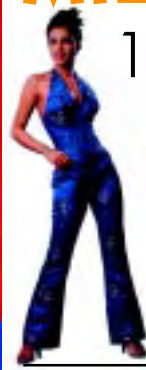


**MILLENNIUM GETAWAYS**

10-11



**The Bimbo Deterrent**

UNDER MY HAT

20

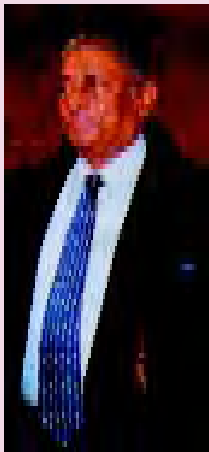
**EXCLUSIVE**

**Round Ten**

Nepal and Bhutan will sit down for the 10th round of ministerial talks starting Sunday to try once more to hammer out a deal on the return of the 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps in eastern Nepal. An agreement is possible only if the 10-member Bhutanese delegation led by Foreign Minister Jigme Thinley agrees with Nepal's criteria for verification of refugees. Bhutan insists each individual be taken up on a case-by-case basis, while Nepal says humanitarian norms dictate that the family as a whole must be taken as a unit. The UNHCR has suggested a middle-of-the-road option: take up every refugee over age 25 for individual verification, and the rest as a family unit. Julia Taft, the US official in charge of refugee affairs, who visited Kathmandu and Thimpu earlier this month backed the UN approach. The talks are fraught with pitfalls, among them is the issue of the 17,000 children who have not known life outside the camps.

**Kadrigamar in jam**

Kathmandu's monstrous traffic jams are not just trapping commuters. This week, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadrigamar was stuck at the Babar Mahal intersection for half an hour on his way to the airport to catch his flight out. Sri Lankan officials were said to be peeved that Kadrigamar, who is on the Tamil Tiger hit list, was provided no security while Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou, who was here at the same time, had two van loads of police and four out-riders. Kadrigamar's lone police escort finally made a passage for the car through the jam. A senior Shital Niwas aide told us the security discrepancy was because Papandreou's visit was "official" while Kadrigamar's was a "working" visit.



**IC 814**

On Christmas Eve last year flight IC 814 from Kathmandu to Delhi was hijacked and held in the Afghan city of Kandahar for a week. A flashback at the ordeal and its continuing fallout on Nepal's tourism industry.....pg 4-5

**CLOSE TO THE EDGE**

**The government is ready to set up a special paramilitary force to take on the Maoists whose presence is suddenly felt nationwide.**

**BINOD BHATTARAI**

**W**hat is astonishing is how quickly in the past month the country's mood has turned from bad to worse. Underneath the seeming calm of the bustling streets of the capital there is a deep sense of foreboding that we are all being pushed to the edge by forces beyond our control.

Five million children couldn't attend classes last week because a student group sent out photocopies of a mildly worded letter ordering schools to close. Just to show they meant business, the pro-Maoist students roughed up a few principals. What it showed was not how much the Maoists are in control, but what little government control there is. The Maoists are simply exploiting a vacuum created by absolute disarray in government, in the politicised bureaucracy, and in a leftist opposition that seems to have gone into winter hibernation.

To be sure, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala hasn't had much time for governance lately. No sooner had he patched up a threatened mutiny within his own party than he was immersed in a high-stake haggle with the Royal Palace to get approval for an ordinance to set up a specially armed paramilitary unit. After six months of toing-and-froing between Singha Durbar and Naryanhiti Durbar, the draft law has finally been sent for approval by King Birendra. That is supposed to be a formality, but one has to factor in the army's extreme reluctance to agree to such a force. Even if it does

get royal approval, the bill will have to be ratified by the winter session of parliament. For now, a demoralised police force cannot put any pressure on the Maoists even if it wants to—it is poorly equipped, inadequately funded and lacks training. Commented one UML mouthpiece, *Drishti*: "At present, powers from the Palace to the Maoists are intent on spreading instability. But the government has not been able to respond adequately."

Sensing the palace, the government, the police and the army working at cross-purposes, the Maoists have seized the moment to expand the movement from their base districts and make the first inroads into national society. After mobilising supporters among college students to threaten schools all over the country to close, and for the first time affecting the urban middle and upper classes, they promised to escalate their campaign in the run-up to the sixth anniversary of their movement on 13 February.

Opinion is divided about whether this strategy will work. The schools closed not because there was genuine support for the 15-point demand laid out by the pro-Maoist students, but due to a fear psychosis at work throughout the country. Whatever the case, the Maoists were able to demonstrate a leverage that they actually do not have. Says Shyam Shrestha, editor of the leftist magazine, *Mulyankan*: "The Maoists are under tremendous pressure from within their own movement to resolve the



SUBHAS RAI

contradictions their declarations have created, that is, shown new results."

So far, Nepal's Maoists have out-done Mao by carrying out a revolution in fast-forward, and they need to maintain the momentum. The school strike could have been a diversion to strengthen their base areas and hold elections to what they called district-level "people's government".

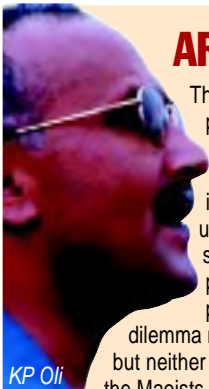
One of the biggest factors working in the Maoists' favour is that most of our democratically elected leaders have completely discredited themselves in the public eye. The Maoists want to capitalise on this frustration and use it to demand a complete overhaul of the constitution. They follow Mao by the book to argue that violence is the only way forward because state repression cannot be confronted with words alone (see box). The issue of whether or not an

armed uprising is the proper strategy has split Nepal's communist movement many times in the past. Former advocates of the hard line argue that Mao preached violence only as a last measure, whereas the present movement uses violence as a starting point. "The reason the Maoists seem to be gaining support is because of the total failure of governments since 1990 to bring

about an economic and cultural transformation," says Hari Roka of the CEN-ML. Even so, it is clear that the Maoists would not have been able to get to where they are so quickly without opting for an armed struggle.

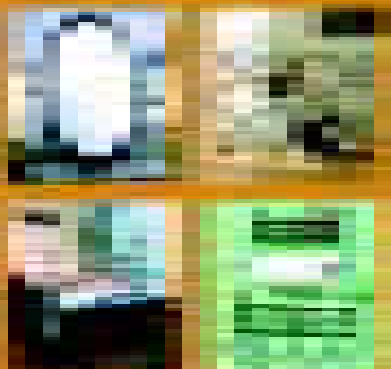
⇒ **Close to the edge p 6**

**ARMED AND DANGEROUS**



KP Oli

The question of whether violence is a legitimate strategy for a proletarian revolution in Nepal has split our communists many times both before and after 1990. Khadga Prasad Oli, deputy leader of the main opposition UML, was one of the leaders of the Naxalite rebellion in Jhapa in the 1970s. "Once you take up arms it is difficult to give it up," says Oli. "Within two years, some of us had realised that armed struggle was the wrong way, but it took us 10 years to change the party's approach." His decision to eschew violence even cost Oli his party membership, and he understands why the Maoists face a dilemma now: "Today it's impossible for the Maoists to win power through force, but neither is it easy for them to stop their struggle." One window that may get the Maoists back in the mainstream would be to win over the masses by implementing broad-based economic and social reform programmes, and thus negate the need for a revolution. That would be possible only with strong, firm governance and by a government that knows what it is trying to achieve.



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## WAKEUP CALL

Most Nepalis would not accuse us of being alarmists if we took a deep breath today and said that the country is staggering towards a dangerous abyss. Ten years after democracy, ten prime ministers and three elections later, rulers whom the people trusted seem to have run out of gas. Increasingly, it feels like we are flogging a dead horse. Legally the ruling elite may still have the mandate to rule, but morally they have abdicated that right. Rulers who fiddle around while the country burns, can't take tough and timely decisions, put the welfare of their neediest citizens on the back burner, and rulers who are only interested in amassing money and power as if there were no tomorrow cannot be entrusted with the destiny of this nation.

The matrix of change comes in two basic types: it can be for the better or for the worse. Change can bring development, or it can bring degradation. Development, or progress, is said to occur when change is understood and controlled, when rulers and ruled work towards a goal-oriented process of change that is for the better. But the other kind of change is when things spiral out of control. The rulers have neither the inclination nor power to steer, and the chronic failure of governance makes the ruled fatalistic, leading to apathy and despair. This is when we can say there is regression and degradation. It does not take a rocket scientist to look around Kathmandu today and conclude that what is happening to the country is degradation and regression. The more serious aspect of it is that a people who have waited ten years to see even a glimmer of change don't see any. They are no longer just blaming our feckless leaders, but also the system. The threat of democratic reversal (both from the left and the right) is more real today than at any time in the past ten years.

The irony of it all is that this is one of the few times there is a majority government in power that has the numbers in the legislature to see change through. And yet, nine months after the present rulers took office, more than at any time in the past five years, there is a feeling of no one being in control. Five million school children could not go to school last week because a student union threatened their teachers, a tourism



industry crippled by the lack of timely intervention is bringing the economy to its knees, farmers in the tarai don't want to grow rice anymore because they lose money on every sack they sell, donors are seriously contem-

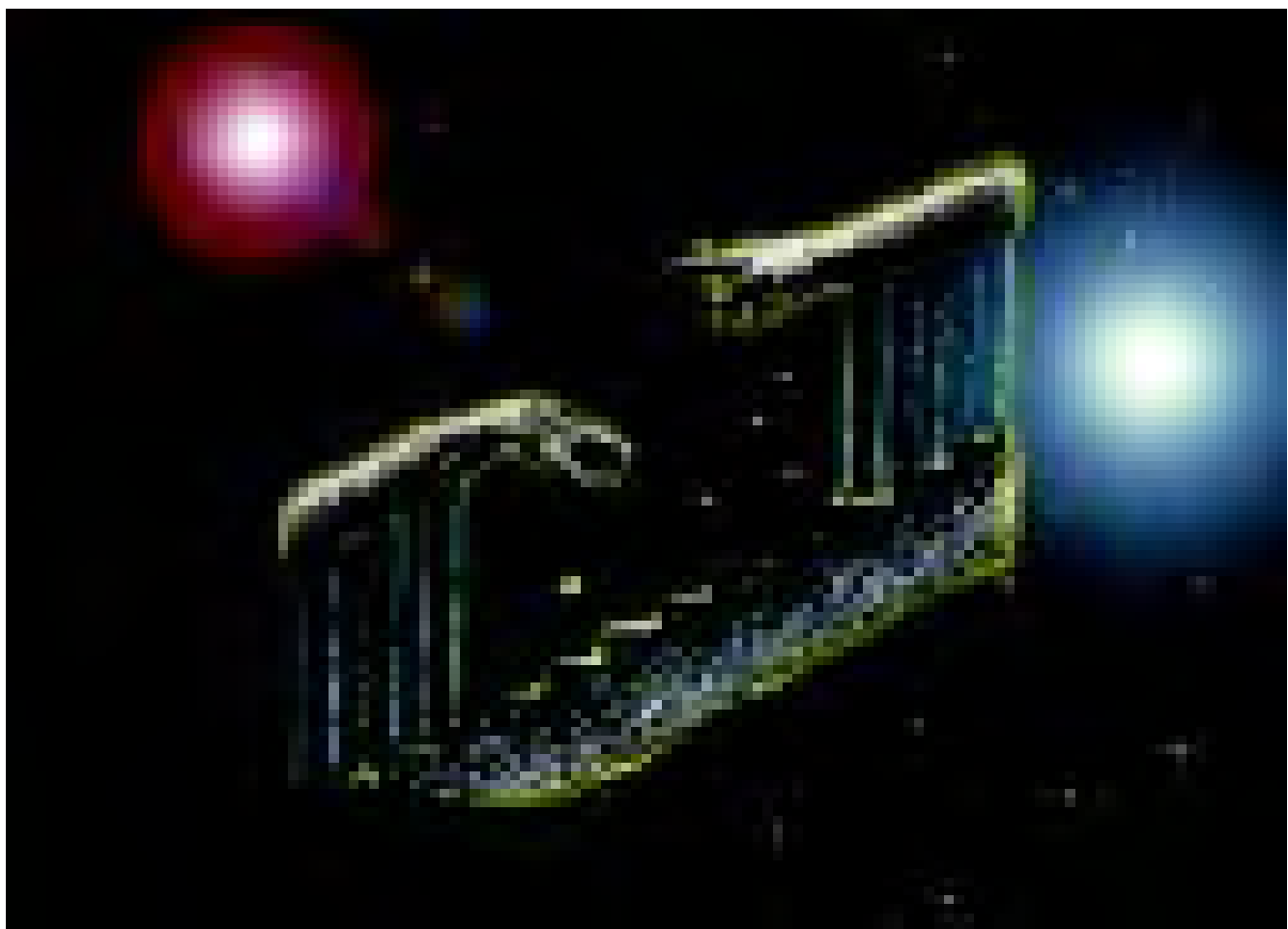
plating winding down development projects. It has now reached the point where the government should evaluate its own non-performance and tell us why it has failed. Even at the best of times, Nepal's development challenges are so serious and solutions are required so urgently that any government that takes it upon itself to try to rule has an unenviable task. Without iron resolve, strong vision and commitment, a super-efficient and honest bureaucracy, we cannot begin to make a dent on this country's crisis of poverty, inequality and social justice. But this is not the best of times. Democracy is being squeezed from the left and the right by people who want to see it fail.

This is a wakeup call.

## FULL OF SURPRISES

What do you say when you look around inside the cabin of a plane flying to Kathmandu these days and see that half the seats are empty? Well, you turn to the bright side, and say the seats are half full. At least there are some daredevil tourists still coming to Kathmandu. They must be into extreme adventure. First there is the adventure of the trek, the rafting or safari then there is the adventure of facing the gauntlet of touts, taxi drivers and beggars clutching at your bags as you emerge from immigration. Now, in addition to all this, there is the adventure of trying not to get kicked out of a hotel. At the check-in at the other end, most tourist passengers were worried: will we find a hotel, do we have to walk from the airport, are we going to be kicked out at midnight? It is becoming apparent that Nepal is not for the faint-hearted. The image we are trying to cultivate for our tourism industry is: "Visit Nepal: It is Full of Surprises."

Nepali Times is published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd  
Sanchaya Kosh Building, Block A-4th Floor, Pulchowk, Lalitpur  
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Marketing, circulation and subscriptions: marketing@nepalitimes.com  
www.nepalitimes.com Printed at Jagadamba Press (01) 521393



## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# Spirituality in the age of science

Our history is glorious. But, sadly, we can't live there. We have to live in the present, and plan for the future.



**STILL IN BANGALORE**—My hugely entertaining juket tour of India is finally winding down. The last stop was to attend this seminar organised by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), one of the premier institutions of scientific learning and research in India. Spread over a large wooded campus, it is equipped with a state-of-the-art laboratory with PARAM, the super-computer. The theme of the seminar was to re-live the glory days of ancient India which had apparently been conducting space exploration, building super-computers and launching satellites three thousand years ago. Attending the seminar were luminaries like His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Ravi Shankar, the swami, not the sitar-player. Both spoke about spirituality in the age of science. Also in Bangalore at the same time was India's celebrity scientist, Dr ARJ Abdul Kalam, the father of India's nuclear bombs, who was there to espouse peace. Just like hunters are the world's most avid conservationists, so it seems with nuclear scientists: war-mongers seem to be the loudest peaceniks.

Attached to the IISc is the Tata-funded National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS). Unlike its mother institution, NIAS does not limit itself to the sciences. It does not confine itself to the study of pregnant monkeys carrying test-tube embryos and moths that eat mosquitoes. It occasionally gets into the science and society interface. This week, when the IISc was playing host to their holinesses, the NIAS was hosting an international conference of scientists and philosophers to talk about "Knowledge and East-West Transitions".

Even here, the topic of discussion became secondary as speaker after Indian speaker took to the podium to trace the roots of the nuclear bomb, communication satellites and global positioning systems to some long-lost Sanskrit monograph from the first millennium before Christ. There was one Prof CK Raju who said, among other things, that Euclid was a manufactured personality, and that Einstein plagiarised his theory of relativity from some ancient Buddhist scripture in Pali smuggled out of India. For my naresake Professor CK, proof appeared immaterial, all that mattered was faith. Looking to the past amidst the squalor of the present was a quintessentially Nehruvian process. Nehru was educated in elite schools in England, and he embellished

the glory of an idealised past to awaken a civilisation in deep slumber. Perhaps at that time in the history of newly independent India it was necessary to do so. But sadly, Nehru's agenda has been hijacked by saffronite funds who use it to justify everything from nuclear bombs to revive a "lost" Hindu Empire encompassing Afghanistan, Burma and everything in between. Now it seems this agenda has even infiltrated India's scientific community. Indian and Nepali "scientists" talked rebusulys of how our ancestors streaked across the subcontinental skies in *pashpak binans*. Maybe true, but this was a scientific conference. We needed proof, not conjecture.

