



### EXCLUSIVE

## H<sub>2</sub>O

It's official. Parched Kathmandu may get 170 million litres more water every day by 2006. But whether some of that will actually flow out of your taps is another matter. It will depend a lot on where you live, and if the leaks in our distribution network are fixed before that. Nepal and the Asian Development Bank formalised a \$120 million loan for the Melamchi project on Wednesday to bring the snowmelt into the valley. ADB President Tadao Chino was in town to witness the signing of the project agreement. Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya thanked Chino for the money and had tea with him on the Ministry lawns. The total cost of the project is \$441 million and includes bilateral donors from Nordic countries and Japan, and loans from the World Bank.



## New Zone Bosses

King Birendra gave his OK for an armed police force to battle the Maoist insurgency last week. The Home Ministry says it hopes to iron out administrative and technical procedures for the paramilitary force by next week. "The armed police would have better weapons than regular police, but not as good as those that the army uses," Home Secretary Shreekanth Regmi told us. The ordinance now needs the approval of parliament.

The king has also approved amendments to the Local Administration Act, which would allow the government to set up regional administrators in all of Nepal's five development regions. The Regional Administrator's offices will be located in Dhankuta, Hetauda, Pokhara, Surkhet and Dipayal and is a response to the security threat posed by the Maoist insurgency. The regional chiefs will also try to ensure better co-ordination between different security agencies—the Royal Nepal Army, the paramilitary and the Nepal Police.

See also p. 3

### RAJENDRA DAHAL IN POKHARA

The much-awaited Nepali Congress Convention in Pokhara is now finally over, and a ceasefire is in force between the warring factions. How long it will last is anyone's guess, but this infighting had paralysed governance for almost one year and there is hope that the ruling party will now turn its attention to the country's urgent crises.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala emerged victorious by being re-elected party chairman, while his rival, Sher Bahadur Daba, who had launched a sustained attack on Koirala to quit at least one of his two posts, conceded defeat but firmly ensconced himself as No 2 in the leadership hierarchy. The anti-Koirala faction has also doubled the number of votes in the total tally from 18 percent at the 1996 convention to 35 percent in Pokhara.

It is obvious that the future stability of the Nepali Congress (and perhaps the country) will now depend on how magnanimous Koirala is in victory and how much he will accommodate the ambitions of the rebel faction. If he doesn't, the infighting in the ruling party will continue and the nation will slip further into the abyss of drift and disorder. But if he does, it will provide Koirala with a real opportunity to deliver on the promises he made when he became prime minister 11 months ago: to ensure law and order, curb corruption and improve governance. After all, his party has a majority in parliament, there are the first signs of party unity, and the morale of cadres has been restored somewhat after Pokhara.

Koirala told us: "You will see everything will start happening within ten days." This is a hint that a ministerial reshuffle is on the cards, and the cunning politician that he is, Koirala will surely try to defuse the threat from rivals by offering them lucrative and responsible posts in a new ministerial line-up next week, and oblige them to deliver. But this may not be as easy as it sounds. It was in fact the haggling over really plum ministries like Home and Finance between the Congress factions in October that triggered off the latest confrontation. This time, though, Koirala can pick from the rival camp without having to deal with Daba, or his mentor, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

Eclipsed by the epic headline-grabbing battle within the Nepali Congress was the party's own first-ever election to its Central Working Committee (CWC). The tiered elections from grassroots to the regional level climaxed in Pokhara with the vote for 18 posts in this powerful committee. Another 18 members will be nominated by the party president ostensibly to ensure an ethnic, regional, gender and political mix. Among the 18 elected members, six were anti-Koirala, nine pro and the rest non-committed. Three scions of veteran Congress leaders (Prakash Koirala, son of BP Koirala, Prakash Man Singh, son of Ganesh Man Singh and

# CEASEFIRE!

**"You will see everything will start happening within ten days."  
— Girija Prasad Koirala**



"Young" Turks -in-Waiting: Ram Chandra Poudel and Sher Bahadur Daba

Bimalendra Nichi, son of Mahendra Narayan Nichi) were elected. Interestingly, Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudel got the most votes although he hardly did any lobbying. This perhaps indicates the strength of the middle-roads and the seeming desire within the party for unity and compromise.

If there was one winner in Pokhara, it was the party: it has now got the mechanism in place to ensure a leadership filter through a democratic process. Bollywood actress Manisha Koirala, who was in Pokhara to

campaign on behalf of her daddy Prakash Koirala, was "repulsed" by the cut-throat rivalries within the party. But even she was impressed with the process: "This was a truly democratic party convention. People with different opinions found space, and there was a rejection of the autocratic way of doing things. It is a very good sign. With the infighting behind us, the party can now focus on looking after the country."

For a week the entire country's attention was focussed on Pokhara. Even the main

opposition leaders from the UML and other leftist parties admitted they were keenly watching the outcome of the Pokhara convention to formulate future strategies. With the ruling party preoccupied with no-trust votes and politically tinged verdicts on the streets, there was a sense that the country was drifting in a barless on a stormy ocean. Pokhara also saw the presence of an unprecedented number of pressure groups, big business, lobbyists, and media who considered it important enough to invest the time and energy to see how the ruling party would resolve its internal conflict and find a way out.

The other aspect of the Convention that was overshadowed by the leadership tussle was its first-ever Policy Paper into which the party had put a lot of work over two years to reflect feedback from the grassroots. The Paper reiterated strongly the party's commitment to socialism, reflecting the viewpoint of the party cadre at the local level who felt that the liberal market economy had sidelined the concerns of the poor. "Liberalism and socialism should not be seen as contradictory, but a reflection of the party's ideals of understanding and reconciliation," says the Paper, and goes on to quote BP Koirala from a speech he made at the Socialist International Convention in Australia in 1981: "Democratic socialism is the wave of the future for the Third World."

The Policy Paper uses even stronger words to analyse the way Nepal has been indiscriminate in going for foreign aid projects. "Foreign aid will not be donor-driven. It will be a reflection of the need, appropriateness, and priorities of Nepal and Nepalis. And it will be on our terms, we will not accept unnecessary conditionalities." The Nepali Congress had accepted numerous donor conditions for projects like the Anun III project, the hydropower scheme that never materialised. The party is now seeing the backlash of some of those conditionalities from within its own ranks.

Koirala has stated he will step down within three years. The leadership then will devolve on a new generation of leaders who will hopefully work out their future internal differences (and there will be many) through the process initiated in Pokhara without bringing the whole country to a standstill. ♦

**Editorial p2  
Get on with it**





## GET ON WITH IT

Just as well that tourism is in a deep slump. Pokhara needed to keep its hotel rooms full, and it reaped a bonanza from the Congress extravaganza. If foreign visitors don't come, it seems domestic political tourism will spring to the rescue. Despite an alcohol ban (can't trust our rulers with the booze) which hit bar sales, hotels and restaurants did brisk business. Drivers of Pokhara's vintage Datsun taxis were happy not just for the business, but also for an opportunity to editorialise on the antics of our politicians using choice epithets (which we can't repeat here). The country's movers and shakers were all there in their big cars: politicians with bulging suitcases, their businessmen pals carrying the cheque books. The only thing we can say is that some of that cash probably trickled down to Pokharites. (Although some hoteliers on the lakefront are afraid bills for fooding and lodging of politicians may never be settled—which isn't a surprise given the complete lack of scruples that characterises Nepali politics today.)

The one redeeming feature about the Pokhara Convention was the sight of delegates casting votes for party leadership. Only when political parties practise democracy within will we begin to have true democracy in our country's governance. And hopefully the mechanisms put in place at the present convention will mean that intra-party feuding of the kind that paralysed the nation in the run up to Pokhara will not happen again. Let them fight their internal battles internally, don't hold the country to ransom. The obsessive infighting stole precious government energy away from pressing problems: delivery of development services, resolving the Maoist insurgency, financial sector reforms, the looming threat of debilitating strikes in the hotel, transport and education sectors. Across all government offices, there was one refrain: "After the Convention." Let's face it: for the past four months we've had no government, which is why the fires of street protests burnt out of control for two days. The ruling party blames extreme political elements and enemies of democracy for fanning the flames, but it must bear the responsibility for bungling and allowing its internal power struggle to take priority over everything else.

Our politicians never tire of saying that they want to turn Nepal into a Singapore. Dream on. It would be unrealistic to think that it would even turn anytime soon into a Thailand, which ranks 63 in Transparency International's political corruption rankings. Absence of corruption in the political culture makes Singapore the cleanest in Asia, and it ranks sixth internationally. Singapore's Trade Minister George Yeo explained why his country was ahead: "Policies are formulated to benefit Singapore as a whole and not particular interest groups which finance political parties." The politico-business nexus that was present in Pokhara would do well to make a mental note of that.

The ruling party should now get down to the job of ruling. There is a lot of catching up and patching up to do. The rebel faction got enough votes to show that they are a force to be reckoned with. Party chairman and prime minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, must, for the sake of his party and the country, be inclusive and unite the party (even if it means sharing the spoils) so that he can have one more go at tackling the really serious challenges that this country faces.

## WINTER IN POKHARA

Winter, as a venerable columnist pointed out in these pages last week, does strange things to people's minds. Where else does the urge to huddle together with 5,000 people you don't like very much and talk about politics come from? And overcoats. There's this new trend to bundle up in large penguin-like cloaks from some Scandinavian junket on democracy. This clearly causes over-heating and as a result synapses start misfiring wildly. You begin to think you can change the world, or at least solve all its problems in ten days, tops. The air seems balmy (it is) and you have a spring in your step (trampling over fleshy fellow-humans does make for smooth sailing). God's still in Machhapuchhre, and all's right with the world. Pokhara in winter does something to you: the *lalupates* brilliantly red against an azure sky, the blue-throated Himalayan barbets rushing in a flash of green wings, Griffon vultures trying to keep up with the soaring paragliders, the migrating Siberian ducks making a stopover by the lake. And amidst it all, the Great Nepali Congress Circus in full swing.

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### STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# In the jungle raj



**Despite its poverty and squalour, Bihar has the lowest suicide rate in India. It seems those who expect nothing are never disappointed.**

PATNA - Even a confirmed atheist will become a believer after travelling on the road from Bhittanore on the Nepal-India border to Patna. The road is so bad, drivers say that they simply cannot drive on it if they are sober. So they get drunk even before they get behind the steering wheel. That makes things even more difficult when the bus has to give way to huge trucks passing by at breakneck speed on a single-lane road where drivers have stopped avoiding pot-holes because there are just too many of them. That is why you see many rusty carcasses of buses and trucks that didn't make it. There is a curious term the Indian media uses to describe it: trucks there "meet with a mishap" and "turn turtle" while driving at "breakneck speed".

After such an adventurous journey through the badlands of northern Bihar, Patna is a bit of a disappointment. The city wears a hopeless, desolate look. Everybody has a sense of foreboding about the fate of the state after its mineral-rich southern half became a separate state on 1 January. The new state of Jharkhand takes away about three-fourth of the revenue of the parent state, and nearly all industrial units and most electricity generating plants of the erstwhile Bihar were in the south. Nepal borders this rump of Bihar, and there is an opportunity for Nepal to get a better deal for the surplus electricity we provide to India through the power exchange system. A delay in arriving at revised rates may prompt the power-hungry Bihar to go for more thermal power stations and pollute the whole region even further.

