine explosions. In the first five months of 2004, that toll had risen to 120. Kumud Nepal talked to Chitrakar, who has also been nominated recently as the South Asian representative to the Advisory Committee of the International Campaign for Ban Against Landmines, about the dangers of landmines and her own experience as an activist against their use.

**When you started the campaign nearly a decade ago, the violence that is prevalent today wasn't there. So why the campaign against landmines?**

Sure, landmines weren't as serious an issue as they are today in Nepal. But there were more than 20,000 people in 70 countries who had become the victims of landmines. We wanted to establish a global solidarity against landmines. My own experience in Cambodia had shown me how landmines could destroy people's lives. I saw people blinded, handicapped and paralyzed by landmine explosions. I wanted to make people aware.

**How would you describe the menace of landmines in our country today?**

Both sides to the conflict are using landmines indiscriminately. While the Maoists are relying more on improvised explosive devices, IEDs, the government forces use manufactured landmines. There are also command-detonated mines, and remotely-controlled and timer mines that both sides are using recklessly.

**Why is their use so widespread?**

In any conflict-hit area, the use of landmines is inevitable. They are widely used because they are easy to produce

and cost effective. Also, in the type of war that is being fought in Nepal—the Maoists have embarked upon a guerilla war—landmines make it possible for the warring sides to fight their battles from far away; it's not a face-to-face conventional war.

**During 2003, 48 civilians died in landmine explosions. In the first five months of 2004, that toll had risen to 120.**

**How would you describe the level of danger posed by the landmines in Nepal?**

Landmines pose a serious threat to people's lives, especially in rural areas. More often than not, it is the innocent who suffer, caught in the middle. During 2003, 225 civilians were victims of landmine explosions. While 177 of them survived, 48 died. Among the dead were 18 children. In the first five months of 2004, out of a total of 120 civilians who died in such explosions, 32 were children. Most of these children toyed with the landmines not knowing what they were. Some others died trying to extract metals out of the explosives to sell as scrap metal. Then there is the bigger post-conflict danger of using landmines indiscriminately.

**How so?**

The landmines are buried underground and will remain there even after the conflict is over. These landmines will lead to the needless loss of human lives. Take



SS/WN

Cambodia for example; even after the civil war ended in 1975, people are still dying due to the carelessly laid mines. It is really difficult to completely dispose of these explosives. A poor country like ours will have similar problems dealing with the cost of cleaning up the landmines, if and when the war ends.

**What have been your efforts to combat this problem?**

We have been trying to reach out to the people. Our awareness programs are focused on 10 districts for the time being: Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan, Banke, Morang, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, Dhading and Dolakha. We are looking to run programs that will tell students about the risks of mines in 150-200 schools within the next two months. We have also been helping with the rehabilitation of landmine victims.

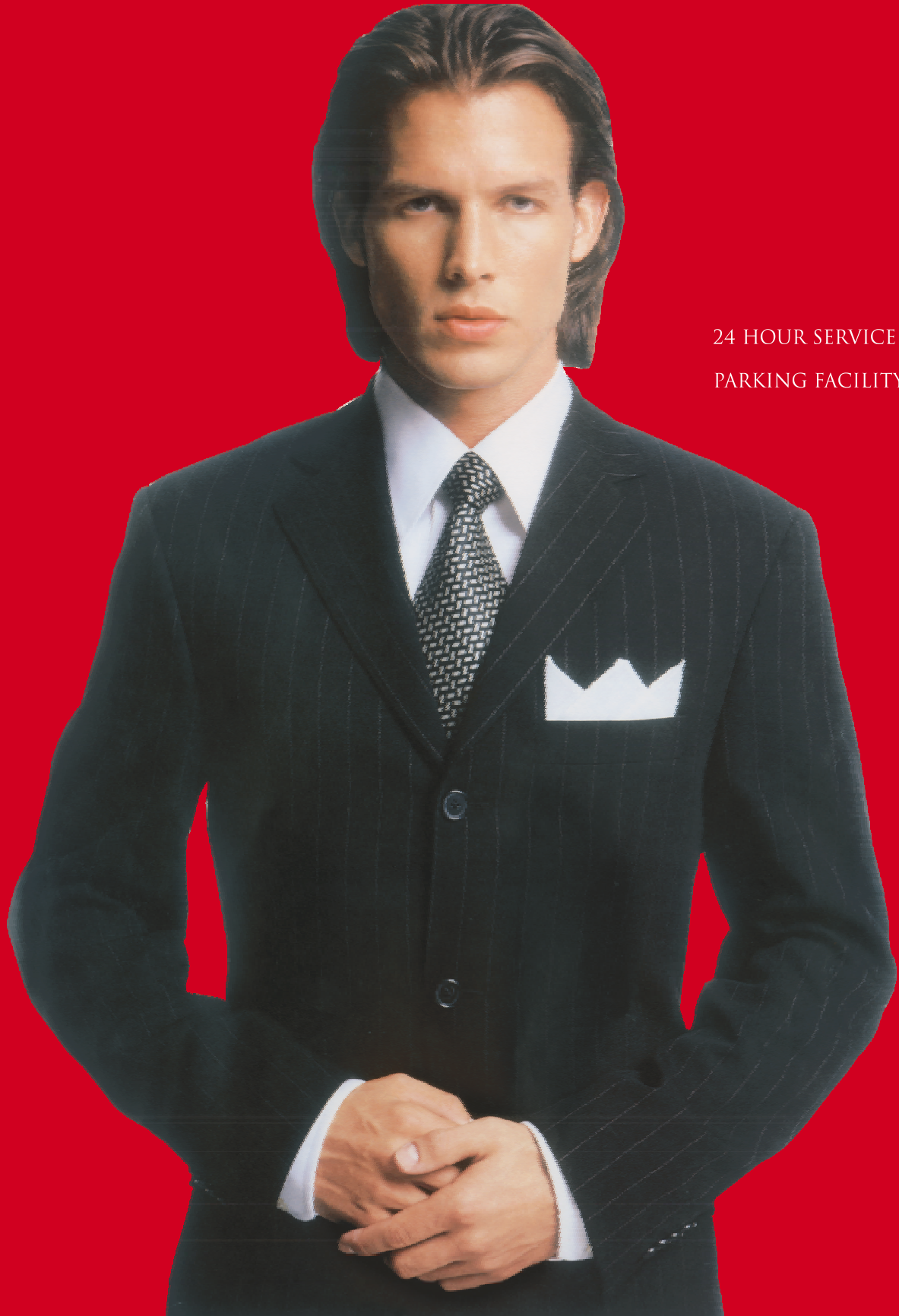
**How about banning the use of landmines?**