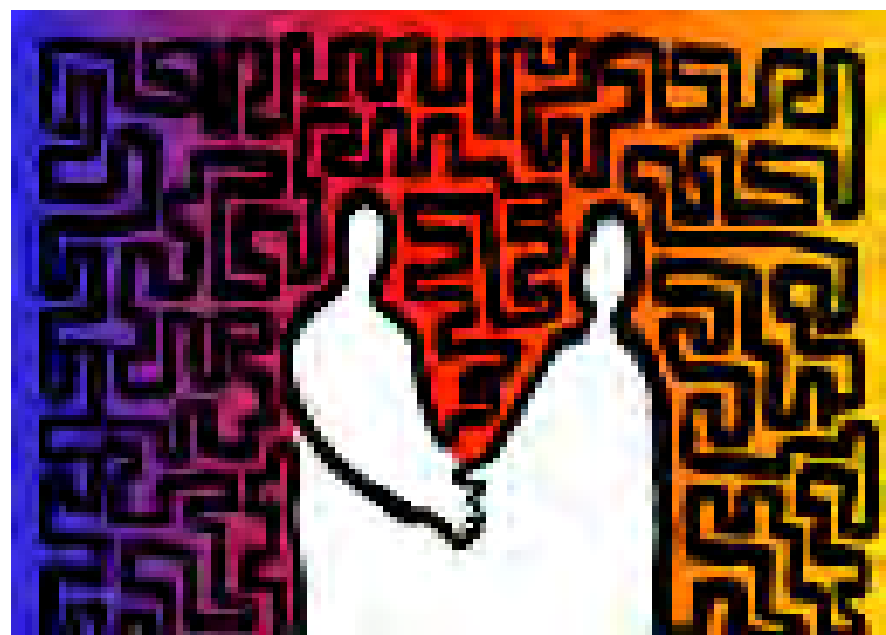
While all this was going on, an Indo-Nepal Sanskrit Conference was being organised by the Rastriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth in the holy town of Tirupati where a "senior scientist" named CSR Prabhu (they sure have a lot of initials down there) expounded on his theory that not only were our ancestors buzzing around in binans, but they had also perfected space technology, geo-stationary satellites and all-terrain vehicles capable of travelling through space, land and water with equal ease. May well be true, but how does that change the fact that South Asia has more child malnutrition, less literacy and more gender disparities than sub-Saharan Africa? Why was all this coming out in an Indo-Nepal Sanskrit meet I haven't yet figured out. And also mysterious is why no one asked Mr Prabhu why our scriptures which suddenly seem so ahead of their time,

have no answers for our present development dilemma? Or why the ox-cart and the plough have remained essentially unchanged for 5,000 years?

Mr Prabhu wasn't finished yet. He said "Nepal's Royal Library" (do we have one?) has a copy of Subbaraya Sastri's book which contains technical details on assembling and fabricating spacecraft, the advanced alloys to be used, semiconductors, and propellants. Finally, our own Mahendra Sanskrit University in Dary seems to have found a purpose: get over its obsession with the Diploma in Kamakanda (rituals) and pursue a intellectual property rights case to get compensation from NASA for stealing what, Mr Prabhu says, are joint Indian and Nepali discoveries of orbital launch vehicles and space stations.

Rajiv Sadkar, editor of *Gentleman* magazine (doing to India in the 00s what *Playboy* did to America in the 70s) put it in his own very pithy style: "See, all that these pompous...s are bothered about is an India of only 25 million people that is riding on the crest of the information communication revolution, carries international credit cards and drives around in fancy cars. The rest of the billion simply do not matter to them. These intellectuals manufacture apologies to relieve the guilty conscience of India's middle-class."

Why are we so obsessed with manufacturing and wallowing in an artificial past? Our history is glorious, but sadly, we can't live there. We have to live in the present and plan for the future. ♦



## INTERVIEW

**“Not everyone carries a gun in a revolution”**

**Mao said “a revolution is not a time for holding parties”. You cannot expect politeness in revolutions.**

something from my country and then got involved in politics. I got enrolled for my Masters and PhD only to get a scholarship so that I could devote myself to self-study and think of ways in which I could get involved in the revolution. I missed nobody in this. I told the head of the Jawahar Lal Nehru University [in Delhi] and reputed Indian leftist, the late professor Momin Raza, and my PhD supervisor, Dr. Atiya Habib. They understood my problems and helped me. Many people have doubts about my PhD thesis. It was not purely a technical one but was based on Marxist political economy and was titled "Natural and Regional Issues in Nepal's Underdevelopment". Thirdly, everyone connected to a revolution does not have to just carry a gun. According to me, 'spontaneities, and the necessities of a revolution, some carry a physical weapon and others a mental weapon.

*Is it true that you got interested in politics while you were studying at ASCOL [Amrit Science College in Kathmandu]? If true, how could a highly educated person like you join a classless revolution and politics?*

I studied for two years at ASOL in 1971-72. At that time there was hardly any political activity taking place in the country. Banned parties had just begun to unite and go underground. I come from a very backward village where people are mostly farmers. I was the most educated one among my relatives and other villagers and so there was no one to guide me in life or in politics. Besides being aware that dynastic monarchy was not correct, I did not have any other political awareness. But this does not mean that I did not have a taste for politics at that time. I used to read a lot of papers, and listen to speeches given by students allied to different political parties. Elections at ASOL at that time were not conducted on a panel basis, but one could vote candidates of different parties. I remember I had voted for Prakash Man Singh from the Nepali Congress and the

late Madan Kratiwada from the leftists as my class representatives. At that time Ram Raja Prasad Singh, who had been elected from the graduate constituency, was not allowed to take his oath and was arrested. ASUL was closed in protest and I, too, participated actively. Yet my political awareness was limited and I concentrated on my studies. After finishing my engineering degree in India, I saw the pathetic state of Nepalis working in India, saw the inhumane attitude of the Indians towards the Nepalis, and thought about the backwardness of my village and country. I began asking myself what the best way to live was, and what a person was supposed to do on this earth. Searching for answers I slowly came into contact with Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thought and politics.

*Could you tell us something about your experiences at ASCOL?*

I cannot forget the time I spent at ASCL because it left a very deep mark on my personal life. At that time ASCL was considered to be the best college in Nepal and to be associated with it was an honour. Hard-working students from all over the country used to join it but there was still a preponderance of students from rich families, from the upper strata of society, and from Kathmandu. Students like us from villages and backward places were lumped together and those from St. Xavier's, St. Mary's and other schools were put in other groups. On the first day of school we were asked to introduce ourselves and since I had stood first in the SC board examinations, I was made to give a speech in front of 1500 students. This was my first public speech. I had some difficulty while speaking, but it was a good experience and I will never forget that. The behaviour and attitude of the English-speaking students created some problems for me, but after I did very well in English, they too started respecting me. I used to live in a small room on the ground floor of post Leknath Poudel's house in Thamel (where Saraswati Campus stands today). I had to live on the Rs 100 that the Ministry of Education provided me as scholarship, a stipend from the Madan Puraskar Guthi, and the money awarded by the present king for scoring the highest marks in geography. I did not have many friends, but since I was from a village and had one first in SC, everyone was friendly and helpful to me. ♦

*toyota ad*

*Excerpts from an interview with Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) ideologue Baburam Bhattarai in the Nepali-language weekly, Sahara, 10 Dec.*

*In a recent article you stated that the present educational institutions should be burnt down. If the educational institutions in your time had been burnt down, would it have been possible for you to complete your education?*

I made the statement in the context of a student agitation in Pokhara last year. It was a figurative statement to encourage and support them in their struggle. By "burning down", I did not mean that one should actually burn down the infrastructure but rather get rid of old ways of thinking, the educational system, the curriculum, the manner in which it is taught, and other obstacles. If you study the histories of revolutions past, you realise that it is only after the destruction of the old system that a new one can be put in its place. The pros and cons are not calculated at the time of a revolution, that is why Mao had stated "a revolution is not a time to hold parties". You cannot expect decency and politeness at the time of revolution. What we have said is in line with Mao's thinking and we still believe in what Mao said. What we want to tell our student friends is that for a beautiful and prosperous future you should be able to make sacrifices today and have no second thoughts about making those sacrifices. You should not be afraid of destroying this huge factory that is only producing unemployment - especially when the factory itself is slowly dying.

*How do you counter the argument that you have done your PhD and send your children to boarding schools, but want the children of other people to give up their books and carry weapons?*

This is the response of reactionaries and the ruling class. The objective is to create doubt, suspicion and anger among ordinary people against the revolution. This is a ploy to create a negative image of the revolution in people who haven't understood or fully grasped its true meaning. To clarify, I should present some personal and family facts. Firstly, I have only one daughter, Mansi, who earlier used to attend an educational ship called a boarding school but who now goes to an ordinary government school. We have not pampered or spoilt her but are preparing her for a life of struggle and revolution, and in this respect we are satisfied with her progress. Secondly, it is not true that I joined the revolutionary movement only after I completed my studies. I finished my Bachelors in Architecture from Chandigarh (in India) in 1977/78 under the Colombo Plan. I became aware of my responsibilities towards my country, wanted to do



# IC 814, one year after

## A NEPALI TIMES REPORT

Whenever Sanjay Thital and his wife Rosira have taken a flight in the past year, they've had goosebumps. It is especially bad when cabin attendants bring around the food. Sanjay says he looks around nervously half expecting a masked man to run down the aisle shouting "Get down." Sanjay worked for a Japanese medical charity in Peshawar and was flying back from Kathmandu just after getting married last year when his Indian Airlines flight IC814 was hijacked just as the food was being served. "I have tried to avoid Indian Airlines since then because the Kashmir problem was the reason for the hijack and it has not been resolved," he told us.

Last week, *The Times of India* reported that one of the hijackers of IC814 had been spotted in Kathmandu. For many here the report was a sharp reminder of the bias and scape-goating of Nepal by the Indian media last year in the aftermath of the hijacking. Nepal is need to reminding. The hijack and the prolonged negotiations that led to the release



had a political fallout that added to already worsening Indo-Pakistan relations and raised tensions in the region. But what has led many Nepalis was the 'regional superpower press' (in sheer number and sound bytes) putting the blame squarely on a small neighbouring country, and accusing it of harbouring Islamic militants and other sundry subversives. In Nepali eyes, the main culprit was the Zee News TV channel, which even had a computer simulation of militants getting off a PIA plane and boarding the IA aircraft parked side by side. Like passengers at a New Delhi bus terminal. Indian magazines carried

pictures of *nadassas* in the tarai with captions saying they were training centres for Islamic terrorists.

It suddenly became characteristic of a newly jingoistic Indian state and an equally obliging media that while things were not better managed at home it was better to deflect attention. Press coverage of the hijack distorted facts, lacked objectivity, vilified an innocent and reduced the crisis itself into a media event, all in the rush to be the first breaking story. A year after the drama, media critics even in India are now admitting that the hijack was part and parcel of the Kashmir

conflict between India and Pakistan, and Nepal just got caught in the middle. The response of the Indian state machinery was to distract attention from its own long-term failures in Kashmir and its initial bungling in reacting to the hijack by maligning a conveniently weak neighbour. So the story was not about intelligence failure, or about squandered options when the airliner stood on the tarmac at Amritsar airport. And what hurt Nepalis most were the Zee News items quoting "intelligence sources" that the hijackers had brandished Kalashnikovs even before the plane entered Indian airspace and that a Nepali was one of the hijackers; there was no correction after the reports proved false.

The appearance of a story in the press is itself conspiratorial. Hijacks are conspiratorial, and so were the negotiations that ended the hijack—no one has a clue as to what actually transpired, how much money changed hands and

**The hijack of flight IC 814 on a Kathmandu-Delhi flight exactly one year ago this week unleashed an Indian media frenzy that targeted Nepal. One year later, Nepalis are still finding it hard to ignore the fallout.**

who was involved. But there's a stake in the fallout as well. Who benefits from adverse media coverage? It is possible that the budget for Indian intelligence gathering in Nepal has grown by leaps and bounds. There are those who benefit from a perceived heightened security threat. Then there was the nearly six-month long haggling over improving the security of Kathmandu airport. Nepalis did not want to allow Indian airlines security checks on its "soil", and finally agreed to have a special ramp where passengers would be frisked. The added security has made it much more of a hassle to travel. Indian Airlines, compared to other airlines. But most passengers have the attitude: better safe than sorry.

Airport manager Rajesh Raj Dali says Kathmandu airport's security is now much tighter. "We're now as good as any airport anywhere," Dali told us in his office overlooking the runway. "We are providing airlines all security services they have asked for." The airport now has a sterilised passenger hold where even employees except those helping boarding and authorised security personnel are not allowed to mix with passengers. There is close-circuit television surveillance of all sensitive areas.

Checked-in baggage also passes through several screening processes: X-rayed first, and then screened for a second time upon request of airlines. In addition it also allows some airlines upon request to get passengers to identify their checked-in baggage on the apron before boarding. In addition to the hand baggage screening at the terminal, the Indian Airlines' special ramp is where security personnel do a thorough body frisk. Pakistan

International Airlines also has body frisking, but does that on the threshold of the aircraft itself. Asked about inconvenience to passengers from long queues on the apron, Dali says: "There were problems when these new security measures were introduced but we have now streamlined it and we don't harass passengers. We haven't got any complaints from any airlines."

Another post-hijack development is the institutionalisation of the National Civil Aviation Security Committee that is headed by Nepal's Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, and the formation of similar security committees in all airports around the country. One of the greatest casualties of the hijacking was Nepal's tourism industry. More than 30 percent of the tourists in Nepal are high-spending Indian holidaymakers who used to gorge in the restaurants, shopping centres and casinos of Kathmandu and Pokhara. From January to June, there were no Indian Airlines flights at all which cost the Indian carrier an estimated Rs 2.5 million a day. But the damage to Nepal's tourism industry was colossal, not just because Indians were not coming, but also because a third of non-Indian tourists still fly in via New Delhi, Calcutta or Banaras. Luckily, tourism managed to recoup some of the losses with a healthy autumn season despite the Indian numbers being down, which had more to do with new rules about only Indians and Nepalis with passports or citizenship papers being allowed to fly between the two countries. Even though the flights have resumed, and the security is tight, the fallout from the negative media coverage in India is going to take a long time to undo. ♦

## "Soni saw his life flash before his eyes..."

Daman Kumar Soni was sitting next to Rupin Katyal when the stabbings began. Satnam Singh was in the seat directly behind Katyal. As the flight had made its way towards Amritsar, the flight purser had been shifted to the twenty-fourth row. The hijackers had picked out eight well-built passengers, summoning them by crooking their fingers and making them get up. Daman Kumar Soni was among them. One at a time, they were asked to move to the executive class cabin where they were made to sit down, tightly belted in, and with their seats reclined. "When I walked into the executive class, I saw an open bag with what looked like yellow nylon rope in it," Soni says. "I wondered what it was for." He was soon to find out. The rope was used to tie the wrists of all the eight passengers who were belted into the seats in the executive class cabin. "They looked like handcuffs," remembers Soni. Among those who were handcuffed with them was a man called Chander Chhabra, a honeymooner whose name was Garg, at least another Indian in his thirties, and a foreigner with a beard and long hair who was blindfolded.

In the cockpit, when the countdown began, bits of it could be heard through the cockpit door. "As it progressed, Soni

saw his life flash before his eyes. "It was excruciating. An image of my family deity flashed before me. I thought we were all going to die. It was a hopeless situation." From the front, they could hear shouts: "Pilot, plane *udao*, plane *udao* (Fly the aircraft)."

Loud, angry exchanges emanating from the cockpit and outside its door punctuated the air. A hijacker, later identified by the passengers as Doctor, came rushing up with a small knife, no larger than those used in a kitchen, to the rows where the passengers were tied down. "He started stabbing Rupin, hitting him repeatedly at least 20-25 times. It was all so fast, it looked like he was pounding a roll of dough."

Doctor then went towards the cockpit door but came back and once more began to assault the mild-mannered Katyal with the small knife. He then moved to the seat behind him and began to attack Satnam Singh. While everyone else stayed quiet, Chander Chhabra began to plead for mercy. Doctor aimed a kick at his face to silence him. Another foreigner, a Belgian, was also struck. Blood was soon dripping down the seats and on to the floor. ♦

(Excerpted from *IC814 Hijacked!* by Anil K Jagga and Saurabh Shukla, Lotus 2000)

## HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



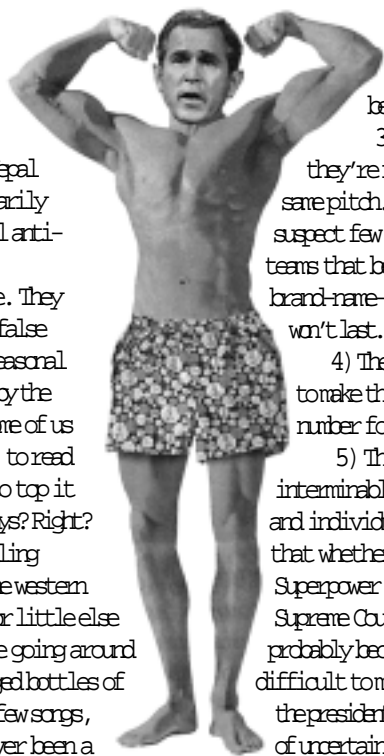
## Ten reasons why we must not despair

Some of us were forced, nearly at gunpoint, to play with our children.

This week, with tales of woe pouring out at parties all over town, the misty, wintry blast chilling our bones, ten reasons why we must not despair, why things in Nepal aren't as bad as some say at the moment. This list is necessarily subjective, arbitrary and may not make it past international anti-facetiousness firewalls. You have been warned.

1) The school strike was good for our kids. Take mine. They missed out on various activities that only go to perpetuate false stereotypes about West Asian kings and regi. The usual seasonal bashing of imkeepers in small villages near Jerusalem fell by the wayside as the gates of the school remained shut tight. Some of us were forced, nearly at gunpoint, to play with our children, to read with them, to renounce the keyboard for a few days. And to top it off, the strike is a one-off. It won't happen again. Right guys? Right?

2) The cold, gloom, mist and frost that has us all huddling together in pathetic knots of misery is good for adults. The western capitalist aim of making us all Atomised Individuals, good for little else other than work or consumption, can't be met while we're going around giving each other bear hugs, and passing around paper bagged bottles of liquid warmth. Snuggle up, arms around shoulders, sing a few songs, and get to know your fellowman, and woman. There's never been a



better time.

3) Manchester United is on a losing streak. Or at least they're not devastating every opponent that dares to be on the same pitch. Now I know all of you won't rejoice in that. In fact I suspect few of you will. But those of us who gallantly support sports teams that believe in talent development and heart over money and brand-name-ism, have seldom been happier. And besides, we know it won't last.