But wait a minute, does Bihar need any more power at the moment? Probably not. This, despite the fact that very little electricity is presently being generated by outdated thermal power plants that need not just overhaul, but total replacement. A Patna industrialist offers an interesting explanation for this: power outages are a sign of good times because they show that electricity use is on the increase as demand outstrips supply and shortages occur. This could, the reasoning goes, spur investment in electricity generation and distribution.

Contrast that with a situation where there is enough electricity and there is no use for it because industry is

stagnant, and the purchasing power of the general public is too low to create further demand. After all, there is chronic shortage of power in India's "garland states" of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat but relatively stable conditions in Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. Calcutta, once notorious for unscheduled power-outs, has ample electricity simply because most industries have fled the state.

It is the same in Patna. When this place was doing a little better, power shortages were so acute that local entrepreneurs built kerosene-lanterns with an improvised top to accommodate a mosquito repellent tablet. These days, stand-by diesel generators are still there, but blackouts are less frequent. Perhaps prompted by this, a new battery-powered bicycle has entered the market, that can run 30 km on a single charge.

Maybe because Biharis often travel on roads like the one I travelled on, they have firm faith in the Supreme Being. This state, despite its poverty and squalour, has the lowest rate of suicide in India. According to Professor KK Verma of the AN Sinha Institute of Social Studies, only those people are prompted to commit suicide who have high aspirations. Those who expect nothing are never disappointed, so they continue to thrive in any environment.

Professor Verma compared Biharis with cotton and sugarcane farmers in Andhra Pradesh who committed suicide by the hundreds when prices of their cash-crop

crashed. They were afraid that they would not be able to repay their loans if the selling price didn't recoup even the cost of production. A similar situation didn't arise in Bihar because bank loans are considered income! Most Biharis farmers never take a loan with the intention of repaying it. If the bank comes calling, they simply close the traffic on the main highway and force political leaders to waive the loans. So maybe we should think twice about selling power to Bihar—they may never pay us back.

At the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Bihar Working Journalists' Association, both the "puppet" Chief Minister Rabri Devi and her husband and puppeteer Chief Minister Laloo Yadav graced the inauguration ceremony. Rabri inaugurated the meet and went away, but Laloo stayed throughout the session. It is clear who holds the real power over here—speakers spread fragrant grease on Laloo but didn't even have a passing reference for his wife the Chief Minister.

Another major worry in Patna today (and one that can have repercussions in Nepal) is that around five million Biharis labourers will be rendered jobless as soon as the Delhi government complies with court orders to shut polluting industries in the Indian capital. Prof Verma is as complacent as only a sociologist could be: "They all will go away to Bombay or Ahmedabad, you see. What will they do here?"

I asked Biharis journalists if there was a way out of the present morass for Bihar. Considering that pessimism is the hallmark of their profession, I was surprised to see that some of them were quite optimistic. They felt that if New Delhi supported Bihar in improving infrastructure and agriculture, there is no reason why it can't regain its past glory. When journalists of a state which seems to be in an even worse shape than us can be so full of hope, why should we in Nepal despair? Bihar is like the land in a popular marketing anecdote for a determined salesman, nobody has shoes, whereas for the more complacent, nobody wears shoes. Talking of shoes, there is no reason why we should not be able to sell some to Bihar given the condition of the roads there. ♦



# Red, Green and Blue

The aim of every revolution is to re-establish a new order with the force of arms. To this end, the guerrillas have to ultimately take on the establishment's praetorian wings: the police and the army. The aftermath of a revolution is the implementation of a new ideology, and the time it takes to implement that ideology depends on the effectiveness of the revolutionary leadership. No political system is perfect, its ideology and working order have to be modified according to the demands of the people and the state of the country. Otherwise, breakaway groups soon launch a revolution within a revolution: it all depends on the state's capacity to accommodate or eliminate dissatisfied groups.

The lessons from insurgencies in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and India are that revolutions find fertile ground in poor countries with unstable and corrupt governments. As the euphoria of democracy wears off in Nepal, and the majority of people find no tangible improvement in their lives after 11 years, some are willing to stake all for change. The response of successive governments in Kathmandu has been to reject this notion of democratic decay because it means admitting failure. So they have always looked at the 'Maolist activities' as an irritating problem. But as the insurgency grows, and the influence of the Maoists spreads, it has also become a vote-capturing slogan for some, while others see it as an opportunity to fight factions within their own parties. Five years and nearly 2,000 deaths later, and after untold economic and social cost to Nepalis, it is time to analyse the government's response and why it has failed.

That the police force has been unable to control the insurgency is an accepted fact. A movement that started in four remote districts of central-west Nepal now has a presence in just about every part of the country. It is important to understand that the police is under the direct control of the home ministry and the prime minister. But there are frequent changes in government, and overt political interference in police appointments and its running, not only because of its security role but also because the police looks after lucrative sectors like the airport, customs and narcotics control. The professionalism of the



DHRUBA ALE

police force has been severely tested by such interference. Their public relations has been poor, and morale is low in the ranks, not least because a Maolist area posting means you are either very unlucky, or without the proper connections.

Even when they had to take on the beginnings of the Maoists insurgency five years ago, the police was woefully unprepared. Police officers from lower ranks who joined up just so that they could earn a salary to support their families are the ones who have mostly been slaughtered in Maolist attacks. With their complete ignorance of guerrilla warfare tactics, antiquated bolt-action weaponry, lack of prompt helicopter support, meagre salaries and compensation to families and consequent morale problem the police have failed to do much about the Maolist threat.

The plans to set up separate units of a paramilitary police force armed with semi-automatic self-loading rifles (SR) will simply shift the burden of

this heavy rifle from the army to the police. SRs weigh 15 pounds and are not at all suitable to be lugged around in mountain warfare. Even the army may find this weapon to be a problem if it has to engage in a future guerrilla war with the Maoists. Besides, at the rate that the M16s are being captured by the Maoists at present, it is only a question of time before the Maoists are likely to have more of the SRs than the paramilitary. Besides, a 25,000-strong paramilitary force will be spread too thin on the ground and will not be effective in covering a district, let alone the whole country. As the army saying goes: 'Mountains eat soldiers.' The logical conclusion is that under the present scenario, the police force cannot effectively fight this insurgency.

The next option for the state is to deploy the army. Some units have been used for patrolling duties in 16 district headquarters after the Dhaulagiri attack in August. But we must ask ourselves, how prepared is the army?

**There is no military solution to this crisis. Pursuing that option will destroy the country, and may ultimately cost us our sovereignty.**

Or, even, how wise is it to involve the army? Deployment of the military cannot be done on the sly, it can only be ordered after the National Security Council has decided that it is the best course and the decision approved by the King.

History is replete with instances where armies have been mauled by insurgents: the defeat of the Americans in Vietnam, the Russians in Afghanistan and the Indians in Sri Lanka. There are a few exceptions where armies have been successful: the Malaya peninsula was one where the British used superior firepower, jungle

The only difference is that in the army, it all gets shut up.

Aside from these structural problems, the army also needs a higher budget, lighter weapons, and better morale if it is to take on the Maoists. The issue of chain of command also has to be cleared up. Who is giving the orders? The present deployment in 16 districts may be useful to familiarise the soldiers with local terrain, together information and to win the hearts and minds of the local people with road building, medical care and other services. But it is a messy situation, and it could turn



MIN BAIRACHARYA

terrain, and a strong army administration to crush the communists. But our Army may have to fight a protracted war against motivated and battle-hardened Maoists in difficult terrain. The consequences could be disastrous. The Royal Nepal Army has not really seen action since its blitzkrieg to wipe out Khapras in west Nepal in 1973, and to crush a poorly armed revolt in Okhaldhunga a few years before that, when about 20 rebels were killed. An army can only be the last resort, if it fails to win a decisive victory in a guerrilla war a negotiated solution has to be found.

The RNA at the moment is not battle-tested, morale in the junior ranks is not that high either because of low pay, the hardship of barracks life, irregular promotions and infrequent home leave. The mismanagement, inefficiencies, waste and corruption problems that plague the civil service have parallels in the military as well.

either way when the bullets start flying.

If it is to be deployed the army brass may demand some things more than a big budget. It would want total army control of the districts involved, acceptance of collateral damage by the government, and army action against civilians who don't cooperate. Added up, this could have an ominous meaning for Nepalis. It will be like declaring an emergency in three districts. Civilians will be caught in the crossfire, there could be a backlash against the military and the insurgents will use it cleverly to hit back. The country will be sucked into a vicious cycle of ever-intensifying violence. And if it looks like the insurgents have the upper hand, there could be massive desertions from both the police and the army. As the country plunges into civil war, there is the ever-present danger of external

interference under one pretext or another.

It is clear from this scenario that there can be no military solution to this widening crisis. The roots of the Maolist insurgency lie in the failure of successive rulers to deliver basic health care, education, rampant graft and corruption, the widening gap between rich and poor, the politicisation of the civil service, inflation, shortages, unemployment, lack of security and the public perception that no one is in charge. The Maolist leaders have capitalised on this public frustration with a populist rallying cry. They have taken the short-cut to political recognition and governance by deliberately choosing a path of armed insurrection. With so much going for them, it is doubtful whether the Maoists are even interested in a compromise. The brief prospect of peace talks have now all but faded. At the level of rhetoric, their demands range from scrapping the constitutional monarchy, declaring Nepal a people's republic and ousting 'Indian expansionism'. But if a compromise is in the cards, they could settle for a change in the constitution, and punishment for corrupt leaders.

However, if the apathy of our rulers to the plight of Nepalis, their misadventure and struggle for survival continues, and lawlessness prevails the Maoists are sure to become a force to be reckoned with. There is no doubt that the business-as-usual approach can only lead to ruin. There is no military solution to this crisis. Pursuing that option will destroy the country, and may ultimately cost us our sovereignty. ♦

*(Dr Kanak Bahadur KC used to be with the Royal Nepal Army and is now running a private medical practice.)*



MIN BAIRACHARYA

## LETTERS

### P SAINATH

Thank you for publishing P Sainath's excellent article 'Rationalism and nationalism' (#26) which is one of the most cogent and well-argued pieces I have read in a long time in these intolerant times. And there I saw the reason for all the intolerance and bigotry amidst us: the twisting of facts, scapegoating and deliberate manipulation of media that has sown communal discord throughout the region. Nepal has been a convenient scapegoat for



India, and the backlash was what we saw in December. The street violence in Kathmandu was just the latest episode in this ugly saga.

**Lal B Rai**  
Kathmandu

I was reading Nepali Times and watching Star News. And as usual the Indian channel had a piece on smuggling from Nepal to India via the 'open border'. While this is true, it is only half true. Smuggling cuts both ways. There is plenty of smuggling from India to Nepal (as has been

over decades). The crooks from UP and Bihar are not saints. The Indian Press conveniently leave this out. Maybe you can do a piece on this to give this a more balanced coverage.

**S Shrestha**  
by email

### ANIL SHAH

I am not someone who writes letters to editors, but I was prompted to do so after reading Anil Shah's bold and forthright piece on the current state of the country 'Think nationally, act individually' (#26). He raises an important point about the different reaction from various sectors of society: the traditionalists, the

establishmentarians, the revolutionaries, and the escapists. But I think the best part of it was his advice to us to stop reading articles like his and start doing something about the state of the country.