We are trying that as well. We are pressing on the government to sign the Ottawa treaty that was formulated on Dec. 3, 1997. The treaty is a common agreement on the ban of nuclear weapons and landmines. Similarly, we are appealing to the Maoists to sign the Deed of Commitment under the Geneva Convention that says any side in a war will not arbitrarily use landmines and other ammunition.

**And their response...**

The government is always positive in its response, but there's a huge gap between what it says and what it does. As for the Maoists, we haven't received a response from them yet. ■

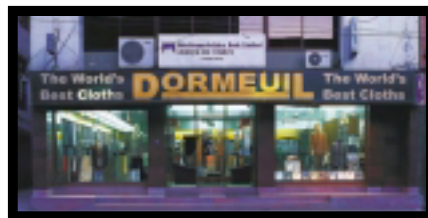




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# To Be or Not To Be

*"To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them?"*

Prime Minister Deuba faces a dilemma of Hamletian proportions this week. Will he announce elections if the Maoists defy his Jan. 13 deadline to come forward for talks? Or will he decide that the country is in no better shape now than it was in October 2002, when he told the King that the elections were not possible, and by so doing risk another dismissal?

When the King made a near-impossible comeback possible for Deuba in June, he explicitly told the new prime minister to prepare groundwork to hold elections within 2061 B.S., by April. Seven months on, no one, certainly not the big political parties who believe in elections, want elections. At present Deuba's own NC-D is the only party to have come out openly in support of elections; even that support is ambiguous. Two senior leaders—Bijaya Kumar Gachhedar and Bal Bahadur KC—have voiced serious misgivings about the prime minister's election plans.

While the junior coalition partner, the RPP, is expected to fall behind the election call, the CPN-UML, the largest party supporting the government, seems deeply divided on the election issue. Should it decide to join forces with the Nepali Congress, which first wants to see the issue of "regression" addressed before elections, Deuba's election call will be politically dead even without the Maoists opposing it. The Maoists of course want elections, but of a different kind: elections to a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.

We are not against elections. Indeed, there can be no democracy without elections, no matter how messy they may be. But we aren't sure whether elections now are the best option before us. This is no time to split hairs over the terms of a Constitution that, at best, remains in a suspended animation. At the risk of

sounding hackneyed, we repeat one more time: The Maoist problem will not be resolved militarily. The political process should be revived and nurtured with care before those in the RNA and the CPN-

**See Cover Story  
Page 22**

Maoist with militarist mindsets take the whole country hostage. There is a remote hope that elections may yet unite



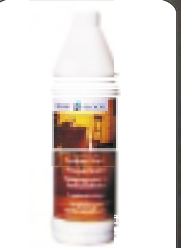
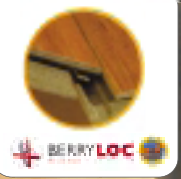
all political parties and that they will rally together to oppose the Maoists, who will go to great lengths to disrupt the polls. But for that to happen, Prime Minister Deuba will have to display a higher level of statesmanship than he has yet shown.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

Accessories



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