4) There is no number four this week but it has to be included to make this list add up to ten. The next list will definitely have a number four.

5) The American election is OVER. No more boring, interminable rubbish spouted by news channels, papers, magazines and individuals around the world, most of whom knew only too well that whether Gore or Gush won in Florida, the World's Only Superpower would continue much as it has for decades. So the Supreme Court has overruled the voters and said "Enough", probably because even the stand-up comics were finding things difficult to mine for jokes. That's an end to it then. But then again, the president-elect is a regional politician, scion of a political family, of uncertainly intellectual capacity, and facing a bitter, divided and

deeply partisan Congress. So don't celebrate too soon.

6) Whisky tastes better in winter. This is a scientifically proven fact, and if you don't believe me, perform your own experiments.

7) Nepali politicians are no more corrupt, venal or ignorant of the condition of the masses than their counterparts in India, Pakistan (oops, forget, no more politicians in Pakistan, scratch that) or Fiji for that matter. That's something to think about. But does Nepal really want to be compared with those places? Probably not. So just have another whisky.

8) It's wedding season. All over the place, happy families are spending vast sums to marry off sons, daughters and others, sending them into that wonderful world of matrimony, adult-hood, child-rearing, prosperity and so on. Go raise a glass to the happy couple, any happy couple, and just smile wisely if they ask you if marriage is all it's cracked up to be.

9) The Nepali Times is alive and well, seven months into its long and no doubt, exceedingly prosperous future. Long may it be with us.

10) Er, I'm off to the beach. No, not the sandy terrace of the Jungle Pub in Sauraha, but Bentota in Sri Lanka where none of the preceding nine points really matter all that much. Except for Man U that is. Long may they lose. ♦

# Hijack diary

Soon after Sanjay Dhital and Rosina were married, he had to be back at his job with a Japanese charity in Peshawar. So their journey was going to be like a honeymoon trip. Well, almost, for as they boarded IC 814 in Kathmandu on 24 December last year, they could hardly imagine they'd go through such a traumatic ordeal. Nepali Times presents excerpts from Sanjay's diary:

**Friday, 24 December**

I couldn't get the PIA flight to Peshawar [via Karachi], so we had to fly Indian Airlines. The flight was two hours late. We took off and half an hour later were served lunch. I'd begun eating when I heard shouting "Heads down, don't move." Looking back, I saw three masked men running up the aisle. Two had pistols, the third, a grenade. They shouted in Hindi: "Don't move or we'll shoot." I stopped eating, put my head on my knees, shut my eyes and waited. An announcement came over the PA system: "The plane has been hijacked. Don't try to be smart. Keep your heads down. Or we'll shoot you." The captain came on: "We've been hijacked, try to be patient, obey instructions." We had to blindfold ourselves. The plane descended and landed somewhere. I thought: if there's a commando raid, it will be now. But we took off 25 minutes later. I was really scared. My wife began to cry, and I held her hand. The plane landed one more time, and took off again.

**Saturday, 25 December**

We landed for the fourth time. There was no way to tell where we were. We were made to sit at the back of the plane. We were given four biscuits each and water for lunch and asked if we needed to use the toilets. We could take the blindfolds off. It was difficult to hold back the tears. My wife glanced at me as I wiped away my tears. She ate two biscuits. There was total silence. Around 10 pm they brought food—hard rice, beans, water. It was very cold, and we heard later that the temperature outside was minus eight degrees. It was difficult to sleep.

**Sunday, 26 December**

I was very thirsty and asked one of the hijackers, a reasonable fellow called "Doctor", for water. He poured me a soda. They put our blindfolds back on, and in the afternoon gave us naan served on Afghan Airlines cutlery. I knew we must be in Afghanistan.

**Monday, 27 December**

The captain said: "No one has come to rescue us, the Indian government is doing nothing. I've asked for international help on CNN and BBC." The hijackers said: "Your government doesn't want you, why should you return? Let us all die together." They cursed the UN and the US saying Muslims are dying in Chechnya and no one is bothered. Around noon they said UN diplomats were coming from Islamabad. An Indian team was expected by evening. The hijackers looked more relaxed. We did not need to be blindfolded, and could talk softly. Deep within I was worried they

had major demands. That evening, a passenger was asked to recite dialogues by Gabbar Singh [a character from an old Hindi film]. The atmosphere was lively at times.

**Tuesday, 28 December**

One hijacker was called Burger. Negotiations were on and he even joked a little.

**Wednesday, 29 December**

Biscuits for breakfast. Women got milk. The smell from the toilets was unbearable and I was worried about diarrhoea. Someone came to clean them, which was a relief. Burger interacted with passengers—women called him *bhaiya* [brother]. Talks were still on, and they served us chicken. For the first time, I could sleep today.

**Thursday, 30 December**

Suddenly, the atmosphere on the plane was different. Burger appeared with a megaphone and woke us up. "I have bad news, the talks aren't going anywhere. The Indian government didn't agree to our demands. There is only one thing we can do now—kill you and ourselves. Your government doesn't care about you. We will begin killing you one by one. I may appear friendly, but I can be tough. Think about Allah, recite his name." This was it. After an hour Burger asked: "Does anyone want to eat?" No one spoke. Then Gajendra, a Nepali, asked for food. He ate well. At noon Burger went to see the chief. He returned after 15 minutes, smiling, "Salaam alaikum friends. At the Taliban's humble request, the Indian government is talking again. Pray to Allah." An hour and a half hour later, he appeared saying, "Congratulations, 80 percent of our demands have been met." We were relieved, and waited. Burger asked if we wanted to give the Taliban a token of our appreciation. We decided to present them with a model of the aircraft we were on with details of the hijacking. Burger said: "Brothers and sisters, please forgive us. We did not want to cause you all this trouble. Your families have suffered a lot. We want to hear that you've forgiven us." Everyone said in Hindi, we forgive you. Burger said "Have a good trip back," and stepped off the aircraft.



## IT policy: real or virtual

It's official. We now have an IT policy. Last week the Minister for Science and Technology called a press conference to discuss the policy and announced that the government hoped to earn Rs 10 billion from hardware and software exports in the next five years. IT is to be declared a national priority sector in which the government would be all: the "promoter," "facilitator," and "regulator." It is also proposed to declare IT companies "essential services" to ensure that the sector is not affected by strikes and bandhs.

The government also envisages setting up a venture capital fund and an IT park in Banepa that would be used as an "incubator" to nurture new companies. Companies that set up operations would be allowed to import equipment by paying just one percent customs duty for five years. However, the customs concessions specified by the policy would be applicable only to training institutes. And they will need the recommendation of the to-be-formed National Information Technology Centre (NITC). In addition to recommending duties, the NITC is also to work on computerisation of government offices, develop content, design and assist the government in designing websites.

Other "will do" statements include establishing Internet nodes in all districts within three years and taking the Net to the villages. It also specifies that telephone charges for Internet use would be gradually reduced—in contradiction to reports that the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation plans to raise local call tariffs (see: Nepali Times #21).

## Still in one piece

The Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), generally known as *Ma-Le*, managed to keep itself together by agreeing on a last-minute compromise to keep its central leadership virtually unchanged. The first formal national convention of the ML, held 7-13 December, endorsed Sahana Pradhan as President and Bam Dev Gautam as the all-powerful General Secretary. The ML split from the parent UML party about 33 months ago and was completely routed in the parliamentary elections of May 1999. Powerful dissident CP Mainali has been given charge of the western development region and two other party organisations, while Devi Prasad Ojha is to head the party's publicity wing.

## CORRECTION

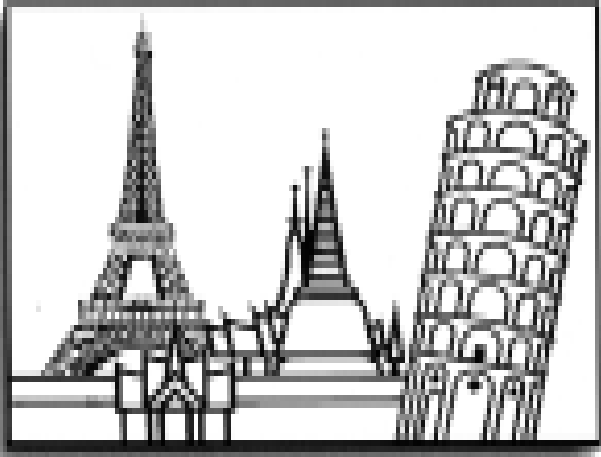
All pictures accompanying the article Ganja Nation (Nepali Times #21) were by Shrikharka Kharal instead of what appeared, except the photograph of the India-Nepal border on p6 which was by Chandra Kishore Jha.

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# Close to the edge

⇒ from p1

If the government gets its paramilitary ordinance passed, the insurgency could see a dangerous escalation. With semi-automatic weapons, helicopters and better equipment on both sides, casualty rates would rise. The government has anticipated the generals' displeasure and stipulated in the draft ordinance that the paramilitary would be under the army's command in situations where they are deployed simultaneously. (After the Durai massacre in September, the army has been partially deployed in 16 district headquarters.) The new force will initially be staffed with transfers from the army and the police.

**Maoist leaders could be foreseeing that serious instability caused by the insurgency could be used by the former autocratic forces to regain their lost powers, or even cost Nepal its independence.**



(Clockwise from top) Guerrillas on the move at night transporting wounded, young out-of-uniform, but garlanded, Maoists get ready to move out of camp, and a guerrilla training camp in a jungle clearing in mid-western Nepal

With daggers drawn on both sides and peace talks stalled, most political observers fear the worst as the Maoists move into the occupy political space left vacant by government inaction. The Maoists say they are now taking their struggle from the "Strategic Defence" phase to "Strategic Balance". In Mao jargon, that means creating alternative governance structures to fill the governance vacuum in the mid-western hills. During this stage, Mao said, guerrilla armies must also



be ready for frontal warfare with the enemy. If that is what his Nepali disciples are preparing for, the Durai siege could be a sign of bigger battles to come.

The Maoist leadership does have their own internal challenges to face: their junior cadre are armed and impatient, but not adequately politicised. They don't want the violence to spiral out of control even as they reign in a guerrilla force that has tasted blood. Escalating violence will help rightist forces who want to go back to pre-1990 days, while a negotiated solution is likely to benefit the UML. "The dilemma for the Maoists is that by agreeing to a peaceful resolution now they would have to settle for a constituent assembly after sacrificing 2,000

lives. That would be an unacceptable price to pay," says Hari Roka.

Recently the Maoists have been sounding out centre/left parties about an alliance for a "people's struggle"—this could be taken as an indication that they are looking for

a soft landing. Maoist leaders could be looking at the long term where they foresee a scenario where serious instability caused by the insurgency may be used by the former autocratic forces to regain their lost powers, or even cost Nepal its independence. ♦

## ORDINANCE

- The draft paramilitary bill will allow the force to be used to
- control armed conflict, or its likelihood;
  - control any armed rebellion or separatist movements;
  - control terrorist activities;
  - control ethnic clashes;
  - help in relief operations during natural calamities and other emergencies;
  - tackle hostage-taking;
  - provide security along the borders; and
  - fight alongside the Royal Nepal Army in the event of war.

## COMMENT

by SHASTRI RAMACHANDRAN

# Peacekeeping for a price

**The poor in poor countries are twice betrayed: by the rich nations and by their own governments.**

POW camp is not entitled to the £10,000 the British parliament has voted as compensation for victims from its own country. And why? Because, the British argument goes, the Gurkhas were "technically Indian Army units" before 1947. Come on. Before 1947 India was a part of the British Empire.

Peacekeeping, it seems, is replete with horrors almost as repugnant as war waging. Peacekeepers of the world first go to war against "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans, and then they apply the same principle to different races in their own peacekeeping force. Just shows that peacekeeping by the poorer countries of the world to protect the wealth, economy, security and strategic interests of the advanced industrial nations is fraught with the same perils as war. When it comes to the vulnerable

underbelly of Fortress Europe, people of all countries and races are rallied to the cause of "peacekeeping". Western security and strategic interests are too valuable to be guarded by lives from the West alone. But when peace is at stake in places that have fallen off the globalisation map, like Sierra Leone and, earlier Somalia, then peacekeeping is left to "third worlders". The West has little security and strategic concerns to motivate intervention in these conflicts except when the domestic compassion factor generated by television images of misery gets politically too hot to bear.

The problem with the poorer countries is not economic backwardness alone. The people of these countries are also poor in learning the lessons they should from such conflicts and the

discrimination inherent in them. Their governments collaborate with the advanced countries that have already subordinated the United Nations to their own objectives in the name of globalisation, democracy, peace and human rights. These governments earn hard currency by sending contingents of their armed forces as peacekeeping troops. Everyone is happy with this cosy dollarised deal. Only the poor in poor countries are twice betrayed: by the rich nations and by their own governments.

Yet, these governments never learn. Even as the issue of discrimination in pay and pension of Gurkha soldiers in the British army is raging and Nepali sentiment is deeply offended the Nepali government wants its soldiers to be included in the UN




peacekeeping mission to Sierra Leone. This is asking to be lynched. Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola has gone a step further: he wants British help to establish a regional international training centre for peacekeepers in Ranchhali. Yes, the same British with whom he ought to have taken up the pay-and-pension issue that is agitating Nepalis.

The Western world doesn't want body bags coming back from its war-waging or peacekeeping theatres. It is politically expensive and explosive

even if it comes with a hefty pay packet. Cheaper, and smarter, to get those developing country soldiers to pull chests out of the fires raging around the world at any given time. The least we can do is learn about the costs of war and peace, and learn to speak for the interests of our own people. Maybe the Japanese would have been forgiven for their barbaric POW camps sooner had the victims not been from the Western world. ♦

Shastri Ramachandran is a New Delhi-based Indian journalist.

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# Three men on a horse

All who know Calcutta will find the subject of my sketch, familiar: the rearing bronze horse, the rider, sword-hand resting on his charger's flank, looking searchingly over his right shoulder. In Calcutta, it is perhaps the most brilliantly conceived of all the heroic bronzes of British viceroys and famous generals that once galloped the *maidan* and are now tucked away under trees in the Victoria Memorial or drawn up in some semblance of review in the old Government House at Barrackpore. This particular bronze, or rather its look-alike, used to occupy the traffic island opposite Park Street until it made way for the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. Where wags once offered the vision of General Sir James Outram charging up fashionable Park Street to have tea at Flurys and Trinco's or read a new history of his times at the Oxford Book Depot, they may now suggest he is galloping away from the temptations of the street. In fact, he

His penetrating backward glance could be for any number of reasons, since Jung Bahadur, was forever on guard against assassination attempts.

is forever frozen, leading a charge against the besieged residency in Lucknow and he wears the uniform of the Bengal Army which he commanded. There is the magnificent charger, every muscle and vein faithfully portrayed, its tail streaming behind it. It requires only the slightest imagination to see the sweat coursing down its flanks and foam flecking its face. In Kathmandu, the rider is General Jung Bahadur, first Rana prime minister of Nepal, proud in all his decorations and wearing, perhaps, the legendary pearl necklace purchased from Nana Sahib. Queen Victoria had honoured him with the Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. Prince Louis Napoleon, later Napoleon III of France, presented him with his jewelled

sword and the Emperor of China had bestowed upon him the country's highest (and most unpronounceable) award, accompanied by the Double-Eyed Peacock Feather and the Sable Coat. The general wears the gem-encrusted crown of the maharaja prime ministers, the bird of paradise plumes arching behind. His penetrating backward glance could be for any number of reasons, since Jung Bahadur, almost endlessly involved in plots and coups and palace intrigues, was forever on guard against assassination attempts as bizarre as any history has contrived. Pointing to a portrait in his palace at Thapathali, he is quoted as saying to his companion, the British author of *Journeys to Kathmandu*, Laurence Oliphant, 'This is my poor uncle Mathabar Singh, whom I shot. It is very like him.'

A marble plaque set in the pedestal, decorated with the moon and the sun, *akhuri*, cannonballs, the imprint of feet, a rifle and a sword, bears the legend 'His Excellency Maharaja Sir Jung Bahadur Rana G.C.B. & G.C.S.I. Though Ling Pim Mako Kang Wang Sian. Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, Nepal. Born 19th Ashad 1874 Sanbat. Died 27th Bhagon 1933.' Surprisingly, there is also an inscription in Persian, and the sculptor's name,

T. Brook, London 1881, is inscribed on the base of the statue.

Which came first, the Outram or the Jung Bahadur statue? Outram's obviously. Though the renowned sculptor J.H. Foley RA omits to add a date to his signature, an inscription tells us that the bronze was cast by R. Masefield & Co. Founders, London, in 1873. The general had died ten years earlier, so I wonder if he ever sat for his likeness. I had always taken it for granted that both the Calcutta and Kathmandu statues were the work of one man, but Jung Bahadur's statue has the name T. Brooks, London, 1881, inscribed on its base: Brooks being one of Foley's assistants, a brilliant copyist or responsible for casting the second bronze from the original mould. Jung Bahadur died in 1877, so once again the statue is posthumous and one is left wondering how the sculptor arrived at so detailed and perfect a likeness. Whatever the answers to an intriguing situation, there is no doubt that these two almost identical equestrian statues are among the finest anywhere.

Jung Bahadur wasn't the only Rana prime minister perpetuated in bronze. They almost all were, and Kathmandu's Tundikhel or Maidan, exhibits some outstanding statuary—one achieving the almost



impossible by having the horse rear up on a single hind leg. Famous names in heroic statuary were commissioned abroad. I know of only one exception, a sadly dispirited bronze of a later prime minister that commissioned locally, was considered too inferior to erect among its gallant brethren on Kathmandu's maidan. It stands, rather incongruously, in a temple courtyard.