**J Thapa**  
Kathmandu

### LESS POLITICS, PLEASE

I am a recent reader of your impressive colourful weekly. Nepali Times' lack of sensationalism fills a gap in sane journalism. The silent majority unable to voice their thoughts and frustrations in any forum need a fair platform. It is most

galling to see our so-called leaders unable, time and again, to rise above their petty interests and put the interests of the nation first. As a result, we have had to witness the terrible tragedy that occurred recently. Even now, there is no introspection or analysis, and life goes on merrily for these jokers. Please continue to voice our concern about everyday life and continue to devote less space to politics, which we get ad nauseum in other journals.

**K Joshi**  
Kathmandu

### APOCALYPTIC

I smiled when I read your editorial (#25) claiming that it is now time to look on the bright side of things, see the silver lining etc. Here we go, I thought, something

to cheer about and maybe even throw our hats off in celebration of.

I was sadly disappointed, then, to note that the four or five issues have been positively apocalyptic: Close to the edge, point of no return, hepatitis scares, bankrupt banks, maobadis, earthquakes, fire-unpreparedness, edifice complexes... Thank you for making me feel like a pustulous Job.

I am not Nepali, but I have no doubt my friends in Nepal feel even worse. What next, NT, the black death? That said, it's still good to read you. Keep the paper flying, but please, keep your shirts (and hats) on.

**Masha Shlyakhova**  
by email



# FM as the bogeyman

**HEMLATA RAI**

The history of radio broadcasting in Nepal is closely linked with the struggle for democracy. The present state-owned Radio Nepal started life as Democracy Nepal Radio when it was established in November 1950 with the sole aim of attaining democracy. Its broadcasts were a powerful symbol of the freedom of the press and the right to free expression in the fight for democracy against the century-old Panch oligarchy.

History took a U-turn last week when the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC), headed by a journalist-turned politician who had once struck a blow for a free press, issued a directive banning independent news and current affairs programmes on FM radio, because, as a Ministry official put it, it thought it was contributing to "undermining nationalism".

The MOIC edict now allows FM stations only to broadcast information obtained through 'official' sources and transmit material obtained from state broadcasters. The directive also limits the number of members on FM station boards to three at most, one of whom should be from the Ministry. Board meetings without the presence of



COMMUNICATION CORNER

## The government ban on news on FM radio is seeing a backlash led by a parliamentary committee.

the MOIC representative is not allowed. Other clauses mandate that broadcast material produced by individual FM stations be submitted to the Ministry for permission seven days before the planned broadcast. It goes without saying that the Ministry reserves the right to stop it from going on air.

After receiving the MOIC circular, some of the FM stations terminated their current affairs

programmes, while others defied the ban and continued their regular news items this week. The government has so far not taken any action against those who've ignored its directive and officials are tight-lipped about the whole affair. But there are signs that officialdom will attempt to use government media to discourage FM stations from running news programmes.

"This is not censorship. The

government's concern is only about making the media more accountable. Besides, nowhere in the world does FM radio broadcast news collected through their own sources," says Sri Ram Poudel, Secretary of the MOIC, parrotting the official explanation.

Independent media analysts, unsurprisingly, do not buy the government's argument. The international media community is also critical of the move. The Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers (Reporters Without Borders-RSF) was the first international institution to appeal the government to "go back" on its decision to "limit press freedom by depriving the Nepali population of independent news".

In an interaction programme last week in Kathmandu that included media persons, human rights activists and legal practitioners, the government came under fire for a move reminiscent of mechanisms used by

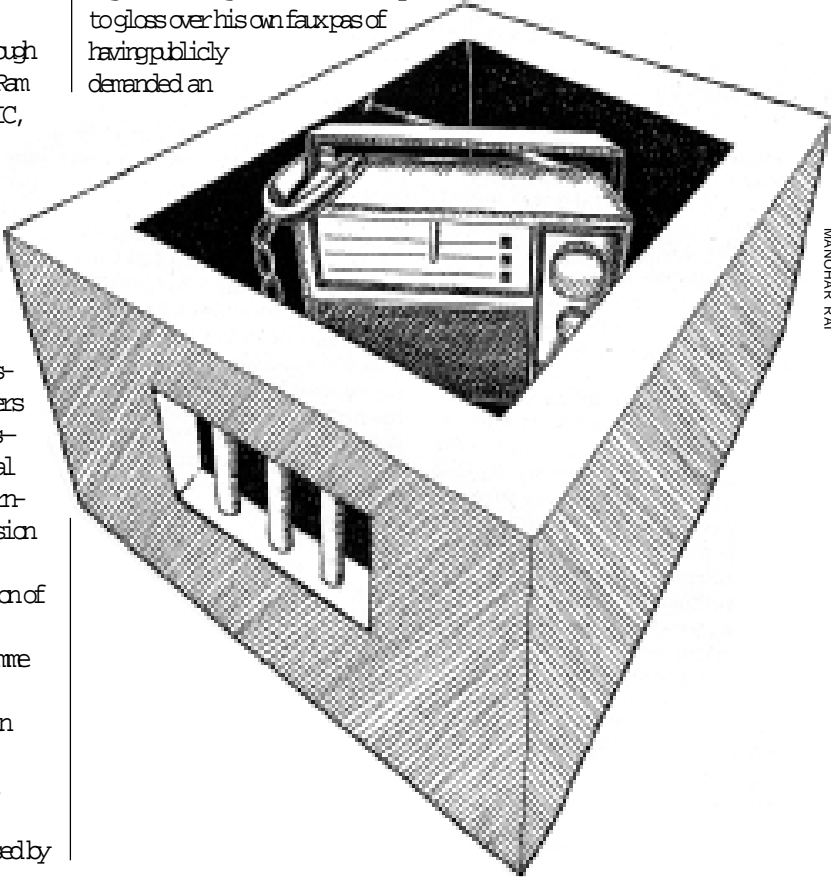
the Panchayat administration to gag the press. Member of the National Human Rights Commission Kapil Shrestha said that the decision was "authoritative nostalgia." "The government is conducting a systematic attack on the press. This move is part of an attempt to muzzle civil society as a whole," human rights activist Krishna Rahadi said.

Although the 2 January MOIC decision conveyed to the country's 11 FM stations in a backdated letter on 16 January came as a sudden move, a ranking official at the Ministry said, on condition of anonymity, that the government had been "feeling pinched" by the coverage these stations were giving to various national issues and that Minister of Information and Communication Jaya Prakash Prasad Gupta had been contemplating the crackdown for some time. It is learnt that Gupta himself took the initiative to push the ban through in the wake of the 26-27 December riots, during which some FM stations were said to have heightened tensions by broadcasting jingoistic reports about the comments allegedly made by an Indian actor about Nepal.

Most analysts see Gupta's righteous indignation as an attempt to gloss over his own faux pas of having publicly demanded an

apology from the actor and announcing a ban on his films till such time as the "apology" was made. This is not the first time Gupta has made noises about reining the independent media. In August 2000, Gupta attempted to bring changes to a regulation governing print media, but was forced to withdraw after the parliamentary committee rejected the proposal. The proposed amendment, which would have private newspapers renew their registration annually, came in for sharp criticism from almost everyone.

The controversial FM news ban was possible because the minister found a loophole in the broadcasting licence given to stations. The licence disallows "news" broadcasts, and FM stations had been circumventing the clause by calling their information broadcasts anything but news. And until last week, the authorities hadn't done anything about it. Some argue that the legality of the clause against news is itself questionable as it contradicts the Broadcast Act and the Broadcast Regulation, which demand that news be produced "fairly and impartially", but does not specifically ban news. The 2



MANOHAR RAI

Licence holders (kind)	Area	Frequency (MHz)	Transmitter (watt)
Radio Nepal (state)	Kathmandu Valley	100	1000
Radio Sagarmatha (public)	Kathmandu Valley	102.4	100
Kantipur FM (commercial)	Kathmandu Valley	96.1	500
Image Channel (commercial)	Kathmandu Valley	97.9	500
Kathmandu Metropolitan City (public)	Kathmandu Valley	106.7	100
HBC (commercial)	Kathmandu Valley	94	500
Hits FM (commercial)	Kathmandu Valley	91.2	500
Lumbini (cooperative)	Rupendehi District	96.8	200
Madanpokhara VDC (public)	Palpa District	106.9	100
Creative Eyes (commercial)	Hetauda	92.9	250
Koshi FM (commercial)	Biratnagar	94.3	500
Birat FM (commercial)	Morang District	96.8	200
Pokhara Multipurpose (cooperative)	Pokhara Valley	Not decided	100
Annapurana FM (commercial)	Pokhara Valley	Not decided	500

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

# White man's burden



It was Kipling who said it best, as ever. "Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst, where there ain't no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirst. On the road to Mandalay, where the flying fishes play. . . . etc etc." Nobody ever understood expatriate life better than the author of those words. He may be out of fashion today for all sorts of imagined sins, but Kipling was a writer's writer. And his insights still stand.

This all came about as I was driving between Patan and Kamaladi on one of my frequent forays across Kathmandu. I was sitting at the traffic light on the Kathmandu side of the Bagmati Bridge, minding my own business, humming a little tune. No, not the Road to Mandalay, that came later. All at once a bicycle hurtled by on the left side, crossed in front and darted through the intersection against the red light. "So what else is new," I hear you snort, getting ready to turn the page. But wait. Onboard the bike was one of my sort, a foreigner of decidedly pale complexion, and not a tourist either. That started me thinking about why we folk leave comfortable lives of real or prospective affluence back home and head for these hills. The cynic of me immediately thought of Kipling. His writings about India, and what used to be called Burma, are often



I've been to some gatherings lately where the talk among foreigners was pretty discouraging. You'd think that these people were actually affected by the things they were complaining about—bandhs, shortages, the WAY THEY DRIVE!!!

pilloried by misguided types as racist or imperialist. But that's ignorance talking. Kipling knew his subject matter, and it was the Brit abroad that he wrote about best, the sort who came to the tropics because "there ain't no ten commandments and a man could raise a thirst".

Road to Mandalay is about a British soldier bemoaning his lot back in Blighty after a long tour "where the dawn comes up like thunder outa Chin-er 'cross the bay". I know what he's on about. I spent two separate but equally dreary years in between foreign postings, learning that "once you've 'eard the east a-callin', you won't ever 'ead ought else". But more to the point are the absence of those ten commandments, or at least that perception by some of those who seek postings in poorer, warmer, more interesting lands. The man on the bike, and he knows who he is, is here because of that and he's not alone. Not that he's a great sinner by ignoring the red light, but he's breaking the cardinal rule—my cardinal rule—of expat behaviour. Do as you would do at home, not as

you please. And no, I'm not Colonel Bluffton-Tufton-Smythe blathering on about setting an example for the natives. It's just common sense. You're a guest here, don't steal the silverware or spit in the ashtrays.

Yet that urge to spin the commandments, or whatever you call the restrictions from back home, is powerful. I sometimes succumb myself, but only when driving. So I know I'm being ever-so-slightly hypocritical by attacking the bike rider. He was just the catalyst. I'm reading a book now that makes me sick, not the book itself but the protagonists. It's about expat life in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, specifically a crop of foreign me'er-do-wells who spend their days teaching English and their nights in brothels, enjoying two dollar sessions with prostitutes. Their cynicism and utter disregard for Cambodia and its people is palpable, thanks to the author's own disgust for his fellow foreigners in Phnom Penh. We've got a long way to go in Nepal before the sizeable expat community here starts to inspire that sort of revulsion; it probably never will. But I've been to some gatherings lately where the talk among foreigners was pretty discouraging. You'd think that these people were actually affected by the things they were complaining about—bandhs, shortages, the WAY THEY DRIVE!!! Let's be honest. Except for the driving, we haven't got that much to complain about. In fact, I'm going to stop right now. It seems to raise a thirst, and then I get tempted to disobey those Ten Commandments. Okay then, perhaps just a small one-one for the road. ♦

January directive lists subjects related to community development as areas the radios could focus their broadcasts on, but leaves out politics and civil rights. "It is an undemocratic and illegal move," says Sindhu Nath Pyakurel, newly elected president of the Nepal Bar Association.

Some independent media analysts interpret the decision as a new phase in government control of the media, which they say started in far western Nepal, where taking in or distributing pro-Maoist newspapers or even those with news on the Maoist movement is not allowed by police decree. Gupta has been critical about the coverage private media have given the Maoist insurgency and has repeatedly suggested some kind of media control, saying that widespread coverage incites insurgency.

The government decision is likely to draw criticism in the upcoming parliamentary session too. The parliament's Development Committee summoned government officials on 23 January to explain the rationale behind the decision. Unconvinced by the official explanation, the Committee has directed the government to reverse the MOIC decision. Raghuraj Pant, a former journalist and member of the Committee, told us that the Committee will "take action" against government if the government does not comply immediately.

"I suspect a gap between the government's intention and the language it has used in the directive," says a hopeful Gopal Guragain of Communication Corner, an independent producer of current affairs radio magazines for FM radio stations outside the



COMMUNICATION CORNER

Valley. "But if the government really means what it says, that will disturb the whole democratisation process. Rural communities with access to FM stations rely on them for information."

Nepal became the first country in South Asia to allow community radio stations in 1997 when Radio Sagamatha went on air in Kathmandu. It also adopted a liberal policy regarding private broadcasters. The establishment of FM revolutionised radio production norms and the listening habits of the Nepali population. There are presently six FM stations in the Kathmandu Valley and another five operational outside the Valley. Two others, Pokhara Multipurpose Co-operatives and Anapurna FM were granted licences as recently as 9 January this year. Meanwhile, over 25 applications are pending with the MOIC.

Locally managed radio stations offered an alternative medium to rural communities, which have

limited access to print media and are largely neglected by the state-run Radio Nepal, whose role as a public service national broadcasting apparatus was altered in 1991. Following a government provision dictating that the broadcaster earn its running costs from advertising, its focus changed from a public broadcaster to one that is more entertainment based.

"The FM radios have helped empower the people, they have provided an alternative means of information and forum for public debates on a range of issues," said Vinaya Kasajoo, a promoter of community-based mass communication. "The undemocratic move of the government against the FM radios shows that the government is scared of the efficacy of private radio in informing people in ways crucial to uplift their decision-making abilities about national issues." ♦

## Chintan convalescing

Well-known human rights activist and lawyer Gopal Siwakoti "Chintan", attacked by unknown assailants on the night of 17 January, says the police has made no attempt to nab assailants even a week after the incident. "This silence is alarming," says Chintan, now recovering after emergency treatment. "They've not even come to get a first-hand account from me, even though I filed a formal complaint with the Anamnagar police office on 18 January."

The National Human Rights Commission too is appalled by the neglect. "We're concerned about the inaction," says Kapil Shrestha, member of the NHRC. "We'll follow this incident to its logical conclusion."

In what appears to be a well-planned attack, a woman called Chintan at home on the day he was attacked asking him to step out on the street to collect a packet she was delivering for his son. He did accordingly and was on his way back after waiting 15 minutes for the caller to show up when he was attacked. He escaped with a broken knee and nose and a wound on the head. Two passers-by, who are reported to have seen three people fleeing the scene of crime, helped him get home after the attack.

Doctors at Kathmandu Model Hospital reported the incident to the police as soon as the injured Chintan was taken there but the police did not come to the hospital to draw up a first information report (FIR). Instead they are reported to have told doctors to continue with the treatment and that the FIR could be filed the next day. "I've no idea who may have attacked me," says Siwakoti. "I may have made many enemies by looking into cases as I do from Arun-III to the Lauda lease," he adds.

Besides being among the handful of activists responsible for the World Bank withdrawal from the controversial Arun-III project in 1995, Chintan is one of the few human rights activists who has consistently raised a voice against police excesses in the course of suppressing the Maoist movement. For his pains, he was arrested by the police two years ago and kept in custody for 11 days.

## More work disruption

New Year's was a strike and so was the day after. Now there is the threat of more disruption, the only consolation is that this time there'll be *chakka jams* affecting the movement of vehicles and not full-scale bandhs. The chakka jams would begin 26 January, if the government fails to fulfil the 13-point demand put forth by the Federation of Nepalese Transport Entrepreneurs (FNTE). Here's a schedule of the FNTE's protest programme: A protest rally on 26 January, another protest rally "with vehicles" on 2 February, an hour-long chakka jam in Kathmandu Valley at 9 am on 7 February and another two-hour chakka-jam in the Valley from 3-5 pm on 11 February. If the demands are still not met, Phase Four of the protests will begin, FNTE says. This one would involve a day-long Valley-wide chakka jam on 16 February, a similar protest west of the Narayani River on 26 February and another one east of the Narayani, in Chitwan on 5 March. The following are the FNTE's demands:

- Take back the government's decision to ban 20-year-old vehicles
- Guarantee purity of petroleum products based on international standards
- Stop foreign vehicles from commercial operations in Nepal
- Stop running 'fake' Sajha buses (hired from private operators and run as Sajha)
- Release impounded vehicles and drivers by taking their insurance policies as guarantee
- Stop punching holes in driver licences (there's one for each major violation)
- End irregularities in vehicle inspection
- Stop import of new vehicles
- Introduce competition in petroleum product imports
- Stop sale of kerosene at the petrol pumps
- Stop import of fake vehicle parts and lubricants
- Provide industry-like facilities to transport entrepreneurs, and
- Simplify double-triple taxation on motor vehicles

## Makings of an epidemic

Nepal has begun to show signs of the being gripped by a major HIV/AIDS epidemic, says the National AIDS and STD Control Centre. Though the number of Nepal's HIV/AIDS infected remains "low" (1,807) it could be much higher given the poor testing facilities.

The recent numbers are based on tests of 182,180 blood samples. Among the HIV positive, the majority (1,063) of men were clients of sex workers, and of 536 positive among women, 384 were sex workers. The remaining 110 women were homemakers, who contacted the virus from their male partners. Besides, another 196 with the infection were intravenous drug users, infected by sharing needles. Another three got the virus through blood transfusion.

Most of those with HIV/AIDS are in the 20-29 age group. Also among the HIV positives are 19 children, 11 boys and 8 girls, victims of transmission from their parents. The Centre warns that although only 142 people are known to have succumbed to HIV/AIDS so far in Nepal, there is every possibility that the problem could be worse since there is no way of knowing how far the infection has penetrated the hinterland.

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# To climb or not to climb

Whether Machhapuchhre (6991m) should be opened for mountaineering expeditions or not has been debated. This beautiful mountain, that rises about 24 km due north of Pokhara and often depicted reflecting on the Phewa lake, has become a symbol of the stupendous scenery that Nepal has to offer. Poets, painters, and photographers find inspiration in this soaring pyramid. Nepalis and visitors alike are awe-struck by its nature-sculpted pinnacle of rock and ice that dominates the Annapurna range. What is most impressive is that the terrain rises from a sub-tropical Pokhara, with its banana and bougainvillea at 900 metres above sea level, to nearly 7,000 metres all within a horizontal distance that would take 30 minutes to drive if there were a highway.

A large part of the debate were the views expressed by some Pokhara residents to a news agency. Some said that climbing on Machhapuchhre should not be allowed because it is beautiful and also because it has religious significance. Others felt that further studies should be carried out, and still others believed the opinion of people in nearby villages should be taken before deciding, whether or not to open the mountain.

Let's take these questions one by one. Banning climbing only because the mountain is beautiful has no rationale. The prettiness or otherwise of the mountain cannot determine whether it should be climbed or not. If that were the case, Ama Dablam would also qualify for a ban, and so would Pumori and other beautiful peaks. And how do you quantify something as subjective as beautiful anyway? Isn't Everest beautiful as well, and how about Annapurna II, or Dhaulagiri?

It is the height and the beauty of a mountain that attracts mountaineers. Just look at the statistics: of the 78 expeditions that went to the Khumbu region in 1998, 10 attempted Sagarmatha (for height) while 31 tried Ama Dablam (for beauty). In the Alps, Matterhorn on the



**Banning climbing only because the mountain is beautiful has no rationale. The prettiness or otherwise of the mountain cannot determine whether it should be climbed or not.**

Swiss-Italian border is one of the most beautiful peaks. It was first climbed in 1865, but the rush to climb it has not diminished and the village of Zermatt below it has become one of the most famous tourist resorts in Switzerland. Given that Machhapuchhre is twice as high as Matterhorn, its attraction for tourism is enormous.

The second argument concerns the mountain's religious significance. We can look at examples elsewhere. Machhu Picchu in Peru is today a very important tourist site because of its religious significance. Similarly, on 27 August every year, Mount Fuji is climbed by hordes of Japanese of all ages, praying and enjoying the trek to the top. In Nepal itself there are many other mountains that are actually considered holy but which are open for climbing and some of them even have the names of gods and goddesses:

Gauri Shankar, Annapurna, Baudha Himal, Ganesh Himal.

On the question of further study, since Annapurna was conquered 50 years ago, there have been voluminous studies on this mountain range. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has been there for the last 14 years and it has enough data on tourism and the environment of the area.

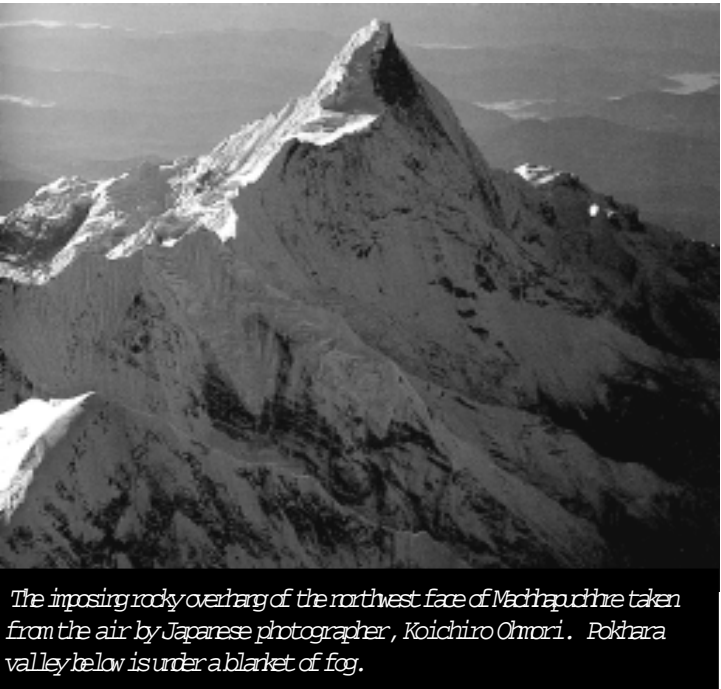
The fourth argument calls for seeking the opinion of inhabitants who live at the base of Machhapuchhre. The truth is that of all the 151 peaks opened in Nepal till now, the opinion of the villagers living at their base has never before been a consideration. Why this sudden interest in what the locals are likely to say? Rather, since Machhapuchhre was open for climbing till 1965 and then closed, it becomes important to examine why the peak became off-limits to climbers after that.