What was amazing was the feat of getting these cumbersome and vastly heavy monuments to Kathmandu, as they belong to the time when everything imported had to be carried over the mountains between Nepal and India. Limousines, royal carriages, extravagant chandeliers, huge Venetian mirrors, grand pianos and suites of ponderous furniture all were brought in on backs of porters toiling up precarious trails. Fragile chandeliers could find replacements

for parts-broken mirrors must have been a headache—but how to replace a delicate finger broken or placate the bad omen of a decapitated prime minister? Carrying an elephant would have been easier.

There is a third in this trilogy of similar equestrian statues; that of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the Sham Bazaar crossing. There is no doubt where the inspiration came from. A hundred years separates the original two and the disproportionate third, but there must be a moral somewhere in a single inspired work serving the memory of three such widely different but distinguished men: a dashing Nepali prime minister, a British general and an Indian hero of Independence. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from *In the Kingdom of the Gods*, HarperCollins, 1999)



## Dev Kumari Thapa THE EARNEST, IMPERFECT EVERYMAN

Dev Kumari Thapa is one of the most established Nepali writers writing today. Born in 1927 in Kurseong, India, she has made Biratnagar her home. She is the author of several short story collections and children's books, and has headed the Biratnagar Sahitya Sansthan. The story translated below was originally published six years ago in *Sankalpa* Sahitya #14, and it shows off the author's skill in painting an evocative social portrait in a short, concise style. The story captures the turbulence of the life of the simple, earnest, imperfect everyman in a society structured for injustice.

### The course of life

His name may be Sam Bahadur, but everyone just calls him Maila Dai. Even he doesn't know how old he is. He could be twenty or he could be sixty. There are countless lines on his face, but his hair is thick and black. His teeth are straight, strong and white, his complexion fair. Maila is slim, short, energetic and gregarious. All kinds of people come to his shop for *manacha*. All kinds of chatter take place there. Without any forethought, he adds his own views to the opinions of his clients. He bears an intolerable animosity towards the well-to-do. He says, 'The merchants of the hills gulp the fields of the poor; the merchants of the terai ruin their vigour by mixing inedibles into food grains. You can't find a single authentic red-hot Nepali these days. How will this country ever last?' He sighs heavily. 'We're becoming the *kandhas* and *bahadurs* of foreigners not just abroad, but inside our country as well.' Clients laugh when they hear his words, and some of them ask, 'You give great speeches, Maila Dai, why don't you join one of the parties?' He says, 'Who'll fill my stomach if I join the parties? After being sated from four separate jobs, I've had my fill of jobs, too. That's why I've opened this *manacha* shop. Now if I join a party, who'll run this shop?' One client shouts, 'Get married, then!' Maila laughs, 'I've married thrice already, how many more times should I marry? None of my wives last, they just make off with all my possessions.' At this, everyone breaks into guffaws. He too laughs. He looks jovial. That's how Maila is.

His first job was at our office. That's when I got to know him. Maila, or Sam Bahadur, had impressed everyone with his work as a peon. Energetic and cheerful, he did as everyone bade. For the bosses, he willingly brought tea, biscuits and cigarettes, he dusted the chairs, and he carried files; he also satisfied all the others. I, the accountant at that office, became quite close

to him. He used to come to my lodgings and do some shopping for my mother. Sometimes my mother would give him some simple snacks. One day he brought us tomatoes and collard greens. My mother scolded him for squandering his money. But I understood he'd done that because of his own self-respect. My mother used to feed him every now and then; and feeling uneasy at this, he brought small gifts of vegetables on his visits.

One day something that had never happened took place in our office. The boss was heard shouting, 'Get out at once!' We were all surprised. He never shouted, even when upset. What had happened? After a while, Sam Bahadur emerged from the boss's room, red and flustered. He came to my chair and said, 'Sir, write my resignation letter.' This was an order, not a plea. Everyone was startled, and we advised him not to leave his job so hastily. He didn't agree, and started to become insistent. So I composed his resignation letter and typed it for him. As soon as he signed the letter, he left the office without so much as a *namaste*, as though he were some kind of victor! There was a lot of talk about him at the office that day.

That evening, he came to our house. Even before I could ask, he began, 'Sir, that boss is a thief.' I smiled weakly, and said, 'That, nonsense.' He said, 'It's true! Sir, for many days he's been forcing me to steal. I couldn't stand it anymore, and so I revolted today.' He didn't say refused; he said revolted. My ears pricked to attention. He was using the words of a politician. I asked, 'What happened?' And he said, 'Last week I brought purchases worth five thousand to the office, along with a bill. The boss kept the bill, and gave me orders to take all the purchases to his house. I did that, but a revolt took place in my heart. After that, on four other occasions, I took purchases meant for the office to his house. But today I put all the purchases on a cart and took them straight to the Sir at the office's store room, along with the bill. The Sir from the store room later gave the bill to the boss, and the boss exploded at me. So naturally I answered back. He's a man who's digested all his shame!' To this, I said nothing. There wasn't anything to say.

After that, Sam Bahadur started to run after another job. He lost a lot of weight in the process. Finally, he found work as a night guard at the warehouse of a merchant. He even got married. He didn't last long at his guard job, though. There were bound to be irregularities at that warehouse. So he 'revolted,' and he got thrown out. His wife went to visit her parents,

and she never returned. After that, Maila once again began to wander about in search of work. I placed him as a labourer at a mill. He didn't last there either; so I placed him in another mill. He couldn't last there either, so I told him, 'Look, Maila, I'll don't possess the traits one needs to hold a job; why don't you do some trade instead? You won't have to stay under anyone's orders.' He smiled wanly and said, 'What trade can I do, Sir? The little money I had, my wife took when she went to her parents.' I said, 'I know. I can take out a thousand from my retirement funds...' Cutting me off, he said, 'No, Sir. You have to look after your mother. You haven't been able to settle a proper home. I won't use your money.' I assured him, 'It won't be charity, fool. I'll loan you that money. You can pay me later.' A few days later, he opened his *manacha* shop. His shop did quite well, and he returned my thousand rupees before long. He even started to play with his extra cash, but he never managed to make a home. Maila wouldn't marry an ordinary girl, and smart girls wouldn't tolerate his abuse. Indeed, his temper was very bad. He let loose with his fists over the most trifling matters.

After leaving four jobs, Maila could finally play with a few *paissas*, thanks to his independent business; the course of his life had found a place to rest, at last. Sometimes he came to visit my mother, carrying fruits or sweets. My mother loved him as her own son.

There was a lot of unrest in the market. Demonstrations, strikes, *chakka* jams, peaceful processions unheard-of debacles. I was standing at the window, surveying the spectacle. A huge crowd of demonstrators appeared in front of my house. Youths, middle-aged men and women, the elderly, and children were waving about their arms and chanting slogans as they marched past, carrying placards with slogans painted on red cloth. A fair, skinny, short man was shaking his fists, hollering and leaping about. His whole body was shiny with sweat, and he was entirely naked except for a short *jurgu* tied below his waist. I called my mother, and indicated that man with my index finger. At first, my mother was surprised. Then she started to giggle, 'There, now, even Maila's started to join demonstrations. Look, he's jumping around like a monkey.' She laughed again.

And I thought—the course of Sam Bahadur's life's journey has started yet once again. ♦

## Nepali fertiliser

Nepal's first chemical fertiliser plant was formally inaugurated last week. The Luna Nepal Chemical Fertilisers—a Rs 260 million Nepal-India joint venture—promises to produce 60-80,000 metric tons of nitrogen, phosphorus and potash-based compounds while providing direct employment to 600 people. Nepalis own 20 percent of the factory's stock, and the remaining 80 percent is held by Indian investors.

## Safest workplace

Surya Tobacco Company bagged Nepal's first National Safety Award for having the safest workplace among 65 competing industries. The award was given as part of the National Safety Week, 3-9 December, and Surya won it for adhering to European environment, health and safety standards. Safety evaluation was conducted by a three-member jury comprising of B.B. Chhetri, chief of the Occupational Safety and Health Project, S.N. Vaidya, director, Department of Labour and C. Pinnagoda, International Labour Organisation.

## Baker's Pride

Maruti Trading has begun marketing six brands of chocolates made by Baker's Pride, an Oman-based company. All the six new brands—Oasis, Bang, Zoom, Mega, Island and Bravo—come in 20-30 gm consumer packs and are priced at Rs 11.

## Yearend getaway

Chitwan is gearing up to welcome 150,000 Christmas and New Year's visitors at the Chitwan Festival 2000 (26 December to 2 January) to be organised at Champachaur in Narayanghat. There'll be 275 stalls selling everything from food and tourism trinkets to elephant rides and boating on the Narayani River, say the organisers.

## Sugarcane prices

Cane growers of Sarlahi and the management of the local Indu Shanker Sugar Mill have reached an agreement on a higher price for sugarcane. According to the new terms, the price of cane delivered at the factory gates is now Rs 136 per quintal, up from the previous Rs 125. The government sugar factories have fixed the price of cane at Rs 131 per quintal.

## Polluters protest

Public transport operators have begun to protest the government's decision to get rid of all vehicles that are more than 20 years old by mid-November 2001. The vehicles have begun flying black flags, and this form of protest will continue until 5 January. They also plan to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister asking reconsideration of the decision. Should that fail to change things, transporters say, they'll enter phase two of the protest, which will include shutdowns in Kathmandu Valley and across the country. No dates have yet been given. If the government follows up with implementation, the streets will have 10-15,000 fewer vehicles by this time next year. Next on the hit list of the Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE) are two-stroke motorcycles, which are said to number anywhere between 30-35,000.

Grindlays								
DAL BHAT INDEX								
In US\$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	\$ Rate	
Bangladesh	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.76	
Bhutan	0.68	0.36	0.58	0.36	0.21	0.02	46.76	
India	0.64	0.36	0.57	0.28	0.13	0.05	46.75	
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82	
Pakistan	0.41	0.43	0.52	0.22	0.12	0.03	57.90	
Sri Lanka	0.73	0.36	0.60	0.23	0.19	0.03	82.65	
Nepal	0.65	0.38	0.63	0.36	0.30	0.09	74.30	

All prices are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.

multisys



# Royal Nepal And Corruption

## RNAC has always been proud that it is less bankrupt than Indian Airlines

Generational icon of corruption has never failed to grab headlines. Each new deal by the flag carrier is invariably followed by controversy and provides an excellent platform for political mud-slinging. In the absence of other economic activities, RNAC is one of the few areas that the corrupt can make a killing. The corporation, with its Rs 6 billion expenditure, represents an outflow of about 1.6 percent of the national GDP, making it one of the largest disbursements. Politicians and others therefore love to dip their fingers into this money pot. That is why it is also the best example of the business-politics-bureaucracy nexus taking in millions at the cost of the nation.

It is almost a given that corruption cannot be rooted out from Royal Nepal Airlines. That is why some people argue that the corporation should be left alone and that one should look at the positive side of the aircraft deals. More aircraft, albeit with some money made on the side, will certainly contribute

to the nation's tourism business. That is the kind of rationale behind advertisements in the print media (not this one) supporting the decision to lease the Lada Air 767.

The airline is yet to explain why it did not approach Boeing or Airbus Industries directly instead of using an agent out of Australia. The only answer can be that the kickbacks are now based on lease rentals which ensures a steady flow of cash rather than a one-time payment, and that is why the corporation never even thought of buying a new aircraft and stuck to leasing.

The issue is not about this one aircraft deal alone but with the way the corporation stands today. With accumulated losses more than double the capital invested, financial solvency is a mirage. Added to that are debts to be repaid and outstanding dues climb to infinity. The break-even level of operation is always above the capacity limit. This means that the airline has to carry more passengers than its planes can carry if it is to meet expenses and overheads. The corporation has always

taken comfort from the fact that it is less bankrupt than Indian Airlines and has used the financial situation of the Indian company as its benchmark for operations.

A corporation led by political appointees and saddled with over 1800 disgruntled employees may find it difficult to get an management company that can work a turnaround. The question of handing over the airline on a management contract therefore does not arise at all. Even if the government tries to sell it off, it may not find takers for a near-insolvent company. For one, the real state of finances at the corporation is unknown since the last time its accounts were audited was five years ago. Even the prime real estate at New Road may not be able provide the attraction that many people believe it will. So the government actually has no option but to keep Royal Nepal Airlines flying somewhere so that politicians can keep interfering and milking it for what it's worth. ♦

Readers can post their views and discuss issues at [arthabeed@yahoo.com](mailto:arthabeed@yahoo.com)

### Grindlays Gazette

#### INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%
PREVIOUS%	
Call Money Avg.	5.15 5.25
84 Days t/bill	5.08 -
91 Days t/bill	5.28 5.26
364 Days t/bill	4.87 5.73

Average rate of 91 days T/Bill improved slightly this week as the surplus liquidity in the banking sector was seen slightly reduced. The average T/Bill rate is expected to remain under pressure in coming weeks as commercial banks are expected to offload their long dollar position. Expected range for next week 4.20 to 4.30%.

#### CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL (barrel )	29.06	28.44	+ 2.18
GOLD (ounce)	270.45	272.50	- 0.75
GOLD (NPR*)	7100	7200	- 1.39
EUR	0.8981	0.8832	+ 1.69
GBP	1.4774	1.4443	+ 2.29
JPY	112.58	110.79	+ 1.62
CHF	1.6754	1.7077	- 1.89
UD	0.5449	0.5438	+ 0.20
INR	46.75	46.75	-
*Currency bid prices at 2.30 p.m. on 18/12 Source: Reuters			

**Oil:** The recent slide of crude oil prices, by about 20 percent, has spurred calls in the cartel to cut output again. OPEC members are concerned that four consecutive output increases in 2000 will lead to a prolonged slump in prices.

**Currencies:** Recent economic data reinforced perceptions that the US economy is slowing down, allowing Europe space to catch-up. The Euro ended the week sharply higher against the dollar and yen. The euro rose to 90 cents, its highest in three months and a gain of 2-1/2 cents on the week. It also surged to a four-month peak against the yen.

**INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK:** The rupee is expected to remain ranged against the dollar amid thin corporate flows and inter-bank volume. Foreign funds could buy dollars for year-end repatriation. They have been net buyers in Indian stock markets so far—added \$222.2m investment in November. Lacking strong import demand, state-run banks may buy dollars to keep the rupee from appreciating.

#### FOREIGN CURRENCY: Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.50	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.69	4.95	5.99	0.94	3.32

BANK RATES (DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.0/3.5	5.23
F/D 1 YR	7.5/6.0	6.73
OVERDRAFT	15.5/12.5	13.54
TERM LOAN	14.5/13.0	13.37
IMPORT LN	13.0/10.5	11.52
EXPORT LN	13.0/10.0	10.63
MISC LOAN	17.5/13.5	15.03





# PACHYDERM POLO



LAXMAN UPRETI

**MIKI UPRETI** . . . . .  
As legend has it, the idea of an elephant polo tournament in Nepal was born at a bar in St Moritz in 1981 as Jim Edwards of Tiger Tops was chatting with a polo enthusiast and whiskey magnate. As the night got merrier, the game began to take shape. It may have evaporated with the next morning's hangover had Jim a few weeks later not got a telegram (no email in those days) from his drinking buddy saying: "Have stick and balls. Get elephants ready."  
And so began the first-ever invitational international elephant polo tournament at the Meghauli airfield outside the Royal Chitwan National Park.

playing time each, with elongated two-metre polo sticks and regular polo balls. (Football balls were once used, but they exploded under the feet of elephants as they dribbled.) The field used to be regular polo field size, but the elephants took too long to get to the other side so they have since been reduced to 100 m x 60m. Each team now fields three elephants, each with a mahout and player wearing a colonial-style pith helmet. For those who have watched horse polo, it is like watching the game in slow motion. Someone described it as: "one of the world's fastest games on one of nature's slowest beasts." Or as Jim Edwards puts it: "Elephant polo is like playing golf from the back of a slow-moving Range Rover."

## The elephant polo tournament traces its origin to a telegram that read: "Have sticks and balls, get elephants ready."

Last week, the 19th Annual World Elephant Polo Association Championships were held with ten teams taking part in two leagues. Tiger Tops Tuskers took away the WEPA 2000 trophy, winning the championship in a brilliant display of gamesmanship in the final match against the Swissair Junbos. The Eldorado team from the USA won the Amateur Quaid Cup in a hotly contested battle with the Screw Tuskers.  
Elephant polo rules have changed over the years, but basically each game consists of two chukkers of ten minutes

The game is not easy and slow as it looks. A team's performance depends on coordination between the elephants and their life-long drivers called mahouts, between various elephants in the same team, the accuracy of the passes and the ability of the forward elephants to outrun the opponents. For sake of fairness, the mounts and elephants are swapped at half-time between chukkers. Other important rules:

- Elephants are not allowed to squat or lie down in front of the goals.
- Elephants aren't allowed to pick up the ball with the trunk at

19th WEPA Championship Rankings		
1.	Tiger Tops Tuskers	(Iceland)
2.	Swissair	(Switzerland)
3.	Chivas Regal	(India)
4.	National Parks	(Nepal)
5.	British Gurkha Gladiators	(UK)
6.	The Tigresses	(International)
7.	Eldorado	(USA)
8.	Screw Tuskers	(USA)
9.	Harry Winston Rough Cuts	(Japan)
10.	Cresta Poonanhis	(South Africa)

**At the international elephant polo tournament in Chitwan last week, enthusiasts played "one of the world's fastest games on one of nature's slowest beasts."**



Let the games begin (above), the clash of titans (left).