It had nothing to do with

security or the lack of it. The reason given so far and one that has been internalised by a generation of Nepalis, is that this peak has great religious significance for the Gurung who live below it. That Machhapuchhre is sacred to the Gurungs is nothing more than a myth, and it is easy to speculate that it had something to do with Col JOM Roberts, a British Gurkha officer who led both the reconnaissance (1956) and expedition (1957) teams to the mountain. The climbing team had to retreat just 45 metres short of the summit due to heavy snowfall. Roberts writes in his preface to the account of the expedition, *Climbing the Fish's Tail* by Wilfred Noyce (London 1958): "Everybody seemed to be climbing mountains in Nepal and I flew at once to Kathmandu in a fever of anxiety lest some trespasser had already had the effrontery to ask permission to attempt Machhapuchhre." He continues: "So Machhapuchhre became for me the ideal mountain, a personal possession yet out of this world, unattainable but mine by illogic right, brooding over a country and a people which will shape the rest of my life."

It would seem natural that Roberts should wish that no one should succeed on a mountain he had begun to believe was his own and which he had failed to conquer. In the 1960s, Col Roberts happened to be Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Kathmandu and it is not difficult to imagine that his sentimental advice to the Foreign Ministry (that handled expeditions) regarding Machhapuchhre's sanctity influenced the fate of the mountain.

In 1993, I was chairman of the committee formed to suggest suitable Nepali names for peaks



with foreign names. I visited the Modi area, meeting villagers to collect required data. Last March, I was at Sandu hot springs of Machhapuchhre village development committee itself. On neither occasion was I able to learn of local names for any snow peak. I, however, did discover some cultural minutiae that may be of interest to readers:

\* The people living around Machhapuchhre do not have a specific name for it, but call all the peaks 'Kling', which means snow in the Gurung language. Since the peak does not influence their lives directly, it does not hold any importance for them. Therefore, Machhapuchhre does not hold any religious significance.

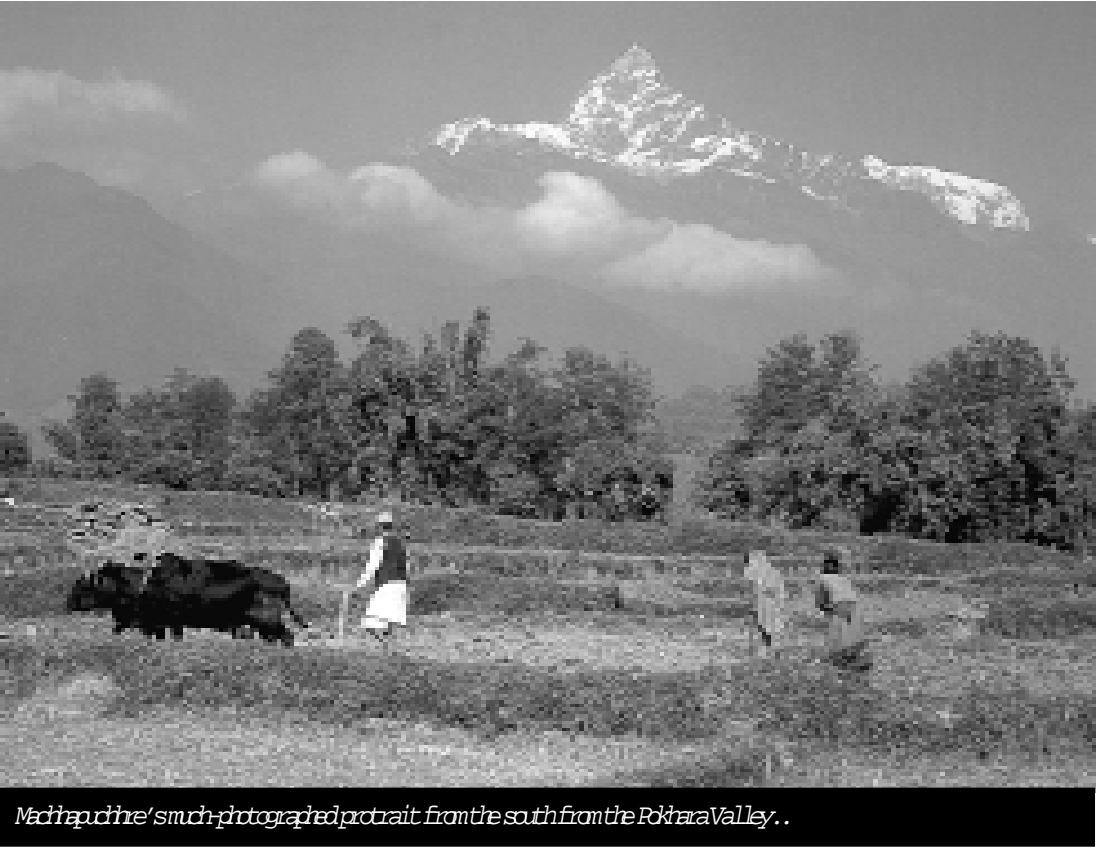
\* For the protection of their sheep and goats, the mountain people perform puja at sites along the route to high pastures during the seasonal migration in spring and autumn. They also revere the nearby rock faces as *hyu-la* (a local deity).

The only religious site along the Modi is Temon on the way to in the Annapurna Sanctuary (Devthali). Thousands of trekkers and scores of climbers trespass the actual venerated site. Why is it that a religious site, Devthali, can be visited by foreigners, but a site without any religious significance, Machhapuchhre, cannot? If there is official concern

for the sacredness of Gurung religious places, the logical step to protect them from desecration would be to begin at the Annapurna Sanctuary itself.

Since Machhapuchhre does not hold any religious importance for the Gurung community, there is no reason to deter it from climbing. In fact, the mountain should be made open and permission for first attempt should be granted to the team that commits the largest donation to the International Mountain Museum in Pokhara, through a bidding process. Machhapuchhre is a virgin peak, and if it is opened there will be many expeditions to climb it. In 1998, 31 expeditions came to climb Ama Dablam and they paid a royalty of \$62,000. Machhapuchhre will attract a lot more expeditions, generating more revenue and creating employment opportunities. The peak is not the monopoly of individuals of Pokhara Bazar with their sentimental ego. Machhapuchhre must be utilised for the benefit of people living around it. ♦

*(Dr Harka Gurung is a noted geographer and a former tourism minister. He was associated with two international expeditions to Everest, an unsuccessful one in 1971 and a successful one in 1988.)*





# Civil Disobedience in the west

ASHUTOSH TIWARI  
IN DHANGADHI

Six months after successfully forcing the government to free them from the vicious cycle of indentured servitude, ex-kamaiyas (former Tharu bonded agricultural labourers) in western Nepal have made history again. According to data available as of 24 January, from the early morning hours of Thursday, 18 January, 2001, about 3000 ex-Kamaiya families in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts started to move peacefully from 51 different makeshift camps into various undesignated chunks of government-owned land.

While doing so, contrary to what appeared in some Kathmandu-centric 'national' newspapers, the ex-kamaiyas were careful not to encroach upon forest land, not to chop down trees and not to build their shelters on privately owned or otherwise contested properties. This is borne out by the fact that even after five days no one had been arrested, and neither had the local administration issued any statement opposing their actions. Except for incidents here and there of the few angry villagers who wanted to either keep the open spaces open for grazing purposes or create community forests, the public, on the whole, has been quite

**This is the first time that free, poor, indigenous yet landless people have issued a frontal challenge to the government.**

supportive of the former kamaiyas' actions.

A total of almost 1,500 highwas was occupied, after which the homeless former-kamaiyas parcelled out 10 kattas (around six and half ranganis) of land under the supervision of their designated leaders among all their families. So far 19 open spaces have been taken over in Kailali and Kanchanpur. In Balchaur of Bahiya village development committee in central Kailali, up to 500 families moved in from various camps clearing shrubs, dividing up the land, building sheds and even assigning names to newly emerging bastis.

Arguably, this is the first time in Nepal's history that thousands of free, poor, indigenous yet landless people, possessing no skills other than agricultural, have issued a frontal challenge to the government. Their challenge was that the government should either help them settle permanently in these newly occupied areas or soon show them where land is available.

Either way, the ex-kamaiyas want the government to fulfill its own promise to speedily rehabilitate them. The reason behind the drastic step was that

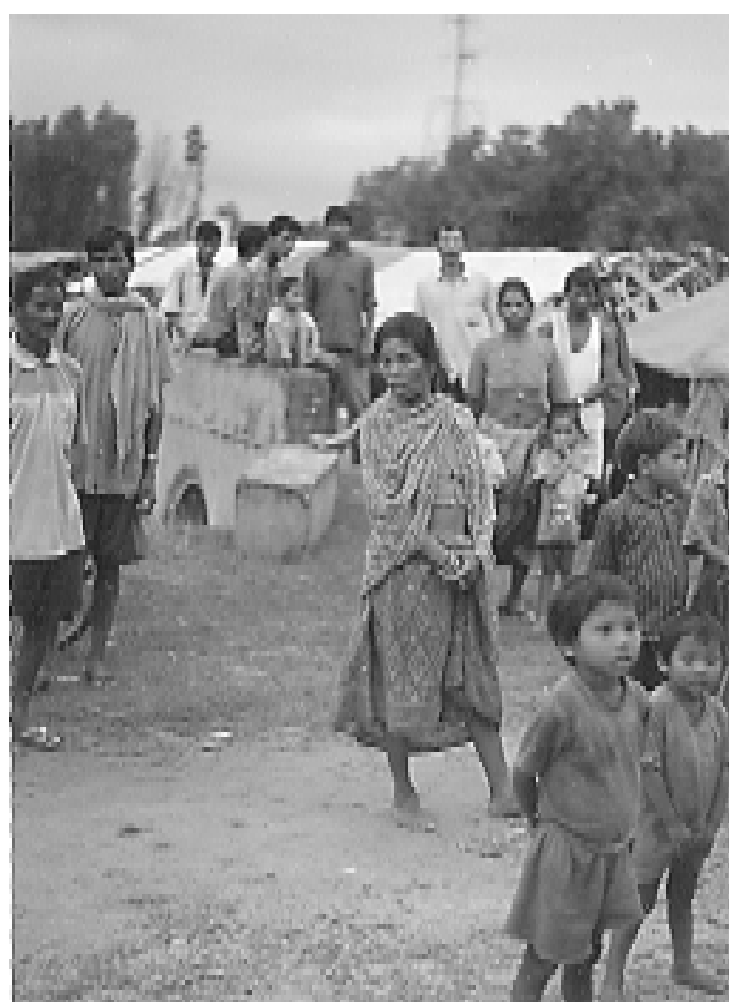
only after each free family owns 10 kattas can concerned NGOs, INGOs, and other bilateral and multilateral agencies move in to assist the government in rehabilitating the ex-kamaiyas with programmes such as nutrition, construction, health care, education, skill-development and income generation. There would be no purpose to continue to hold rehabilitation programmes for ex-kamaiyas while they were living as internal refugees in cramped spaces in their own ancestral land.