- Roper-scoopers are allowed onto the field to pick up elephant droppings during play.
- Elephants are allowed to be fed pick-me-ups (sugarcane balls packed with molasses and rock salt) at the end of the match. Mahouts can have a cold beer, but not elephants.
- Personal fouls include: hitting another player, elephant or referee with stick, or elephant standing on ball. Before it was revived in Nepal,

there are very few records to show where elephant polo actually began. Miniature Mughal paintings depict what look like women hitting balls with long sticks from the backs of elephants. The Maharajah of Jaipur in the Indian state of Rajasthan, who was a pony polo aficionado, staged an experimental match 50 years ago, just as a joke, replacing the ponies with elephants.  
The WEPA championships are invitational and invitations are sent out from the Association's headquarters at Tiger Tops in the Royal Chitwan National Park. Entrance fees are \$5,000 per team, and entrants include Steven Swig, a rich lawyer from San Francisco, Alf Erickson of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, another lawyer who also indulges in hot-air ballooning and collecting corkscrews. Erickson's team, called Screw Tuskers, which includes some of his four

daughters as players, this year finished second from the bottom. Says Erickson: "I don't take this game seriously. I take it ~~ob~~ssessively."  
The Nepali teams, which includes the National Parks team, generally do well since they have the most practice riding elephants in the park and in the Meghauli field. They have won the trophy a couple of times, last in 1998. This year they had a handicap of five and came fourth.  
Ram Prit Yadav, captain of the National Parks team and former warden of the Chitwan Park says: "It's been 12 years since I began playing polo. At first we just didn't get it and lost for two or three years. But then we got the hang of it, and we've been winning ... We've won because our elephants are swifter and we play well." ♦

premium





# MILLENNIUM

If you celebrated the beginning of the new millennium last year, you were wrong, wrong, wrong. At least you weren't too late. There are many domestic and international options open to Nepalis to usher in the next thousand years of... whatever comes up.

Basically, you could stay in Kathmandu, take a break at resorts outside the city, go on adventure or wildlife holidays, or, if time, inclination and budgets suit, fly to a nearby destination overseas.

### KATHMANDU AND VALLEY RIM

**Where:** Hotel de l'Annapurna, Durbar Marg  
**When:** New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** Global fusion, with Annapurna's chefs producing fusion cuisine at the poolside lawn. Unlimited drinks, dance, dinner, prizes and other surprises. Also, special buffet at Char-e-Kebab.  
**Budget:** Rs 3500 per person and \$50 for expatriates.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 221711; fax: 977-1-225236; email: apurna@taj.nrs.com.np; website: www.yonari.com/taj-annapurna.

**Where:** The Everest Hotel, New Baneswor  
**When:** Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** 24, 29 and 31 Dec special party at Galaxy Disco. New Year's Eve dinner, dance and live music by Rocco, a Filipino band at Café Hall.  
**Budget:** You have to go to the party to find out.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 488100, 488099; fax: 977-1-490288; email: admin@everesthotel.com.np; website: www.everesthotel.com.

**Where:** Hotel Yak and Yeti, Durbar Marg  
**When:** December 20 onwards, 24 December, 25 December, New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** Christmas cakes and cookies on sale starting 20 December at Lobby Gazebo.  
Dec 24 - Christmas carol singing at the lobby (6 to 7 pm). A five-course a la carte dinner with a complimentary aperitif at The Chimney; an extended buffet at the Sunrise Café.  
Dec 25 - Brunch with a live band.  
Dec 31 - A seven-course dinner at The Chimney; a mezze and kebab buffet dinner with live Nepali music and dance at Nachgar; buffet at Sunrise Café; disco at Atrium Avalanche.  
Jan 1 - Poolside brunch with live Nepali fusion music.  
**Budget:** Dec 24 - Dinner at The Chimney is Rs 2500 per person; dinner at Sunrise Café is Rs 1200 per person.  
Dec 25 - Dinner at The Sunrise Café is Rs 1200 per person.  
Dec 31 - Dinner at The Chimney is Rs 3000 per person; dinner at Nachgar is Rs 1500 per person; entrance to the Atrium is Rs 1000 per person.  
Jan 1 - Poolside brunch is Rs 1000 per person.  
All prices include tax.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 248999, 240520; fax: 977-1-227782; email: reservation@yakandyeti.com; website: www.yakandyeti.com

**Where:** Soaltee Crown Plaza, Tahachal  
**When:** 23 December, 24 December, New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** Front lawn 23 Dec, Wild Wild West, children's party.  
24 Dec - Dinner at Gurkha Grill with Filipino band Spice on Ice.  
31 Dec - Theme dinner at Megha Malhar - Space Odyssey with MC model Ananya Dutt, performance by a Mumbai band, buffet, door prizes; dinner at Gurkha Grill with Spice on Ice again.  
**Budget:** Wild Wild West, Rs 1200 for a family of three (Rs 400 per extra child); 24 Dec - GG is a la carte.  
31 Dec - Space Odyssey is Rs 5555 per person; GG is Rs 4000 per person. All prices include tax.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 272555; fax: 977-1-272205; email: crownplaza@shcp.com.np; website: www.soaltee.com



**Where:** The Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat

**When:** 24, 25, 26 December, New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** The Radisson Pastry Shop sells Christmas Hampers and assorted treats  
17-25 Dec - Christmas carols from 7 to 8:30 pm in the Radisson Lobby.  
24 Dec - Five-course dinner at the Fun Café with a complimentary glass of red wine.  
25 Dec - Turkey buffet dinner with unlimited sparkling wine at the Fun Café.  
26 Dec - Boxing Day brunch at the Fun Café.  
31 Dec - Theme dinner at Nega Dhuku - Kiss the Millennium with DJs, including Stevie from London's Ministry of Sound and a buffet dinner.  
**Budget:** 24 Dec - Rs 1500 (excluding tax) per person.  
25 Dec - Rs 1199 per person.  
26 Dec - Rs 999 per person.  
31 Dec - Rs 1250 per person.  
All prices 25 - 31 Dec include tax.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 411818; fax: 977-1-411720; email: radisson@radkat.com.np; website: www.radisson.com/kathmandu



**Where:** Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort, Nagarkot  
Nagarkot is an easy 30 km from Kathmandu. At 2175m, it provides a grand view of the central Nepal Himalaya, including Shisha Pangma.  
**When:** Christmas, New Year's Eve  
**Party line:** 25 Dec - Christmas dinner with live piano.  
31 Dec - Special buffet dinner.  
Get there before 31 December - celebrations are for in-house guests only.  
**Budget:** Double rooms at Rs 4000 or \$90. Rs 3200 or \$75 per single room. \$prices are for tourists only.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 680080, 680084, 410432 (Kathmandu office); fax: 977-1-680068, 413641 (Kathmandu office); email: clubhim@nrs.com.np

**Where:** Hattiban Resort, Pharping  
Pharping is a quiet spot 15 km south of Kathmandu with a magnificent view of the Himalaya.  
**When:** Anytime.  
**Party line:** Not so much a party as a few relaxing days away from the bustle and excess of city celebrations. Breakfast in bed, soothing walks, horse riding, short trek and quiet, private evenings.  
**Budget:** Bed and breakfast for Nepalis, Rs 1800 per couple per night; for resident expatriates \$46 per couple per night; for tourists \$90 per couple per night.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 371397, 371537; fax: 977-1-371561; email: nepal@intrek.wlink.com.np

**Where:** Central Godavari Resort, Godavari  
A 25-minute drive from Patan, Godavari is a lush getaway with green hills and a panoramic view of the Himalaya.  
**When:** Anytime, 25 December.  
**Party line:** Again, not a party as such, but like Hattiban, some serious relaxing. There are weekend packages for one night or two. The packages include breakfast, dinner and 25 percent discount on health club facilities. BBQ lunch Christmas day. The resort runs an hourly shuttle service from New Road via Tripureshwar, Bulchowk, Lagankhel, and Satdobato.  
**Budget:** One-night package at Rs 2500 or \$55 for a single room, and Rs 3400 or \$75 for a double room.  
Two-night package: Rs 4200 or \$80 for a single room. Rs 5200 or \$100 for a double room. \$prices are for non-Nepalis.  
**Contact information:** Tel: 533675, 560675, fax: 977-1-560777; email: godavari@godavari.wlink.com.np; website: www.godavariresort.com.np

soaltee ad



# WINTER GETAWAYS

TREKKING

This might not sound like the best idea at this time of year, but the views are excellent, the air is crisp, and you could find that it's easier than you anticipated. If you're a walking fiend, of course, you already know this. Some trekking routes more popular and sensible at this time of year are given below.

Bigu Gompa:

Route: An evening start with a six-hour bus ride to Charikot (north of Kathmandu). You'll pass through Dolakha, Rato Mate, Malephu, Sarangkhol, Piguti, Koshi Khet, Tori Khet, Gumi Khol Bazar, Bigu, Bigu Gompa (a Tibetan monastery), and Tingsang La. Catch a bus from Barabise back to Kathmandu.  
Don't count on finding accommodation and reliable food on this route. It might be best to go on a planned package trek.  
Budget: \$320 per person for a group of four to six including meals, accommodation, transportation (Kathmandu to Charikot and Barabise to Kathmandu) and any camping facilities required.  
Total duration: 8 days  
Maximum height: 3300m (at Tingsang La pass)  
En route views: Gaurishankar, Melungtse

Ghorepani:

Route: A seven-hour bus ride to Bhundi. You'll pass through Pene, Panchase Bhanjyang, Tiller, Dobato, Ghorepani, Gandruk, Landruk, Potana, and Dhanpus Phedi. Drive to Pokhara and catch an early morning flight back to Kathmandu next morning.  
Budget: \$360 per person for a group of four to six including meals, accommodation, transportation (Kathmandu to Bhundi and Dhanpus Phedi to Pokhara).  
Total duration: 10 days  
Maximum height: 2000m at Panchase Bhanjyang  
En route view: Manaslu, Machhapuchhare, the Annapurnas, Dhaulagiri, Tukuche Peak.

Bardipur:

Route: A four-hour bus ride to Dumre. You'll pass through Bardipur, a Newari village surrounded by Megar villages, Bahun Bhanjyang, Kharoli Danda, Jar Bhanjyang, Sola Bhanjyang, Hile Kharka, Bhoteswar, Lapdi Gaun, Kapal Danda, and Ghyansing Gaun. Drive home from Mugling.  
Budget: \$160 per person for a group of four to six including meals, accommodation, transport (Kathmandu to Dumre and Mugling to Kathmandu).  
Total duration: 4 days  
Maximum height: 3000m Kapal Danda  
En route view: Dhaulagiri, the Annapurnas, Ganesh Himal, Langtang

All prices and route information courtesy Mandala Trekking, Kathmandu. Tel: 412438, email: mandala@ros.com.np

WILDLIFE, SAFARI AND ADVENTURE

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is for adventure and wildlife-lovers. Spread over 175 sqkm, the Reserve is a combination of wetland, grassland, scrub and deciduous forest, all of which make it one of the best bird-watching sanctuaries in Asia. The Reserve is accessible by air, road and river. A 45-minute flight to Biratnagar from Kathmandu, followed by a one-and-a-half-hour drive is the easiest option. For true adventure seekers, an 8-10 day rafting trip down the Sun Kosi River is an exciting option. Or, take the meandering highway from Kathmandu, a 10-hour drive.

Where: Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp, Prakashpur

When: October to March (best season)  
Adventure line: Morning jungle treks by the river, lagoons and wetlands, rowing down the river, visiting Tharu villages and, of course, birdwatching. A two-night three-day package includes meals, transportation from Biratnagar Airport to the Camp.  
Budget: Rs 7000 per person for Nepalis and expatriates, \$145 for tourists.  
Contact information (Kathmandu):

Tel: 247078, 247079; fax: 224237, 243250; email: rose@explore.wlink.com.np.

Royal Chitwan National Park

The Royal Chitwan National Park is one of Asia's best wildlife sanctuaries. The Park is home to over 50 mammalian species, 55 reptile and amphibian species, and 525 species of birds. Every package here includes safaris on elephant back, jungle walks, canoeing and bird-watching. Look for the greater one-horned rhino, the Royal Bengal Tiger, gaur, wild elephant, antelope, striped hyena, gharial and the Ganges dolphin. Chitwan is just a 30-minute flight or a six-hour drive from Kathmandu. If you're looking for some great adventure, a two-day rafting expedition down the Seti or Trisuli will also get you there.

Where: Machan Wildlife Resort, Sunachuri

When: October to March  
Adventure line: A two-night package includes wildlife and cultural activities, meals and accommodation.  
Budget: Rs 5,000 per person for Nepalis and \$155 per person for expatriates (both including tax). \$ 225 per tourist and INR 3799 per Indian national (both excluding tax). Contact information (Kathmandu): Tel: 225001, 245401, 245402; fax: 240681; email: wildlife@machan.ros.com.np; website: www.nepalinformation.com/machan



Where: Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, Tharu Safari Lodge and Tiger Tops Tented Camp

When: 23 Dec to 2 Jan  
Adventure line: A two-night package includes all jungle activities, accommodation and meals.  
Budget: \$150 per person excluding taxes, park fees and transportation  
Contact information (Kathmandu): Tel: 411225; fax: 414075, 419126; email: info@tigemountain.com; website: www.tigemountain.com



Where: The Rhino Residency Resort, Sauraha

When: October to March  
Adventure line: A two-night and three-day package includes all jungle activities, meals, accommodation, Park entrance fees, roundtrip transportation between Chitrawasi at the Park entrance and the resort.  
Budget: Rs 3200 per person for Nepalis; \$120 for expatriates; INR 3800 per person for SAARC nationals; \$200 for tourists.  
Contact information: Tel: 220697, 231198; fax: 231200; email: info@rhino-residency.com; website: www.rhino-residency.com

Royal Bardiya National Park

The Royal Bardiya National Park, spread over 968 sqkm in the far west of Nepal, is the largest wilderness area in the tarai lowlands. It is home to endangered species like the rhinoceros, wild elephant, tiger, swamp deer, blackbuck, gharial crocodile and Ganges dolphin. Also here are endangered birds like Bengal florican, lesser florican, silver-eared mesia and Sarus crane. The Park is surrounded by lively Tharu villages. A 70-minute flight from Kathmandu followed by a three-hour jeep ride will get you there.

Where: Tiger Tops Kamali Lodge and Tented Camp

When: 23 Dec to 2 Jan  
Adventure line: A two-night package includes all jungle activities, accommodation and meals.  
Budget: \$150 per person excluding taxes, park fees and transportation.  
Contact information (Kathmandu): Tel: 411225; fax: 414075, 419126; email: info@tigemountain.com; website: www.tigemountain.com

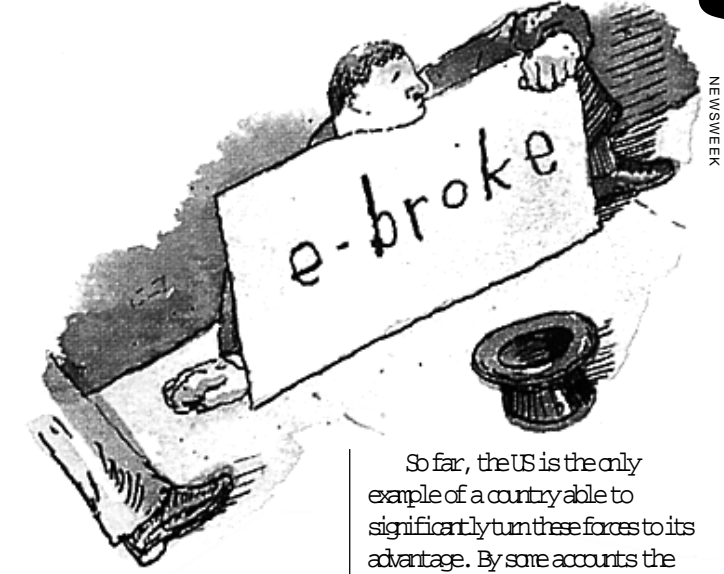


yak & yeti ad

—Compiled by Sujata Tuladhar



# High tech or high risk ?



GENEVA – Two major global economic forces are competing for the world’s attention. On the one hand, the promise of a “new economy” underpinned by information and communication technologies is exciting policy-makers, including those from the world’s poorest countries. On the other hand, growing instability and uncertainty linked to globalisation have left policymakers deeply worried about the impact of financial shocks on growth prospects.

So far, the US is the only example of a country able to significantly turn these forces to its advantage. By some accounts the spread of new technologies has already considerably boosted productivity and raised the potential for growth. In contrast, the impact of new technologies has been much less evident in most of Europe and in Japan.

Meanwhile the US economy has also been helped by uncertainty elsewhere in the global economy: financial crises in emerging markets have helped sustain its rapid growth as capital is attracted to this safe haven, and cheap imports help keep the lid on inflation. And the recent

recovery in emerging markets has further added to the demand for dollar assets as reserves are piled up as a safeguard against future crises.

The disparities in growth rates within the industrial world and a strong dollar have resulted in growing trade imbalance, as the US has become the world’s “buyer of last resort”. Countries with trade surpluses are more than willing to hold proceeds in dollar assets in the US.

At the same time, the combination of technological and financial innovations has aggravated the underlying fragility of current financial and trade flows. The vulnerability of developing countries to any policy shifts in the major industrial countries will, of course, depend on their current state of health, and the stronger-than-expected recoveries in some of the economies hardest hit by financial shocks offer a measure of hope. But with persistent biases and asymmetries in the trading system and the continuing structural uncertainty and volatility of the financial system, growth in many countries remains hostage to

**In an interdependent global financial and trading system, trust in market forces and monetary policy alone is not sufficient.**

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unstable capital flows.

The problems facing much of Africa are of a different order. The basic policy challenge there remains how to overcome savings and foreign-exchange constraints and to raise investment to the level required for growth of at least six percent per annum. The current level of private capital inflows is too small to fill the resource gap but still big enough to make many African economies vulnerable to the arbitrage arithmetic of short-term capital flows. This also means a steadily growing dependence on capital flows, though in recent years these have barely compensated for resource losses due to unfavourable trading conditions. The only way to end Africa’s aid dependence is to launch a massive aid programme and to sustain rapid growth for long enough to allow domestic savings and external private flows to gradually replace official flows.