Explaining the reason for the drastic move, Yagya Raj Chaudhary, the BASE activist who helped spark off the movement to free kamaiyas last May, says, "No other pressure tactics seemed to work. We sent a letter to the Prime Minister to demand land. We lobbied our MPs. We sought help from the press. We organised sit-ins in the offices of the local District Development Committee and the Chief District Officer. We even blocked traffic on the East-West highway for a day. Now that we are breaking the law by occupying government-owned land, maybe something will happen."

Activists also argue that with enough national problems of its own,

the government would not really bother about looking into the issue of the former bonded labourers most of whom were driven out of their landlord's estates last July. "We decided to start occupying government-owned land as an act of peaceful civil disobedience," says Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, President of Backward Society Education (BASE) who is also a 1994 Reebok International Human Rights Award Winner. "The first phase of our movement was about achieving unconditional freedom from debt bondage. That, we accomplished. All we are doing now is making it easier for the government to come to a decision. Either show the promised land to the ex-kamaiyas or help them settle permanently in these occupied spaces."

"The government said that it would give us land by Dasain," adds Raj Deo Chaudhary, an ex-kamaiya who leads the Kamaiya Struggle Committee. "That did not happen. Then we were told that we would get land by Maghi [mid-January]. That did not happen either. Now that we have moved to the open space near Manehara river [not far from the town of Dhangadhi] and have measured our shares of 10 kattas each, we are not



Kamaiyas at makeshift camp in Kailali.

going to move to any other place. We have always done nothing but farming, and we are anxious to start farming on our own land for our own families." ♦

(Ashutosh Tiwari is affiliated with Kathmandu's Martin Chautari and is presently assisting activists leading the kamaiya movement.)

## COMMENT

by BRUNO PHILIP



## "Daju, Pristina kati tada hola?"

You should learn as many languages as you can. There is no better ice-breaker than speaking to people in the middle of nowhere in their own mother tongue. While teaching French in Kathmandu in the early 1980s, I must say I did not pay much attention to teaching myself Nepali. After all, I reasoned, there were going to be very few opportunities after I left Nepal to say "kasto cha tapailai", and so I concentrated instead on making Nepalis truly Francophone. Don't know how well I succeeded in that, or if the French was any use for my Nepali students in their later lives. From Kathmandu, I went on to become a journalist, criss-crossing the world's hotspots, and only then did I realise how useful this language from the Himalaya would be to me in some of the most unlikely places.

Ten years later, I found myself based in Delhi covering the South Asian region for a French newspaper. Everywhere I turned in India, I would run into a Nepali. Some of them, like security guards at embassies and waiters in restaurants would be



East Timorese refugees greet Gurkha soldier.

**You should learn as many languages as you can. There is no better ice-breaker than speaking to people in the middle of nowhere in their own mother tongue.**

pretty obviously Nepali because of their Mongoloid features. It was a good opportunity to brush up on my rusty Nepali *kura*, and I would suddenly spring their mother tongue on them by saying something like "malai euta kukhura ko tarkari, piro haleko". They would first be shocked, then they would smile broadly, and give me exemplary service. Soon, I found there were many Nepalis just about everywhere in India, and it was only because they didn't have Mongoloid features that I had never noticed them. So in Bangalore, there are *chata* owners, porters in Gadhwal, factory workers in the industrial town of Okhla on Delhi's outskirts, and at one point even Nepali soldiers in the Indian Army fighting in Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula. You can now run into a Nepali on oil rigs in Angola, a manicurist in Minnesota, a guard on a floating casino in Macau, Nepalis in Kirghizstan training farmers there to grow vegetables. There have been no sightings yet on Antarctica.

But the real problem in India was that as my Hindi started becoming as good (bad?) as my Nepali, and the two languages suddenly merged into one

another, making my attempts to speak either of them pretty unintelligible to whoever I was trying to talk to. "Ap ke gamu hunchha" would tumble out of my tongue before I could correct myself.

While covering the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan I had to go to Kabul and ran into a British spook who was a former Gurkha officer. Speaking a common language other than English or French got me admission into the one and only pub in Kabul at that time in the British Embassy. Both of us found the fact that we were boozing away in Kabul and cracking jokes in Gurkhali highly surreal.

After being re-deployed to Europe by my paper, I had to go to Kosovo to cover the peace agreement in 1999 between NATO and the Serbs. The press corps was allowed to cross the border just a few kilometres inside Macedonia on the road to Pristina. And there they were, marching along the road behind the British tanks, looking completely exotic with their short stodgy frames, slit eyes and high cheekbones—the unmistakable sight of a Gurkha soldier in action.

They looked smart in their berets and camouflage uniforms, and exuded good training. Many of them were being used in de-mining operations, and we heard some murmurs that the Gurkhas were being used for the really dangerous part of the operation. One Gurkha soldier and his officer were killed while trying to defuse a land mine in Kosovo during the peace operation.

So I decide the best way to ambush a Gurkha soldier is to accost one from behind a tank, and say "Daju, Pristina kati tada hola?" And that is exactly what I did. You should have seen the look on his face: first shock, disbelief, puzzlement, and then a broad grin and a whoop of laughter. "Oh, tapain kaha bata aunu bhayo?" Carrying on a conversation with someone who speaks Nepali with a French accent on the road to Pristina does not happen to everyone everyday.

Later that year I found myself covering the crisis in East Timor, and there were fears of big massacres. Many thousands of people were unaccounted for, and there was a need to guard the places through which the refugees had fled to West Timor. The Gurkhas were entrusted with guarding the border to check the infiltration of West Timorese militia. With their jungle warfare training, the Gurkhas were doing a brilliant job and they looked very much at home here with

their submachine guns and khukris tucked on their side as if they were cell phones. The Gurkhas took the hottest assignments in the extreme east of East Timor with complete nonchalance. I must say I had an edge on the competition because I could get details of the activity along the border from my *daju-bhais*.

So the moral of the story is that you should learn as many languages as you can. There is no better ice-breaker than speaking to people in the middle of nowhere in their own mother tongue. ♦

(Bruno Philip was South Asia correspondent for Le Monde, and is now with the paper in Paris.)

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BIZ NEWS

Vague prescription

The Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has decided what it believes should be done with the ailing Nepal Bank Limited (NBL) and Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB) although the decision remains largely unclear. Some government officials we spoke to had no clue as to what the report said. A sub-committee report adopted by PAC last week says there have been procedural lapses in actions taken by the central bank, which Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) officials admitted to at hearings. The final word is that NRB's efforts at bank reforms have so far been illegal and that reforms should henceforth be carried out in accordance with the law.

The report does not mention "handing over banks to foreigners", the over-arching theme at its hearings, nor does it instruct the government not to do that. The rather verbose, five-page sub-committee report, says everything but how the government should proceed with its plan to hand over management of the banks to professionals.

One prescription says former officials and directors were responsible for the mess (no mention of politicians though)—which we all knew—and recommends action against wrongdoers who it does not name. Unlike previous decisions, when lapses were pinpointed and specific suggestions made, this time it remains unclear. All those responsible for what happened should have been punished in accordance with the law, the report says. The report goes on to add that both NRB and the Ministry of Finance are responsible for the mess—not a revelation though—and instructs them to be aware of the law and act responsibly. The PAC also found fault with NRB for not employing a clause (29 a) in the law that gives it authority to take-over banks and dismiss their management. NRB says it took a consultative approach instead, after slipping once by calling for proposals for managing the banks without seeking their concurrence—especially in the case of NBL in which the government has a minority shareholding.

PAC also says that no study was undertaken to assess the impact of the "serious" work before initiating it, despite admission by government officials at hearings that the banks could collapse if left as they were. PAC adds that it is unclear who would be responsible for the consequences after new management teams were hired—NRB, MoF or the directors of the two banks?

Power for power

Nepal and India have agreed to sell more electricity to each other. The Nepal-India power exchange committee that met in Kathmandu last week agreed to exchange 150 megawatts of power, up from the existing pact to give each other up to 50MW. Presently, Nepal imports 50MW of electricity and exports about 37MW. Nepal Electricity Authority says the new arrangement will enable it to use the surplus energy after some power projects now under construction begin supplying to the central grid. Nepal and India exchange power at Rs1.60 per unit. The power exchange would entail construction of 132KV transmission lines connecting Butwal and Anandnagar, Birgunj and Motihari, and Dhalkebar and Sitamadi. Nepal has already put together finances needed for the new construction on the Nepali side of the border.

Kerosene cheaper

The Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) announced a major reduction in the price of kerosene last week but shortages of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) continued despite assurances of increasing supply to ease the problem. On 14 October the government raised the prices of petroleum products, raising kerosene rates by 100 percent—from Rs13 to Rs 26 and fixing another rate for rationed fuel. Later, the government gave in to widespread protests and reduced the price to Rs 22. Kerosene is now available at Rs 17 a litre, while one-rupee reductions have been made in both petrol and diesel prices.

Dry Port nears completion

Nepal's largest Inland Container Depot (ICD) or dry port, at Alahu near Birgunj, will be ready for operations mid-February—11 months behind schedule—when contractors are expected to finally hand it over to the government. Two other dry ports at Bhairahawa and Biratnagar are already operational.

Over 70 percent of Nepal's trade takes place through Raxaul bordering Birgunj. The new dry port with a broad-gauge rail link with the Indian system is expected to heavily reduce transport costs, both on raw material imports and export of finished products. A \$23.58 million World Bank loan and another \$5 million contribution of the government funded the ICD. The rail link was built with Indian aid.

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Can Nepal Do IT



There may be millions of global players, but there's always room for a hundred speciality players.

The CAN Info-Tech 2001 is creating a lot of interest as usual. This is one of the few trade events in Nepal that is a truly multi-audience platform there's something on offer for businesses, consumers and the curious public. IT is an area of business where Nepali firms made breakthroughs relatively early in the last decade, and stayed ahead of other South Asian countries (except, of course, India). This is also perhaps the only sector where business dictates government policy and not vice versa.

The important question, however, is whether we have been able to make the best of the opportunities that we've been faced with. Do we still have a competitive edge compared to the other countries around us? Are we only looking at the domestic market pie or can we take a chunk of the global market? Are there fast-growing companies in this sector or is it just the number of companies that is increasing rapidly? Where are we and where do we want to be?

The nature of our industrial policy and problems with transportation mean that it makes more sense to keep the hardware sector focused on internal rather than global competitiveness and growth. The software and services sectors are areas of the IT industry that can and should be setting their sights beyond Nepal's horizons. The establishment of transcription and call-centre businesses, for instance, is an encouraging development. But again the issue is whether we have a competitive advantage and whether the volume of business coming our way is increasing.

Nepali business is always plagued with oversupply, and trampled back by a herd mentality. Though there are a few big national players, there has been no movement towards their transformation into large corporations. Most companies here are generally associated with an individual, and this means their growth horizon shrinks. In order to

have a high multiplier factor, it is important that existing players raise the entry barrier by corporatising their operations. Further, there have to be enough plans on the drawing board at any given time to generate human resources and so ensure business growth.

There's a common feeling that Nepali companies may simply not

have a high multiplier factor, it is important that existing players raise the entry barrier by corporatising their operations. Further, there have to be enough plans on the drawing board at any given time to generate human resources and so ensure business growth.

There's a common feeling that Nepali companies may simply not



A stall at last year's CAN Info-Tech.

be able to compete with global players. What is really important here is looking at the entire gamut of IT businesses and finding the right niche for Nepal and its capabilities. It's just like replicating the carpet and pashmina niche in the crafts and apparel fields in the IT sector—there may be millions of global players, but there's always room for a hundred speciality players.

Nepal itself provides enough internal business opportunities, like the helicopter-service business (Here come the Flying Trucks, #24). The lack of good communication and transportation systems in far-flung areas of the country provides tremendous opportunities for business. For instance, getting apple producers in Margha and traders in Birgunj networked together could move

tremendous advantage. The role of IT in development experiments could be very crucial.

Tourism is another area that can really benefit from an IT revolution, whether in terms of services provided to tourists or to operators. Mountain climbing would be safer and conservation efforts could be better understood, the spectrum of benefits is wide.

The issue is therefore to be able to understand our own core strengths and work them out vis-à-vis the domestic and international markets. It is not only about having the right laws but also about having IT vision for this country. Since the private sector is more pro-active in this area, this is definitely a space to watch. CAN you do it? ♦

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

FEEDBACK

by PREM PAUNJOO

Employers' blues, actually

Since the write-up 'Hotel blues again' (#26) is also related to our organisation, we have been obliged to publicise our views in order to set right the illusion that has been artificially created. It is our responsibility to make you aware of the reality, whether they are taken positively or not.

The article mentioned was clearly against the principles of impartial journalism and clearly takes the side of hotel employers and uses insulting words against workers and unions in an indirect manner (like "union bosses"). It is also absolutely wrong to write that unions have cited examples of Singapore and Indonesia with regard to the service charge. Instead, unions have published even service charge rates for a number of countries,

The unions have been kind enough by not making incriminating bills public.

ranging from USA to Europe and the developing countries of Asia. You have tried to project that the service charge exists only in Indonesia and Singapore. You have also called the union's *arablan* illegal. But the demand for service charge is not a revolution. We assume that people can distinguish between an *arablan* and a revolution—putting forth a small financial demand for collective bargaining is never a revolution. Anyone with general knowledge about the industrial relations system should know that it is normal trade union practice.

A 10 percent service charge is only

an incentive that is in practice in hotels, restaurants and catering services across the world, although percentages may vary. We have cited different rates and are flexible enough in this regard. We claim the practice is international, but have never claimed that the rate is uniform all over the world—the maximum is in Italy (22 percent), the minimum in Kenya (5 percent) and the normal rate 10 percent. The article certainly gives one the wrong impression.

In small hotels and restaurants, the service charge cannot be implemented. It is only in tourist standard hotels, restaurants and

catering service that it can be done because these are visited by high-income groups. This is in keeping with the norms of social justice. So hotel bosses need not worry about workers in small hotels. We take care of them better, so they do not need the crocodile tears of big losses.

Hotel owners have drawn comparisons with Germany—"if Nepali workers should get similar perks as those in Germany, then everything in Nepal should be as it is in Germany". Yes, if standard services are equivalent to Germany, why can't workers claim service charge for quality services? You might have heard the common refrain that Nepali workers are considered most productive outside Nepal. Then why are they always humiliated as less

productive within the country? Yet these workers have not claimed the same percentage or facilities as in Germany.

Hoteliers have mentioned food and medical benefits given to workers. It is in the package of facilities provided by hotels themselves. The service charge is not part of the package and employers or managements will not be spending any money by providing workers service charge. It does not hamper business either, because our wage structure is one of the lowest in South Asia.

Hotels certainly maintain different accounts to minimise what they pay in value added tax (VAT) even through the use of fake bills. If someone wants to probe this aspect, they can visit our office and we can present the fake bills. We are still kind enough not to have made such bills public. We know these things better as workers in the hotels. Government agencies cannot check

this efficiently, but if the service charge is implemented workers will always be present and fake billing will not be possible. That is why hoteliers are putting their collective strength against the service charge.

Lastly, it came as a surprise that the arguments and counter-arguments as prepared by hoteliers have been published in your paper exactly as they are distributed in public. We do not know whether there are people in your organisation paid by the hoteliers or that your entire organisation is prejudiced against hotel workers, but we think you completely blacked out our arguments. ♦

(Prem Paunjoo is a member of the Joint Action Committee of the hotel employee unions.)

(We published the industry reports made available to us in the interest of public information, just as we are doing with the union point of view.—Ed)





**GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA**

CAN Info-Tech 2001 is here. In the last seven years, this has turned into the biggest hi-tech event in Nepal. This year it has a new look and a new venue—the International Convention Centre in Naya Baneshwor, instead of the crowded premises of Hotel Blue Star. No more parking problems now.

The event had humble beginnings. The first CAN Info-Tech fair was organised in January 1995. The executive committee of the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) had only recently been formed, and they decided to kick off with an info-tech show. The response was positive and an enthusiastic CAN decided to make the event an annual affair. The first was more of an exhibition than a business show. Over the years, interest from exhibitors increased to such an extent that last year exhibitors had to be turned away due to lack of space.

Computers and multimedia were the stars in 1995. The next year it was the Internet. But by 1997, the focus had shifted to trade, and price wars were fought with gusto over the next couple of years. In 1999, V-SAT and video conferencing were hot tickets. Price wars broke out again in 2000,

the show. It is also starting an Internet-based distance learning programme in Nepal, offering 350 distance learning courses from the US. Says Tuladhar: "We are focusing on value-added services, and the move towards distance learning is one of our efforts to bridge the digital gap between Nepalis and people in developed countries." The strategy is clear for Mercantile don't just display hardware, also show what it can be used for.

The next largest exhibitor is the World Distribution Group (WDG), which is unveiling non-Intel-based Enterprise class servers like the SUN Ultra Sparc and servers from Dell for the first time in Nepal. The Enterprise class servers are used mostly by big organisations as network servers for data storage. WDG's Anun Shrestha says, "Our strategy at the exhibition is based on complete information, communication and technology solutions, so we will try to present an integrated computing environment." WDG will also have V-SATs (very small aperture satellites) used by businesses in lieu of signing up with an ISP, and hospital management software at the show.



"Do you realize we've been together through three versions of Windows?"

but the larger companies had moved to value-added services. As the prices of everything related to computers went down, companies tried to woo customers by providing more bang for their buck.

"Showing boxes is not interesting anymore," says Pawan Tuladhar of Mercantile Communication. The Mercantile Group has the biggest presence at the exhibition. This year they are highlighting their fibre optic networking equipment. Mercantile Communication is also launching its business and teen portals, [kearn.com](http://kearn.com) and [yokeho.com](http://yokeho.com), at

Another first for the show will be the availability of Wireless Access Protocol (WAP) services, marketed by Worldlink Communications. There's a lot of buzz about WAP overseas, but they arrived in Nepal only a few months ago. WAP provides Internet access to gadgets like mobile phones, palmtops, and personal digital assistants (PDA) as long as the device is WAP-enabled. Yet another company, Sigma Resources, is exhibiting Gateway computers and networking equipment.

Service-oriented companies  
apart, the usual computer-wallahs

## The conference

The motto at all the CAN Info-Techs has been: "Nepal Information technology show and conference." But conferences have been irregular at best. Instead, over the years, the show had begun to resemble more a business event than anything else. The organisers this year have tried giving it a new dimension—by organising a SAARC-level IT conference. Speakers include internationally distinguished people in the IT arena. Even local vendors are bringing in lecturers from parent brands to deliver talks on topics like e-security, application services, and distance education.

The official conference is slated for 27-28 January, over the weekend, but the 250-seat hall booked up long before time. Private companies have also booked the halls for business and tech talks. A company executive was dumbfounded when told that all the seats had been taken.



# CAN Info-tech Ver 7.0

(Pentium IV required)

**The 7th CAN Info-Tech trade show this week focuses on value-added services.**

are out in large numbers. The Pentium 4 War, as we could call it, will give visitors the best prices on equipment. At the entrance you will be greeted with unbeatable prices. As you go on, you'll find the usual array of standard-issue computing and related products, including computer books, software, and UPS back-ups made in Nepal, Taiwan, China, India and the US.

There's even a company, Techno Links, that has created CD-ROMs with a Nepali version of the popular Indian gameshow, "Kaun Banega

Croquet", for sale. Another stall virtually recreates the set of the show.

Webpage service providers are engaged in their own price war, and this is the place to go to get a good deal on web hosting prices and service charges. And finally, there are pager companies also out offering their wares.

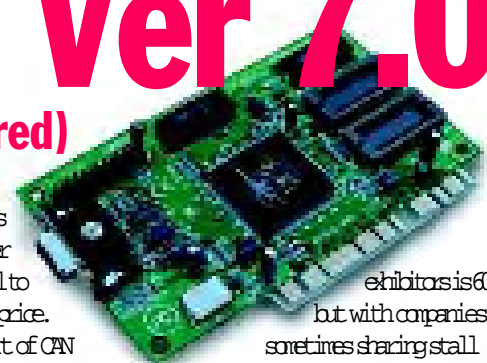
Brands like IG, Samsung, Canon, Epson, HP, Microsoft, Novell, Creative, Acer, Xerox, and Fluke are all represented at the show, although CN Upadhyay, co-ordinator of the show, hastens to add: "Most multinational brands will be represented by their

local counterparts."

This year CN has also provided computer institutes a nether hall to themselves at a special price. This effort on the part of CN has definitely given visitors more to see. Domestic giant College of Software Engineering has the largest area amongst the training vendors promoting their foreign certification plans.

CAN Info-Tech 2001 definitely has a new look about it. Given the huge demands from exhibitors, total exhibition space is more than 1600 sq m. The show is spread over 80 stalls and four halls, and the number of

exhibitor is 60, but with companies sometimes sharing stall space, it's hard to tell. As the IT scenario in Nepal boomed in recent years, CPN Info-tech has been a place where ordinary people can get a feel of the technology to come. Most people went to the first event in 1995 to see computers. This year, it looks like anybody with even the remotest interest in IT should go for a doko. The Pentium 4 may not attract you, but the show is definitely worth a visit. ♦



# CSE AD

# The Internet on th



**MARK TURIN IN LEIDEN** . . . November 2000 was an important month for the history of the Internet in Nepal since it marked the publication of the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) report on the state of the country's IT sector. Entitled *The Internet from the Top of the World: Nepal Case Study*, the 53-page report makes for fascinating reading for

those who want to know the hard facts about telecommunications use in Nepal. The most interesting as well as the most predictable finding of all is that His Majesty's Government emerges badly—rather ironic given that the authors of the report were an ITU team specially invited to Nepal by the National Planning Commission. The same team also published a shorter article,

*Computing at the Top of the World*, in the November issue of *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 42, #11, in which they offer a distilled and punchy résumé of their findings. A section is enough to show their general level of dissatisfaction with the powers that be in Nepal: "Perhaps the government might best pursue an enabling strategy? It needs to get over the mindset of trying to

## A new study offers hard facts about IT in Nepal. Entrepreneurs and the middle class are winners, the only real loser being HMG and

squeeze every dollar of hard currency from every place it can impose a tariff or tax, and get beyond bureaucratic protectionism for inefficient pieces of government, including the NIC" (page 26). Pretty nice stuff.