The pace of recovery of East

industries.

Finally, the recovery has been sustained thus far by highly favourable conditions in the world economy that are susceptible to change. A sharp slowdown in the US and deterioration in global financial conditions could be particularly damaging.

A fundamental lesson of the financial crisis is that excessive reliance on foreign resources and markets leaves growth prospects vulnerable to external shocks. In an increasingly interdependent global financial and trading system, it is clear that trust in market forces and monetary policy alone will not be sufficient.

Increased international co-operation and dialogue are needed if the full potential of new technologies to bridge the growing gap between the rich and poor is to be realised. This calls for bold leadership, of the kind that ushered in the post-war Golden Age. ♦ (IPS)

*Rubens Ricupero is Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).*

# No room for Roma

**BRIAN KENETY** IN BRUSSELS . . .

**a**n international public interest law organisation working on behalf of Europe’s Roma (Gypsy) population says last week’s high-profile European Union (EU) human rights forum in Paris “continued the unfortunate EU tradition of treating human rights as a purely external matter.”

The Budapest-based European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), which monitors the rights of Roma in Europe and provides legal defence in cases of abuse, said the EU failed to heed NGO pleas last autumn at the first Human Rights Discussion Forum for the EU to also examine human rights issues within member states. Declining an invitation to attend the forum, Dimitrina Petrova, executive director of ERRC, said: “Racial discrimination and growing anti-immigrant intolerance are only some of the serious human rights problems which plague many EU member states. The approach of the Union to human rights remains unchanged.”

The ERRC believes the right of individuals to access international protection from persecution in their country of origin is gravely threatened in Europe. It points to a failure on the part of many European governments to provide legal regimes in the fields of immigration, individual establishment and integration, in accordance with international law and human rights norms, especially for Roma.

The agenda of the Paris meeting is especially disappointing in light of the frequency with which European leaders call for an end to an exclusively external EU human rights policy.

Dimitrova said that the EU has a “double standard”—pointing to abuses around the world without



A Roma protest camp in Germany. The banner proclaims: "German politics is racist."

## The EU may preach human rights abroad, but Europe’s Gypsies continue to languish.

tackling those at home and that makes it less likely that eastern European states applying for EU membership would adopt best practices. In its *Human Rights Agenda for the European Union for the Year 2000*, the so-called Comité des Sages (‘Wise Men’) of the EU Commission, noted that widespread human rights violations continue within the Union, and concluded, “a Union not prepared to embrace a strong human rights policy for itself is highly unlikely to develop a credible external policy, let alone apply it with energy or consistency.”

A United Nations Geneva-based Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination report says Roma are victims of racism, violence, poor social conditions and human rights abuses, but police often fail to protect the Roma because they are prejudiced against them. European media exacerbates the problem by

stereotyping the Roma as predisposed to crime. Roma, targeted by Kosovo Albanians in retaliation for alleged collusion with Serbs during last year’s conflict, have sought refuge in EU states, only to be forcibly returned.

European countries in which serious incidents of violence against Roma have occurred in recent years include: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been advocating “the recognition of Kosovo Roma as refugees or persons in need of international protection.”

With only five Roma members of parliament in Europe, some 20 mayors and about 400 local councillors, Roma are still vastly underrepresented in public office

across the continent, although they constitute significant minorities in many countries. Roma are at risk for discriminatory practices as there is no ‘homeland’ and no foreign government to forward their case internationally.

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the UK have responded to the arrival of Roma refugees from other countries by imposing a visa regime on the country of flight, thus hindering Roma, in need of international protection, from access to procedures to have claims heard.

“Many member states of the EU apply so-called ‘manifestly unfounded claims’ procedures to persons they believe are fraudulently applying for refugee status. In light of deeply ingrained prejudice in Europe regarding Roma as ‘chronic liars’, there are serious concerns that authorities dismiss legitimate claims for asylum lodged by Roma individuals,” the ERRC said in October. ♦ (IPS)

## Canberra cool on greenhouse cuts

SYDNEY - Australia, the largest per capita producer of greenhouse gases, says its efforts to enhance “carbon sinks”—trees, farmland and vegetation that soak up carbon dioxide—should mean it can have a lower target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. But environmental groups say this argument is leading to official complacency about Australia’s emission levels and appears to be pushing deforestation and the demise of indigenous forests in this country.

Australia’s 1.5 percent share of global greenhouse gas emissions seems low, but not for its small population of 19 million. Recently, Australia’s emissions have increased 16.9 percent from the 1990 base level, over 100 percent more than it was allowed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

With an economy heavily dependent on greenhouse gas-generating fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, Australia says it cannot afford to switch to renewable forms of energy. Like the US and Japan, Australia has been avoiding committing to a low annual emission target. The UNFCCC, also known as the Kyoto Protocol, is not yet in force: it needs to be ratified by 55 countries, but only 22 have done so until now. Further talks on specific ways to cut greenhouse gases, among them trading in “credits” earned from environmental projects overseas by rich countries, collapsed at The Hague last month. If carbon sinks are not included in the emission target equation, Australia must curb 400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. ♦ (IPS)

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# Lost Word

**RL BINDU**  
IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM . . . . .

"It was the craze in those days and I too could read and write," recalls Rasia, referring to a concerted drive that banished illiteracy a decade ago from this verdant corner on the southern tip of India. But today, the campaign that brought Kerala to "total literacy" as defined by UNESCO, is receding into memory.

Rasia, one of Kerala's celebrated neo-literates, has fallen back into an illiterate existence. "I can no longer read the letters my son sends me from the Persian Gulf where he works," she says. She blames her present unlettered condition on the disappearance of the thousands of volunteers who trudged from door to door as part of Kerala's Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) between 1989 and 1991. The campaign systematically sought out and banished illiteracy.

The Kerala Sastha Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), a volunteer organisation that spearheaded the TLC drive, had the enthusiastic services of 350,000 volunteers for a highly successful campaign that gave the 30 million people of this state indices that matched those of Western countries. Under the KSSP campaign, the unpaid volunteers served as instructors and turned Ernakulam into India's first totally literate district and a model for other literacy campaigns across India. But Ernakulam is now heading to set records of another kind because, according to a recent random survey, the literacy rate in the district has dropped to 73 percent.

The same survey said that Kerala's overall literacy rate has gone down to 82 percent from the 90 percent achieved at the time of the 1991 census and taken up to an average of 93 percent over the next few years. "Lack of facilities such as continuing



A young participant in India's National Literacy Programme.

## Kerala, India's 'most literate state', relapses into illiteracy.

education centres, official lethargy, and widespread addiction to alcohol are some of the reasons for the decline," says K Soman, a literacy activist. According to KP Kaman, social scientist at the prestigious Centre for Development Studies (CDS) here, the decline is mainly due to neo-literates lapsing back into illiteracy. He says it does not reflect a real setback to Kerala's pre-eminence as India's most literate state.

Yet, despite Kerala's remarkable progress, like the rest of India, it has no law for compulsory education. Experts have pointed out that such a law is necessary to consolidate the gains of mass literacy and mass education. By 1997, Kerala had achieved 93 percent literacy, but was

trailing behind the northeastern state of Mizoram, which then had 95 percent literacy, according to a survey conducted that year by the UNESCO-supported National Literacy Mission. The two centrally administered island territories of Andaman and Nicobar in the Bay of Bengal and Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea showed 97 percent and 96 percent literacy rates, respectively, in 1997.

Other states are fast catching up and western Rajasthan sprang a big surprise by taking a quantum jump from 39 percent literacy at the time of the last census in 1991 to 55 percent in 1997. Southern Tamil Nadu has reached 70 percent. With the country as a

whole maintaining an average literacy growth rate of two percent, authorities have reason to expect a national average of between 66 and 68 percent when the current decennial census exercise is completed in 2001. Experts say this might touch 75 percent by 2005.

"It is not that Kerala's literacy rate has gone down but that other states' have picked up," explains MG Shashibhoshan, director of the Kerala State Literacy Mission. But other officials are not so optimistic. The director of the State Council for Education Research and Training, V Vijayakumar, thinks it is high time for a thorough overhaul of the existing system, taking into account factors such as disinterest in literacy among poorer people. Shashibhoshan admitted that the decline was enough to spur the state to add to its existing network of 4,000 continuing education centres. "At least 18,000 more centres are needed and fresh initiatives are on the anvil," he said.

For Kerala, there is more in the decline than loss of status, held over decades, as India's most literate state. With little investment in industry, the state's population depends on remittances sent by its estimated four million literate expatriates in other Indian states, the oil-rich West Asia and further afield. Remittances from outside the state have maintained Kerala's consistently high ranking among Indian states in annual per capita household and consumerist expenditure in spite of a serious crisis in investment, production and employment.

Literacy—in particular female literacy—has been a key factor in Kerala's other demographic achievements that set the state apart from the rest of India such as a gender ratio favourable to females, low infant mortality, high life expectancy and low birth rates. ♦ (IBS)

## Landmines in Afghanistan may stay longer

PESHAWAR - Severe fund shortages are forcing agencies involved in de-mining efforts in Afghanistan to close or send their staff on forced leave, setting back efforts to clear the war-torn country of deadly mines.

"Only seven percent of our staff, including the emergency teams, are working," said Kefayatullah Eblagh, director of Afghan Technical Consultants, one of the largest mine-clearing agencies in Afghanistan.

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA), which supervises de-mining operations, has directed all mine-sweeping agencies not to increase staff salaries for 2001 and reduce other expenditure, and will have fewer organisations assisting next year. The agency asked UN-member countries for \$26 million for de-mining activities in Afghanistan, but received only \$14 million for 2000.

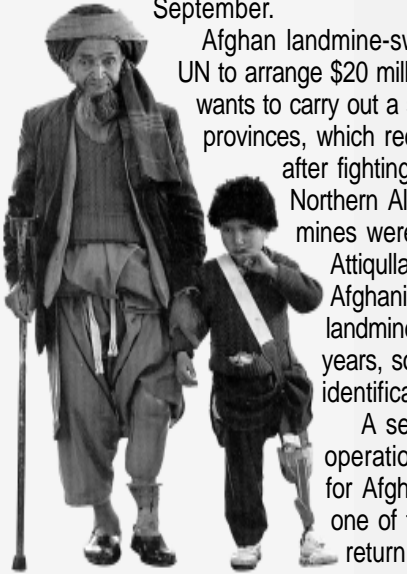
The legacy of a decade-long (1979-1989) war between the then Soviet Union and the Mujahideen, landmines play havoc with the lives of ordinary Afghans. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, they left 919 sq km of land strewn with mines, making the country the world's most mine-infested area. NGOs have cleared landmines and other explosive material from 218 sq km, leaving 720 sq km still dangerous. The mines have killed 40,000 and disabled 210,000 Afghans. The Mine Action Programme says 150 to 300 casualties occur every month on uncleared land.

Haji Atiqullah, director of the Mine Clearance Programme for Afghanistan (MCPA), said from January to October 2000, agencies cleared mines and unexploded ordnance from 83 million sq metres, falling short of the 90.8 million sq metre target. The shortfall was due to sudden reduction in UN funds in September.

Afghan landmine-sweeping agencies want the UN to arrange \$20 million for next year. The MCPA wants to carry out a survey of the northern provinces, which recently fell to Taliban forces after fighting with the opposition Northern Alliance, to determine if new mines were planted by either side.

Attiqullah said: "We aren't sure if Afghanistan will be clean of landmines in the next eight to ten years, so we plan to erect identification marks in such areas."

A severe setback in de-mining operations has larger implications for Afghanistan. Land mines are one of the major hurdles in the return of refugees, development and reconstruction of the country. ♦



Two Afghans crippled by landmines learn to walk with the aid of a cane.

# Japan gets choosy about aid

**SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI** IN TOKYO . . . . .

Strong opposition from the international community has softened the Japanese government's move to cut its official development assistance budget drastically next year, but the world's top donor seems no longer willing to lend as generously as it did before.

"Japan's aid budget is being reviewed with the focus on quality rather than quantity and the new policy is quite popular with the public," said Kenichi Manuyana, an expert on China at the Institute of Developing Economies, a quasi-governmental think-tank. The bombshell on aid policy came November when Shinzuke Kamei, top policy planner of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, called for a 30 percent cut in the aid budget. He cited two reasons: Japan's tight fiscal situation and the doubts that have been raised about whether aid is truly appreciated by recipients. Of the \$77.2 billion fiscal 2000 budget, aid accounted for \$9.48 billion, down 0.2 percent from the previous year. Japanese media reports the ruling coalition has settled for a 3.0 percent reduction for fiscal 2001 faced with growing opposition to drastic cuts.



## Japan's aid budget is being reviewed with the focus on quality rather than quantity.

about 62 percent of Japanese aid, are expected to be the main losers.

Kamei, known for his conservative and populist views, is a top player in the LDP and the coalition government. Public perception is that while Japan's official development assistance programme aims to contribute to the stability and growth of developing economies, the results have not always been positive.

China, Japan's second highest recipient, is under special scrutiny. The study finds that despite millions of dollars extended to China over two decades, a period that contributed to the country's economic growth, Beijing's military spending has increased year after year. China received \$1.22 billion aid in fiscal 1999, following Indonesia, which got \$1.6 billion, including a special

Less Japanese aid could affect projects like the Borobudur and Prambanan Archaeological Parks in Indonesia, and the Beijing Vegetables Research Centre in China (inset).

package during the financial crisis. Guidelines outlined in 1995 state that aid would not be extended to countries with high military budgets and poor human rights records. The latest move to reduce aid follows several similar moves by the LDP since 1997 when the then prime minister proposed a 10 percent cut. Since then, annual growth in the aid budget has been zero percent. Experts contend that the new reductions will begin April 2001, given Japan's severe fiscal crisis and growing public opinion against corruption-tainted projects in developing countries.

Kiichi Miyazawa, Japan's influential finance minister, said last month: "Assistance should be reviewed because there may be parts that are provided out of habit."

Yumiri Shiran, Japan's leading newspaper, explained in a recent editorial that Kamei's proposal deserves special attention as the aid budget accounts for about 10 percent of Japan's total public works projects responsible for a current fiscal deficit.

The newspaper also pointed out that recipients have not submitted

proper reports on how Japanese grants and loans have been used. Foreign Minister Yuchi Kono, who is not keen on cutting aid, acknowledged the going is tough. He said he would work towards keeping afloat Japan's aid budget, which he stresses is the pillar of Japanese diplomacy. Aid experts too say that Japan's foreign aid is just 0.28 percent of its GDP, and a cut is too small to affect the economy.

Irge Kaul, Director of Development Studies at the United Nations Development Programme, said in a recent development seminar that reductions in Japan's aid would hurt developing countries. "Take for example the growing rates of tuberculosis in India. In a global age it is in the interest of Japan to provide funds for the eradication of this disease as it can affect Japan as a result of more people travelling," he said.

Manuyana, of the Institute of Developing Economies, says that Japan should not slash aid to poor countries but revise aid to China that is reporting high growth rates and increased foreign cash flows. "Aid to China can take a different form such as for environment and health projects rather than expensive infrastructure that is still the line," he says. ♦ (IBS)



Maoist foreign policy

Jana Awazhan, 15 December जनआवाहन

- 1. All bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements found unjust or unequal will be scrapped. All treaties that were secretly entered into will be made public and those that are not fair will be scrapped. Special facilities currently being provided to powerful countries will be ended.
- 2. Will not be part of any military alliance and will protest any action that tries to subjugate a third country by force.
- 3. Will follow an independent foreign policy and is not going to be a member of useless organisations such as SAARC.
- 4. Will keep all neighbours at the same distance, will follow and practise a policy of equality, friendship and understanding with all countries.
- 5. Will not establish relations with countries that discriminate on the basis of religion, colour, caste or are carrying out military action against a third country. Existing treaties with such countries will be scrapped.
- 6. Unjust military action will be protested against and help in all forms will be provided to the country against which military action is being taken.
- 7. Aid in whatever form will be provided to people who are being oppressed in their particular countries and even if a civil war is taking place, the oppressed will be provided aid.
- 8. Voices will be raised in the international forums to fight for the rights of land-locked countries.
- 9. Only treaties that are equal and beneficial to both the parties will be signed, and exchange programmes will be held at regular intervals.
- 10. Treaties that foster friendship and understanding will be promoted.

‘People’s Government’

Sambodhan, 15 December सम्बोधन

For the first time in the nearly five years since they began their insurgency, the Maoists have announced the formation of a ‘People’s Government’. This is a major challenge to the Congress government. In Rukum district the people’s government was formed on 1 and 2 December. Besides a chief and a deputy chief, 15 others were elected as representatives. Top Maoist officials and other cadres attended this ceremony. According to sources, the Maoists have chosen Rukum as their temporary programme area, following which a government was formed there. After a two-day meeting in Rukum it was decided that 43 village development committees would take part in choosing the district people’s government. The sources said Purna Bahadur Gharti was elected the head of the district people’s government with Maheshwar Jung Gahatraj as his deputy. Others elected to the 15-member committee are Kul Bahadur Nath (representing the people’s army), Tejendra Kham Magar (the Magar community), Man Prasad Shrestha (the Newar community), Bhoji Prasad Sharma (the farmers), Saruwa Batha (the Jatiya Morcha), Kamala Rokka (women), and Surya Nath Pun, Narendra Buda, Chandra Bahadur BK, Tanka Bahadur Pun, Kumar Gharti, Hari Bahadur Oli and Om Prakash Gharti. Two other candidates were defeated. Maoist leaders present at the elections stated that this is a temporary people’s government formed at the time of a peoples’ war. This is also Nepal’s first temporary government. The entire district has been left open to the Maoists after all police posts were moved to the district headquarters. Maoist sources also said that the government recently formed is a transitional one, and elections would soon be held for a permanent one. The people’s government is going to provide security to the villages, provide help to the families of the martyrs, help in local development, protest when the police or army enter the villages, and help increase the productivity of the farmers. What is not clear is where the money will come from to provide for all this work. The government in Kathmandu was on the verge of providing development funds to the districts of Rukum, Rolpa, Kalikot and Jajarkot with the help of the security forces. The formation of the peoples’ government has now brought in a new element to the affair. The Maoists formed the district people’s government with great enthusiasm but it is going to be difficult for them to protect this district with the same enthusiasm. This decision was taken in haste and shows political immaturity and leftist opportunism and is going to prove a political blunder.

Spooks spooked

Naya Sadak, 15 December नयाँ सडक

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ram Chandra Poudel is getting ready to form a highly secret taskforce comprising officials of the National Investigation Department (NID) to keep an eye on Maoist activities in Karnali. It had been reported earlier that Maoists had collected 326 boxes of arms and ammunition from the Nepal-China border and brought them into Karnali through the upper Dolpo region. According to sources almost half the weapons collected by the Maoists were bombs and guns with silencers. It was after reports of the delivery became known that the DPM is getting the NID active. It has been learnt that the Maoists want to capture Karnali by end of this year. The Maoists know that the government is already aware of their plans. The DPM has ordered the CIAA to form a committee to study these activities but it seems that NID members have asked that they not be sent to Karnali alone. Because of these objections work on forming the committee has not progressed much. The deputy PM has assured the NID that police and army personnel would be included in the group going to Karnali. But NID employees are now doing all they can to influence their seniors into not being named part of the team.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

If the Nepali Congress is not united, the party will face the same kind of defeat as we suffered in the previous local elections. We could blame our defeat on Bam Dev Gautam, who was the home minister and deputy prime minister at that time. This time we won't have a scapegoat like him.

—Khum Bahadur Khadka, former minister and Nepali Congress MP, in an interview with Rastriya Bani, 20 December, 2000

Signonwall: 'Keep Karki Children's Hospital clean.'

- 1. What's an old guy like you doing here?
- 2. What could I do? The discharge fee is just too much to bear...
- 3. ... I was a kid when I got admitted

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

—Phalam, by Rajesh KC, Hinal Khabarpatrika, 1-15 December.

Indolent Singha Darbar

Editorial in Hinal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

For a week schools throughout the country were shut down. Students, their parents and teachers looked up to the government for assistance and encouragement for the smooth functioning of schools, but the government failed even to officially acknowledge the problem in time. Warring hotel entrepreneurs and workers appealed to the government to mediate to reach an agreement, but Singha Darbar failed once again to respond. The government did take an initiative but it came after the worst damage was already done to the industry. The threatened strike was avoided, but it was too late to save losses to the industry. Tarai farmers are suffering due to the dwindling price of rice in which they invested so much of their labour and expensive fertiliser. Rice growers had expected the government to fix a base price for their produce, or failing that, that it would at least act to check the cross-border smuggling of cheap rice from India. Singha Darbar failed them too. And instead of offering support to the farmers as would be expected, their desperate condition is yet to be officially acknowledged. Police are posted in far-flung posts without proper weapons for self defence and dozens of them are being killed in single attacks. Unarmed civilians are being killed and their families and children are suffering their losses in silence. Bands, strikes and chakka jams have become part of daily life.

During difficult times democratic governments stand with the people, but unfortunately our government has failed us even when civil society has appealed for assistance. No department, ministry or official sector can be singled out for this apathy, the whole government apparatus is a part of it. Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has been a total failure in the sense that the promises he made while returning to Singha Darbar nine months ago have not materialised. The peace and security situation of the country has worsened, while economic progress and development have taken a back seat. Nine months itself is not a long period, but there seems to be nothing to call for optimism. The government has become incapable of any action. It is the government's responsibility to strengthen government mechanism and reach out to the people for a way out, if necessary. The present Constitution has accorded the power to make Singha Darbar strong, but, unfortunately, the government itself has failed to protect and follow the Constitution.

It is time the prime minister evaluated his own performance. If he still has faith in the ability of the present government he should act promptly (although the general public has totally lost faith in the government). If he believes that a cabinet reshuffle is the answer, there is no sense in delaying it and if it is the upheaval within the party that is the obstacle, the prime minister himself is the key person who needs to act. In short, some bold decisions are needed to save the country. If the prime minister's health and other factors are the obstacles towards meeting the national challenges and

the worsening situation of the nation, as believed by the general public, the prime minister should pay attention to these issues also. No democratic government has the right to remain blind to the problems of the nation and the people.

New government decisions

Saptahik Bimarsa, 15 December

The government has decided to set up a special court to try all Maoist-related cases. This special court will also be responsible for trying all cases related to smuggling. At the same time, the cabinet has also completed all the formalities for the formation of an armed police force. The armed police force will operate under the home ministry. A third decision was the formation of regional administrative offices in the five development regions to be run by politically-appointed 'Chhetrapals'.

ML Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

Budhabar, 13 December बुधवार

The Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) recently concluded its national convention in which a clear division of forces was seen between a bigger and powerful group and a smaller and not-very-powerful group. The bigger group prevented voting on many of the papers that were



GAUTAM

tabled. The party did not even allow CP Mairali to present his paper, and passed Gautam's paper late at night without discussion. Mairali's supporters had opposed this high-handedness when the convention was being held. Gautam's supporters did not let Mairali's paper be discussed for the sake of party unity and this led to protests from supporters of Mairali. The latter said that Gautam's political programme was being forced on them but besides protesting they could not do anything. Gautam stated that the voices of the minority will be heard and voting on issues will take place at the next convention to be held in two years. Mairali's supporters till the very end were in favor of voting taking place. Earlier, Gautam had asked Mairali to take a positive view of his paper and support him, but Mairali stated that he could not agree with Gautam in principle. RK Mairali had then tried to mediate but was unsuccessful. There was a demand for compromise and a mediator was required to solve the problem in such a way that a win-win situation could be created. Gautam's supporters were not in favour of this and were not prepared to compromise on anything. Gautam got his paper adopted with a lot of arm twisting and this left many delegates disappointed. They were not totally satisfied that all papers not

discussed at this convention would be discussed at the earliest. Party members have warned that they might revolt against this type of behaviour.

Bastola on shaky ground

Deshantar, 17 December देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The Ilam election court has ordered a re-count of the ballots of Jhapa district constituency number four from 22 December. The decision was passed by the court headed by attorney Ramesh Jha following a petition by the losing candidate Yukta Bhetwal of UML, alleging foul play during the vote count in



MIN BAIRACHARYA

the last parliamentary elections. The decision has put the winner, Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola, in a very tricky position. The same court had ordered the re-counting on 6 August, which was halted after Bastola appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ultimately went with the decision of the election court and hence the re-count. Bastola had won the election by a slender margin of 26 votes. Among the various reasons cited for the need for a re-count, Bhetwal has accused the counting process of hiding votes that were in his favour and counting disqualified votes in favour of his competitor. Preparations for the re-count are already underway.

Now RPP's turn to agitate

Nepali Patra, 15 December नेपाली पत्र

While the ruling party the Nepali Congress is engrossed in infighting, the main opposition UML is gearing up to amend the constitution, and the third largest party, the RPP, is getting ready to start a farmers' agitation very soon. The recently concluded 19th central committee meeting has already taken a decision regarding this. The details of the agitation have not yet been made public, but according to the party deputy chief, this agitation will centre around 20 places in the country.

The agitation is going to focus on the problems faced by the farmers, the exploitation they are subjected to, the decrease in the prices of agricultural products, the rise in the prices of fertilizers, petroleum products and sugar, the Kanaiya issue and the security of people engaged in the agricultural sector. The RPP wants the government to provide security to the farmers, buy their products at a reasonable rate, discourage foreign agricultural products from entering the country and develop foreign markets for our products. The party wants the government to increase the price of agricultural goods in the same ratio at which prices of other consumer goods have risen.



COURTESY:WORLD2MARKET

This season, shoppers all over the world surfed the Net looking for unique gift items and some bought copper flowerpots, vases and candlestands fashioned by the Bishwakamas of Palpa. This is

# Copper on the Net

The coppersmiths of Palpa may not have seen a computer, but e-commerce has changed their lives and fortunes and is helping to bring others back home.

migrate to India in search of menial jobs.

A year ago, decorative items made by the coppersmiths of Palpa started appearing on the Internet. Socially conscious on-line companies, like [www.viatru.com](http://www.viatru.com) (formerly [world2market.com](http://world2market.com), a business-to-consumer website) started taking the copper items they produced and supplied them to retailers like Pottery Barn or mail-order

the sleepy hills of Palpa is buzzing with activity. As modern Nepali music blares from a cassette player, scores of artisans sit in a circle, beating and burnishing water pitchers, basins and trays.

Bal Bahadur Bishwakarma joined the circle of artisans seven months ago during a visit from India where he worked as a cook in Kurukshetra, Haryana. "I thought I would earn a lot in India," says Bal Bahadur. "But I didn't. I used to earn Rs 3500 but I had a lot of expenses too. I had no savings! This is my place, my village. I can be with my family here." Bal Bahadur has no plans of going back.

Bal Bahadur asked a lot of questions before joining the local cooperative, says Bir Bahadur Bishwakarma, the nominal leader of the coppersmiths, "He compared his income with ours and realised he had no savings, whereas a person here saves Rs 25-30,000 a year."

The copper pot industry was started by Bir Bahadur after he returned from a training programme at Balaju Technical Institute 14

years ago. Today, the industry employs 35 coppersmiths who earn Rs 3500-7000 a month. Many of the once-landless Bishwakamas are buying land and all of them are sending their children to school. That is saying a lot for a community that has traditionally been backward due to their marginalisation by other groups that consider them 'untouchable'.

Every two weeks, group leader Bir Bahadur Bishwakarma travels to Kathmandu with as much as 320 kgs of copper items. They go to the Association for Craft Producers (ACP), a fair trade group in Kathmandu that checks the quality of the products and supplies Internet companies with copper goods. The association also sells the Bishwakamas' work at their Kipandole outlet, Dhukuti. The ACP sold \$40,000 worth of copper items in 1999. Since the pots began appearing on the Net early this year, that figure has doubled.

The ACP helps Nepali artisans market their traditional skills. "Although the association has been exporting products made by its 1000 members for nearly 15 years now, the web has opened up new markets," says Meera Bhattarai, the



COURTESY:SUNDANCE CATALOG



COURTESY:WORLD2MARKET



COURTESY:WORLD2MARKET

Clockwise from top: The pots as seen by Sundance Catalog customers; the Palpa cooperative of the Bishwakamas; a world2market.com representative shows a girl from Palpa how her parents' crafts look on the Internet; a Bishwakarma coppersmith at work.

Association's director.

"People pour into Kathmandu with great expectations hoping they will get better paid jobs," she says, "but it is not true in most cases. The best thing would be for them to live in their own community, their own village and be able to live a decent life." In fact some of the

Bishwakamas working in the patio have seen a computer before but none seemed interested in the new universe of the Internet. But they are grateful it has given them enough work to continue doing what they are most familiar with and stay on in their own village. ♦

part of a larger trend in e-commerce in the US-retailing authentic, politically correct handicrafts from around the world, often backed up by photographs and reportage, to Net-savvy, credit card-wielding Americans and Europeans. And often, it is small, rural communities in countries like Nepal, and grassroots NGOs that benefit.

For centuries, these Bishwakarma coppersmiths of Palpa survived by their craft-hammering sheets of copper into water basins, pitchers and trays. Then, some 30 years ago, Indian mass-produced aluminium and then plastic containers began making inroads into the Nepali hinterland, and unable to compete, the Bishwakamas were forced to abandon their trade and

and online companies like the Sundance Catalog. The Bishwakamas of Palpa don't know what the Internet is-most have not even seen a computer, but e-commerce has changed their lives and fortunes, and is helping to bring others back home.

The patio of a stone hut in

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## ABOUT TOWN

## CINEMA

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## ART EXHIBITION

- ❖ **Kids Guernica** – Kids Guernica–2000, Nepal. International children's peace mural exhibition in support of the global movement for children's rights. The exhibition sends a message of peace from children from around the world. Tundikhel. 21-27 December. Exhibition throughout daylight.
- ❖ **Vision**. Solo painting exhibition by Sanjay Bantawa organised by the Chomolungma UNESCO Centre. Opening 23 December. 3:30 pm. Bamboo Gallery, Panipokhari. 412507
- ❖ **A Diary of Portraits** (1975-1999). A series of studies in mixed media of the colourful people of Kathmandu by Carolyn Boch, a long-term resident of Nepal and a teacher of Creative Mandala Art Classes at the Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. Last day 31 December. Gallery hours 9am-6pm. The New Restaurant at the Summit Hotel, Kupondol. 524694
- ❖ **Angkor**. A black-and-white photography exhibition by Jaro Poncar from Prague. The focus of the exhibition is the Hindu/Buddhist temple complex Angkor, regarded as one of the architectural wonders of the world. 20 Dec-20 Jan, 2001. 8 am-6 pm. Indigo Gallery, Naxal.



## COMPETITION

- ❖ **Weekly Prizes**. Take part in the various quiz competition and win numerous prizes ranging from gift vouchers, air tickets, adventure trips, dinner and lunch at some of the best places around. Special attraction for Christmas. Log on to <www.nepalshop.com>

## FESTIVALS

- ❖ **Eid-ul-Fitr**. Namaz prayers at Nepal Jame Masjid and Kashmiri Masjid, Bagh Bazaar. 10 am on 26 or 27 December. Call for date confirmation 247044
- ❖ **Christmas Carol Singing**. Services at Assumption Church, Dhobighat. Carol singing starts 6 pm, Mass at 7 pm. 24 December.
- ❖ **Mass**. Aradhana Church Sanepa, 10 am. Assumption Church, 9 am and 5:30 pm. Hotel Annapurna, Durbar Marg, 7:30 am. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 10 am. 25 December

## MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz Sessions**. Live jazz at The Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila. A unique jazz bar where Michael Fienstien played Gershwin & Porter. Featuring this month a host of jazz bands including Elaine McInnes & Chris Masand with the Jazz Commission, the Swingtones, the Latin Lovers and others playing Cole Porter, Gershwin, Brubeck and Coltrane. Enjoy the drinks from a bottomless cellar, gourmet food, coffee, cognac and cigars and hear... interpret Ella, Sarah, Louis. 412999.



- ❖ **Ch@tmandu Ho! Halla!** Hamro.com Nepal's most popular chat presents a charity concert featuring 'The Albatross, Wild Graz, Smarika, Monkey Temple, Flower Generation and others. 23 December, 12noon–5pm. Aroma Sports Center, Sanepa. Tickets: Tick 'n' Tock, Suwal Video New Road, All Nanglo and Bakery Café outlets. Rs250 (includes burger and a Coke).

- ❖ **Shikar Beat Contest**. Twenty selected bands of the original 82 will be contesting for cash awards totalling Rs 172,000. Special guest performance by Cobweb, 1974 AD, Robin & Looza, Rock Yogis. 23-24 December, 3 pm onwards. Tundikhel Khulla Manch. Free Entry.

## DANCE

- ❖ **Classical Nepali dances** based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon showcase the sacred arts of ancient Kathmandu Valley. Every Tuesday, 7 pm. The Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra (near Swoyambhunath Stupa, 10 minutes west of Thamel). Rs 400. 271545
- ❖ **Children Khel**. Exciting children's Christmas and New Year party. 24 December, 11 am-3pm. Entry Rs 100. Free drinks and prizes. Hotel Shangrila, Lazimpat. 412999

## BENEFITS

- ❖ **ASMAN Night**. Benefit dinner and dance for The Education of a Girl Child, organised by ASMAN. 24 December, 7:30 pm. Baber Mahal Revisited. Rs 1500. 270147, 413151, 413394

## MARTIN CHAUTARI

- ❖ **Cultural imperialism in Nepal**. Discussion forum led by Mahendra Lawoti, researcher at the Nepal South Asia Centre. 26 December, 5:30 pm. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. Write or Call for directions: [chautari@mos.com.np](mailto:chautari@mos.com.np)/ 246065.

For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)

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## NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

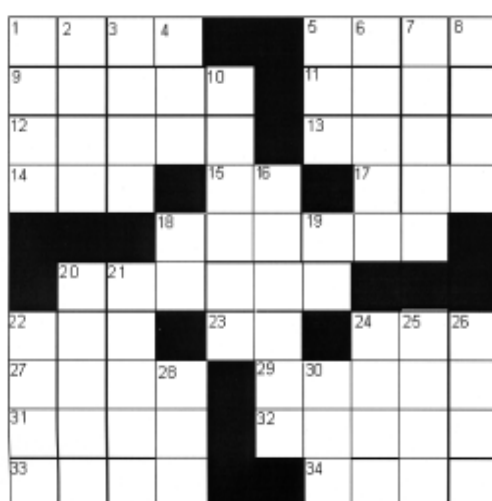


This satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows clear skies all the way to West Asia with only white patches of ground fog over the Gangetic plains bordering Nepal. A high-pressure area is sitting stubbornly over northern India. A strong high-altitude westerly jet stream has been blowing across the northern part of the subcontinent this week, clearing away the haze for great views of the mountains and warmer afternoon temperatures. Conclusion: no rains for the foreseeable future. Foggy mornings and bright afternoons will continue for Kathmandu and other mid-Himalayan valleys. A sudden drop in night temperature over the weekend may bring frost to valley outskirts.

## KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
22-03	21-02	21-02	22-03	23-04

## QUICKWORD 12



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## Across

- Honour at the gala (4)
- Culminate with mace (4)
- Yellow red pigment (5)
- Genesis of the stamp collector (4)
- Head Whoopee (5)
- Gully from the run off (4)
- Cat and An perhaps (3)
- Give the Flemish a guilden (2)
- Kung Fu expert downwind (3)
- Indignation at sleepy hounds (6)
- Pole, teller of sea stories (6)
- Swear at mangy canine (3)
- Indian state is partly explosive (2)
- Cobbler poke (3)
- Sultanate home of Oryx (4)
- Boris' country dwelling (5)
- Contribute insect (4)
- Hun in loft (5)
- Wean afresh (4)

- Eye the sports channel (4)

## Down

- Particle or wave destination (4)
- Nymph resonance (4)
- Lose flab in the rough (4)
- Before the complications (3)
- Spring month (3)
- Father of man, perhaps (5)
- Distance before hitting the sack (5)
- McPherson's read (4)
- Act against inertia (6)
- Angola's slave trade point (6)
- Zinc, perhaps (2)
- North Dakota possibly (2)
- Seed condiment (5)
- Deliver pompously (5)
- No rousing this one (4)
- Great pretender, in deed (4)
- Scar with the quirt (4)
- Lingerie edged (4)
- Pristine (3)
- Consumed at tea (3)

## Terms and conditions

- The contest is open to everyone, except employees of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd and Infocom Pvt Ltd.
- In case of more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by lucky draw.
- Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, Tuesday.
- The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. Please come with an ID.

## QUICKWORD ANSWER 11

CUP	HAUNTS
AVE	ASSAIL
BUS	UPSIDE
ALKALI	LED
LAYS	CC
HR	OSLO
PTA	EAGLET
LINERS	OAT
UNTRUE	SSE
STERN	HER

Out of 12 correct entries the lucky winner is **Terence D'costa**



To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to [crossword@himalmedia.com](mailto:crossword@himalmedia.com). Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

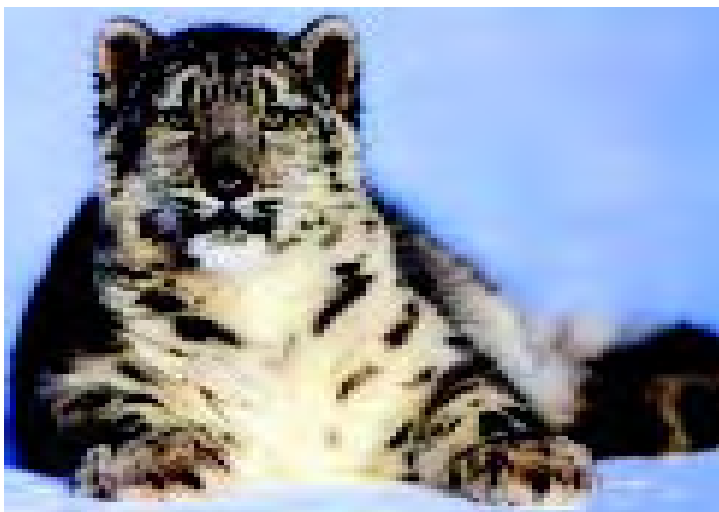
Name.....  
Ph.....email.....



# “Worth more alive than dead...”



**Serious efforts are underway to save Nepal's snow leopard population. Because the main threat is from poaching, the message is: it is worth protecting the rare cats.**



...nbers, it is estimated that about six snow leopards are killed in Nepal every year by poachers, mostly in western Nepal. "It's not easy for people who lose their livestock to snow leopards," explained Jackson while presenting a slide show at Indigo Gallery this week. "Reducing people and wildlife conflict is the best approach," says

support and awareness among local people. Poaching remains the most common threat as it not only destroys the cat's population but also its food supply: Himalayan blue sheep, Asiatic ibex, marmot, pika, hares, rodents and game birds like Tibetan snowcock. "A snow leopard attacks livestock only when it can't find anything else to eat. Villagers don't know that: they kill off wild sheep and other prey, and that causes the conflict with the cats," says Anil Manandhar of WWF in Kathmandu. Jackson's project aims to help highland villagers to make leopard-proof corrals for livestock and to help with education. "We have to help villagers benefit from protecting the leopards by training them to use their indigenous practices scientifically," he told us. The slogan for saving the snow leopard is similar to the one used to protect whales: "Snow leopards are worth more alive than dead."

Because the snow leopard's range traverses international boundaries, conservation efforts have to plan for conservation without borders. Proposed transboundary nature reserves like the tri-national park planned for the Kangchendzanga area would help in protecting the snow leopard. "The concept of transboundary protected areas will enhance the mobility and breeding of the leopards," says Jackson. ♦

(For further information check out: [www.south-asia.com/wwfnepal](http://www.south-asia.com/wwfnepal), IUCN Cat Specialist Group [www.felidae.org](http://www.felidae.org), International Snow Leopard Trust: [www.snowleopard.org/isl](http://www.snowleopard.org/isl), HMG Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation [www.south-asia.com/dnpwc](http://www.south-asia.com/dnpwc))



Jackson, who is also director of the Snow Leopard Stewardship Programme of the Snow Leopard Conservancy, an organisation that aims at protection through tighter community-based action to save the animals. The Programme chooses sites

at the snow leopard as a pest that kills sheep and other livestock. So the first instinct of highland farmers is to kill the animal if they see it. Lately, the astronomical prices that snow leopard pelts command in the international market have given an added incentive to farmers who sell the fur to middlemen who come by. Despite an international campaign against wearing fur of endangered species, the trade is thriving.

A farmer in Mugu sells a complete snow leopard pelt for as little as Rs 800—little knowing what kind of a markup it will have by the time it gets to Hong Kong. If the Mugu farmer can take his pelt across the border into Tibet, he can get \$190 for the same item. After cleaning, processing and cutting, the fur of one snow leopard can have a street value of as much as \$50,000 in East Asia or North America. Such prices make the trade much more lucrative than even narcotics. Just like for the tiger on Nepal's southern border, there is a demand for just about every part of the snow leopard in traditional Chinese medicine. Snow leopard liver, heart, kidney and bone are supposed to be key ingredients in Chinese

traditional aphrodisiac potions. So, besides the fur, the Mugu farmer also barter the bones and dried internal organs of snow leopard with sheep from Tibetan traders. In Nepal, the fourth amendment of the 1973 NWC Act has set stiff penalties for buying and selling of snow leopard parts ranging from Rs 50,000-100,000 or 5-15 years in prison, or both. But lax enforcement of this law, corruption and the huge rewards for trafficking have meant that the illicit trade goes on. Though there is no exact figure on the poaching

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for pg 18



**HAMMER AND SICKLE:** Leaders of the main opposition UML, including General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal (with raised fist and red scarf) rally on New Road on 20 December to protest rising food prices.



**GOOD HEALTH:** Thai ambassador Powthep Varachinta with Bhiksu Sudarshan at a ceremony to inaugurate a free clinic for alternative medicine at Kirtipur Vihar, 16 December.



# NEPAL ON THE NET



## ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

A decade after the Internet, Nepal is still struggling to make a creative dent in cyberspace. There are 16 Internet Service Providers for the rather small Nepali market of 100,000 Internet users. Being online still isn't big business for anyone, except a handful of travel and trade-related sites who can make the odd buck from online registration for their services.

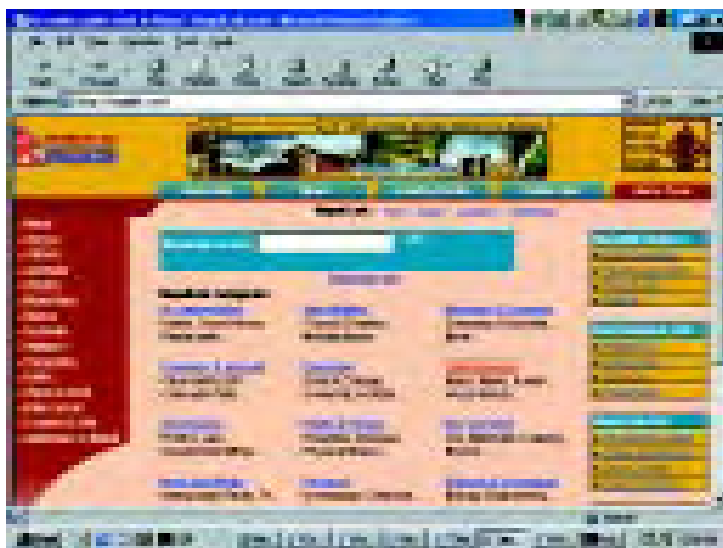
If you look at Nepali websites catering to domestic and international users, it isn't hard to see why. Of course, given the size and particular ramifications of Nepal and its economy, it's highly unlikely we'll have any real transition to a New Economy anytime soon, or see local firms listing on NASDAQ unless someone here goes online with a brilliant new application or service. But even given the conditions we have, Nepali sites could be a little more imaginative. They could look better, read better and work better.

Basically, verbiage about the endless possibilities of the Internet



and a border-less world aside, Nepali sites fall into one of two categories—portals and entertainment sites, and professional sites for organisations. There are few that create an interactive, aesthetic experience while also providing a service. The entertainment sites and portals usually have a few illegal mp3s, a must-have Java chat applet, lots of links that don't work, a free webmail service and sometimes even a matchmaking service. The corporate and non-profit sites offer or simply advertise their services. Most visitors to entertainment sites

are from the Valley and their favourite pastime seems to be tapping away at their keyboards, producing inane exclamations and flirting in chat space. A chat room



veteran explained that the hottest topics are "sex and India bashing".

Nepali users from overseas usually log on to news sites like nepalnews and kantipuronline. Many users of entertainment sites like hamro.com, explorenepal.com and nepalsearch.com are Nepalis who see the more technically advanced international services like Yahoo! Messenger as community spaces that force you to efface your cultural identity. Interestingly, though, once casual chatters become regulars and start making friends they form groups in global services like MSN and Yahoo Messenger and bid goodbye to Nepali chat sites. Webmaster accept that this is a regular occurrence and, in some ways, inevitable.

Hamro.com (formerly econepal.com) is one chat site that's managed 'stickiness' pretty well in these competitive times. ('Stickiness' refers to the ability of a site to draw repeat users who eventually form a loyal community around it.) Hamro.com was Nepal's first Java-powered chat site. It was launched about a year ago and soon had over 40,000 registered users—this is clearly Nepal's most

## Nepali sites are certainly happening, although they could do with better content and be a little more imaginative.

popular chat site. Although hamro.com is virtually synonymous with online chatting for Nepalis, the webmasters are trying to do something out of the ordinary. State radio's radionepal.fina already web-casts Nepali music 24 hours on the site. Their matchmaking service sets up dates and has around 1000 members. The webmasters are even throwing a party for their loyal chat-service users. "Hamro.com is not just a chat site," says Sakar Bhushal who at 19 is perhaps Nepal's most successful and youngest webmaster. "We are planning to go much further ahead with a whole

culture, festivals, hotel and lodge information. Tourism industry professionals like trekking agencies and hotels also have sites. The basic facts are everywhere but, sadly, no single site has been creative enough to go beyond the obvious in terms of information, images or analyses. Yes, mountains are beautiful, and you're bound to have loads of fun on a white-water rafting trip, but what else? Rupesh Pradhan, Director of Yonari Inc., designers of Nepal's most comprehensive search engine nepalhomepage.com, says, "Making a web page is a relatively simple task today, anyone can do it. As soon as

people get a printer, they think of even making a book. But for good content you need study, knowledge and most of all resources." Nepalhomepage.com looks like it's come out of the initial phase. Catering to over 180,000 visitors from 40 different countries every week, nepalhomepage.com is one of the main search engines for information on Nepal. They have the usual stuff like travel tips, exchange rates, the weather and a chat feature, but they also own databases of Nepali missions abroad, addresses of ministries, trading houses, and travel and trekking agencies. The most famous feature of the site now is their discussion forums—there are as many as three hundred postings on a single subject sometimes.

In the news category, nepalnews.com already has a cult following domestically and abroad. Many Nepali newspapers upload their content to the nepalnews domain. The site is constantly updated and has a relatively easy-to-read design, but the real winner here is the content. News. All stripes, as much as you can read.

Even if most Nepali sites lack variety and content, there are also some really good ones, which serve their professional purpose, and are also fun to surf. Spinybabbler.org, the website of Spiny Babbler, a decade-old group that organises activities

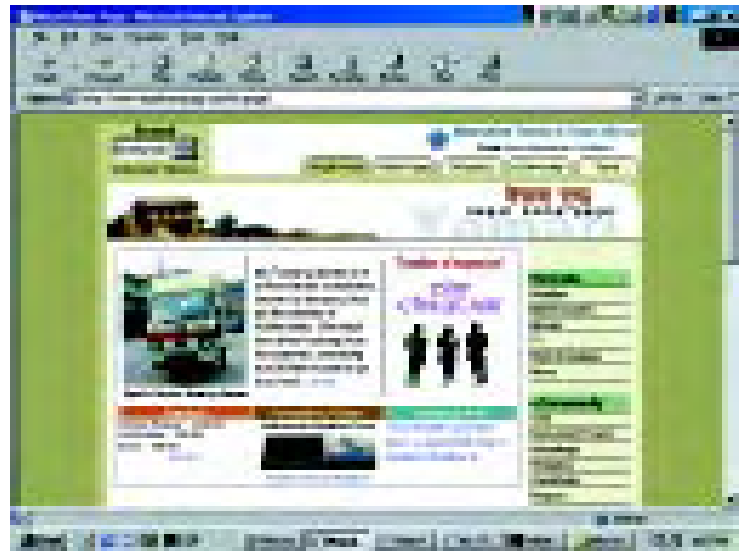
related to arts and literature in Kathmandu is one of the best. Spinybabbler.org has five online art galleries with two exhibitions every month, and also showcases works by Nepal's young English language poets. Content is no problem for Spiny Babbler, which has an established infrastructure in place. "Our physical presence here in Kathmandu enables us to build up the content we want," says Pallav Ranjan, founder of the group.

Arvind Rajbhandari, a long time Net enthusiast and currently a hardware technician at Worldlink, one of the biggest ISPs here, thinks Nepal's Net Age is only beginning and that there are a lot of obstacles to overcome. "We're still learning how to integrate the Net into our daily lives and the hurdles that Nepal's Internet businesses have to overcome have a domino effect. There's a whole range of them—from ISP's with the necessary bandwidth, to Nepal



Telecommunication Corporation using only telephone lines—the slowest delivery medium—for connectivity, to the government's indifference to formulating proper IT policy," he says. "But all the same we are certainly making progress slowly." The govt in fact just announced an IT policy last week. (See Biz Briefs for details.)

There are problems, but it's too early to tell whether these are teething troubles, or more serious hurdles in establishing a greater—and more imaginative—Nepali presence online. One thing is certain, though, even if boom time never hits Nepal, it won't hurt to be more creative on the Net. ♦



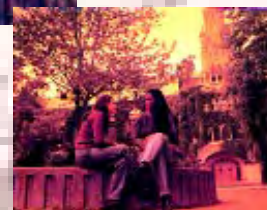
## SITES WORTH SURFING

- www.nepalhomepage.com:** Loads of information and links for Nepal, discussion forums.
- www.spinybabbler.org:** Art and poetry from Kathmandu.
- www.nepalnews.com:** Nepal's premier news site.
- www.hamro.com:** The Valley's most popular teen chat site.
- www.chordsnepal.com:** Downloadable Nepali mp3s.
- www.nepalshop.com:** One of Nepal's first e-commerce sites.
- www.pashmarc.com:** Retailers pashmina shawls and scarves online.
- www.south-asia.com/babycare:** Information on traditional Nepali mother- and baby-care practices
- www.south-asia/ssn:** Nepal's first online medical consultation service, free.
- www.bhakundo.org.np:** Nepal Football Fan Club's official site, posts dates of matches.
- www.jobsnepal.com:** Better positions, greater satisfaction—jobs.
- www.asainart.com:** Great essays on traditional Asian arts, information on Patan Museum's reconstruction.
- www.hbc.com.np:** Nepal's first live web-cast radio service.
- www.bikingnepal.com:** The site for mountain bikers in Nepal.

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# The Bimbo Deterrent

India has gone ballistic, the question is what the rest of the world is going to do about it. There are three answers: "Practice, practice, and practice." Our girls need to go through rigorous training, re-kitting and streamlining to be able compete with the best designs India has on offer. The schematic diagram below was secretly obtained by our intelligence agents and depicts a state-of-the-art jointette who was crowned last week at a Military Air Show in the Millennium Dome. The arrows point to soft spots where we need to get to work without much ado:

**UNDERCARRIAGE:** It is the high heels that will give you the strategic advantage in this struggle for ultimate world hegemony. ♦

No other country in the world now comes even close to matching India's arsenal of heavy weapons. So far as we know, India has successfully tested six bomb shells in recent years. Intelligence sources and satellite surveillance show that it has a stockpile of a further six devices which are ready for deployment, and the country's offensive establish-

## contest to win pepsi

**NEPALI SOCIETY**

# Mother nature

The flowers were provided by Standard Nursery for a nominal amount," says Rana, laughing with pleasure. The park boasts out-of-season flowers, sculptures dedicated to Mother Nature by leading Nepali artist Thakur Prasad Mainali, artistic-looking tree stumps, green poems carved in marble, and walkways. Maintaining the garden doesn't take much—two gardeners, and the municipality trucks that water the traffic islands. All in all it's a fantastic job.



*ChandraRana stands proudly in front of the SEF's hallmark effort, the Birendra Green Garden. (top) The Garden, outside the Birendra International Convention Centre, has walkways, poetry, sculptures and flowers. (above)*

SEF also plants trees—the barrelled trees on the stretch of road in front of Singha Durbar is their doing. In addition, SEF awards environment-friendly industries (with the Ministry of Population and Environment), propagates energy-saving techniques in factories, and is leading an awareness campaign against polluting

SEF is a group of 15 women, most of them housewives concerned about the environment. There's no big budget and the Foundation isn't donor-driven. "There are donors who will be more than happy to support us, but SEF is not interested," says a defiant Rana. ♦