In the full report we learn that two of the five membership positions of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) remained vacant at the time of going to press, and that as of November 1999, the Nepal Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) employed some 4,661 people, "implying a labour productivity level of 50 lines per employee, around 40 percent of the global average" (page 7). In fact, "indifference", "limited" and "NIC" are words that crop up alongside one another more often than is statistically plausible.

The picture is not unrelentingly bleak, however. According to the authors, the brightest light in an otherwise dark tunnel is Nepal's ISP community, which is "driven by smart, young business people, many educated abroad" (ACM, page 26). Moreover, a genuine "advantage of Nepal's network being relatively young is that it is all-digital with the majority having been installed in the last few years" (ITU, page 9). The importance of the latter point should not be underestimated. The now obsolete and user-unfriendly computers with which people in the West have been battling for years have made many older users wary of adopting new operating systems. This is not the case in Nepal where the first computer many people set their eyes on is a Windows machine with a high-speed modem.

We should not forget that the history of telecommunications in Nepal is relatively short. The first fixed line between Kathmandu and the Indian border was opened in 1914, and it was not until 40 years later that the capacity of the Kathmandu telephone exchange had reached 300 lines. In 1999, the average waiting time to get a line in Kathmandu was more than six years and although some of the districts

have an exchange, no lines are connected. As a form of innovative technology, then, one of the most powerful features of the Internet is that it requires relatively little new infrastructure in order to function. For a country like Nepal, where lines of communication (postal system, roads, etc) are limited and unreliable, the decentralised and low maintenance nature of the Internet may emerge to be a distinct advantage.

The suitability of the World Wide Web as a new mode of communication for Nepal has been shown by the speed at which writers, journalists and academics have embraced electronic mail. On more than one occasion I have met senior scholars in Nepal who were surprised to find that some of their colleagues in Europe had neither Internet access nor email. There is, however, a clear reason for what on the surface appears to be a technological paradox. Whilst European academics might have been content with a fax or a registered letter (knowing that both would arrive), in Nepal the prohibitive cost of international telephone calls (NTC currently gains around 60 percent of its revenue from international operations) together with the unreliability of the postal system left the field open for a fast, cheap and reliable form of communication. This niche has been filled by email. Consequently, Nepal's relatively late involvement with the computer revolution (Internet connections were first established in Nepal in 1995) has had two unexpected advantages. First, the more recent introduction of computers to Nepal accounts for the absence of obsolete hardware. Second, in contrast to the wariness exhibited by some Western professionals, most Nepalis with access to computers have shown only enthusiasm for cheap and instant global communication as offered by the Internet.

Ownership of computers in Nepal is still limited to the urban, educated and well-off minority in the country (PC penetration in

Nepal is at 0.27 per 100 inhabitants). Many more people who do not own computers do have access to Internet technology, largely thanks to the 1,000 or so unlicensed communications kiosks (Public Call Centres, or PCCs) throughout Nepal. These previously provided only phone and fax facilities, but have now added email to their list of services. In Europe and the US, web access and private ownership of computers



## In Nepal the first computer people see is a Windows machine with a high-speed modem

increasingly go hand-in-hand (ever more people are buying home PCs, and cyber cafés are usually frequented by people on the move), but this is not the case in Nepal. Students, publishers and individuals working in the trekking and tourism industries may not be able to afford their own computers, but they can afford to make use of them. Low expense and easy access, together with free web-based email

## CAN AD

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# the roof of the world

## Entrepreneurs and the urban middle those they purport to serve.

services, such as Yahoo! and *hotmail*, are features of Internet communication that have encouraged urban middle-class Nepalis to participate in previously inaccessible global networks. As the ITU report states: "FOCs are helping to grow the next generation of entrepreneurs" (page 10).

One of the most web-affected sectors in Nepal is the media. The People's Movement and new Constitution of 1990, brought



## computer many ndows machine modem.

about by the actions of the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, marked a genuine watershed in the history of Nepal, especially for the print media. Over the last decade, many newspapers, magazines and journals have been established or revived. Whilst increased literacy and greater political awareness have encouraged the growth of print media, the traditional obstacles of printing cost and physical distribution have not yet been overcome. Partly in response to these challenges, many newspapers have created web sites in the past five years. These home pages differ in quality and breadth, ranging from cursory overviews of the publication, with excerpts of a lead story and some contact information, to well-archived, interactive sites with identical content to the printed physical copy. Opinion letters and other comments can now be submitted through the home pages of the publication or by email to the editors, leading to a much higher rate of feedback on articles and features.

The Devanagari font compatibility problem is en route to being resolved by making the fonts used in online Nepali-language HTML downloadable and free, thereby encouraging more

people to use them. It is quite likely that a number of the most widely used fonts will emerge as Internet standards for Nepali text, such as Kantipur, Himali, Jaipur, Presti and Sagamatha.

As a direct result of these changes, the Internet rather than the national archives in Kathmandu may now be the first port of call when searching for specific information on current issues in Nepal. Whilst some of the more established academic publications of Nepal do not yet have their own dedicated websites (most notably *Kailash* and *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*), these journals can be found in libraries all over the world. Many newer publications do have sites where the contents of previous volumes as well as submission guidelines are available. The real changes, however, have not been in the field of specialist journals but rather in news media. Daily updates, keywords search facilities and good archiving mean that online information is taking on a paradoxical 'semi-permanence' previously not associated with newsprint. At present, most online newspapers and magazines in Nepal have issues dating back a few years available online, and one would hope that these archives may soon be extended further to include electronic copies of older and unavailable issues.

The digital revolution has also had a major impact on the lives of Nepalis living abroad. As the number of expatriate Nepalis grows, so too does their social and economic importance back home. Some choose to settle in their host countries, but there are many who eventually return to Nepal after years of study or work abroad. For many expatriate Nepalis, Internet-based communication is a key element in their contact with their home country. Internet news sites, free web-based telephone services (VOIP) to America (such as dialpad.com) and cheap email have cut down the cost and increased the frequency of communication with friends and family in Nepal. Having made good use of the new technologies during their time abroad, it comes as no surprise to learn that Western-educated, English-speaking and computer-literate Nepalis returning to Nepal have capitalised on the possibilities of Internet entrepreneurship. The ITU report states that "funds transfer" is an area ripe for Internet involvement: Nepali "expatriates often send funds, and a trustworthy mechanism for electronic funds transfer should be provided" (page 32). If successfully implemented, facilities would cut out those middlemen whose chosen career is creaming a percentage off the salaries of hard-working expatriate Nepalis.

Success stories? There are a few, although limited to the private sector of course. By January 2000, there were eleven licensed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) of which at

least nine were operational and Nepal had the lowest dial-up Internet tariffs in all of South Asia. Conventional communication technologies (telephone and television) are still state-controlled, but Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been largely left to their own devices. One direct result of this freedom has been fierce competition between the different ISPs in Nepal to secure customers and provide technical support. Moreover, the authors of the ITU report have singled out HealthNet for special praise for "actively pursuing network connectivity", and Pradhan's expansion plans are greeted with approval.

Amusing and unexpected paradoxes? Well, the success of .np as a Top-Level Domain (TLD) may in part be down to the fact that .np is related to 'Nippon', which would explain why according to the ITU report, "there seem to be a relatively large number of Japanese hosts using .np".

Overall, the report is a mine of information about the state of telecommunications in the Kingdom. There are a few entertaining and unexpected revelations, but the real strength of the study is that it offers some hard facts about the use of Information Technology in Nepal. Entrepreneurs and the urban middle class emerge as the winner, the only real loser being HMG and those they purport to serve: "some Ministry Secretaries who were contacted did not even know if their ministries had web sites". Oh dear. ♦

The ITU report is freely downloadable from the Internet at <http://www.itu.int/ti/casestudies/nepal/nepal.htm>

(Mark Turin is working on a grammar of Thangmi, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal, and is the webmaster of the Himalayan Languages Project at Leiden University.)



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SHARP AD

Stall No.	Floor	Name of Exhibitor
A1	G	Sky Infosys
A2	G	Ishan Infosys
B3	G	Shrestha Amrit Traders
B4	G	Shrestha Amrit Traders
B5	G	Shrestha Amrit Traders
C6	G	Himalayan Shangrila
C7	G	Touch Stone Sales and Service P L
C8	G	Touch Stone Sales and Service P L
C9	G	CNC Pvt Ltd
C10	G	Himalayan Dot Pvt Ltd
C11	G	Mips Pvt Ltd
C12	G	Geospatial
C41	G	Mars International
C42	G	Associated
C43	G	Jingle Inc
C44	G	Excatly Support & Training Center
C45	G	Seagate Computer Inst.
C76	G	City Computers
C78	G	Agni Paging
C79	G	NIDC
C80	G	Computer Care Pvt. Ltd
C81	G	DTI
C82	G	CSTC Pvt Ltd
H83	G	The Readers Concern
C84	1st	Self Electronics
C85	1st	Connection
C88	G	Daisytek Computers
D13	G	Nucleus Software
E14	Hall	Beltronix
E86	G	Computer Security Co.
E87	G	Pioneer Trade marketing
F15	G	Trade Wings
F16	G	Trade Wings
F17	G	Easy Page
F18	G	Mars Trading International
F19	G	Mars Trading International
F20	G	Lalit Trading Co
G21	G	D&D International
G22	G	The Waves Group/ GM Software
F23	G	Infocom Online Pvt Ltd
F24	G	Infocom Online Pvt Ltd
F25	G	Sati Computer Trade Concern
F26	G	Sati Computer Trade Concern
F27	G	Sati Computer Trade Concern
F28	G	Mazda International Computech
F29	G	Arihant Multisystem
F30	G	Interactive Group
F31	G	Interactive Group
F32	G	IT Nepal Pvt Ltd
F33	G	Star Office Automation
F34	G	Star Office Automation
F35	G	CSE System and Office Automation
F36	G	CSE System and Office Automation
F37	G	Laser Manufacture Co Pvt Ltd
F38	G	Arihant Multisystem
H39	G	Pacific Office Automation
O40	G	Kagaj Kothi
F46	G	International Electronics Concern
F47	G	International Electronics Concern
F48	G	ITNTI
F49	G	Mercantile Communications Pvt Ltd
F50	G	Mercantile Communications Pvt Ltd
F51	G	Mercantile Communications Pvt Ltd
F52	G	Mercantile Communications Pvt Ltd
F53	G	ITNTI
F54	G	International Electronics Concern
F55	G	International Electronics Concern
J56	1st	Computer Advance System
J57	1st	Mercantile Communications Pvt Ltd
J58	1st	D & D International
K59	3rd	College of Software Engineering
K60	3rd	College of Software Engineering
K61	3rd	College of Software Engineering
K62	3rd	College of Software Engineering
K63	3rd	College of Software Engineering
K64	3rd	SSI Kathmandu Center
K65	3rd	Visit Nepal Network
K66	3rd	SBS The e-media Library
K67	3rd	Techno Links Center
K68	3rd	Easy Links Pvt Ltd
K69	3rd	SSI Kathmandu Center
K70	3rd	Academy of Information Technology
K71	3rd	Lord Budhha Education Foundation
K72	3rd	Everest Education Foundation
K73	3rd	Software Group Pvt Ltd
K74	3rd	Softech Computer Inst.
L1	1st	PC World
L2	1st	
L3	1st	BOK
L4	1st	NIC
L5	1st	Business Age
L6	1st	Kantipur Publications
L75	3rd	Informatics Computer School
HALL		
Gauri	G	World Distribution Nepal
Shankar	G	Mercantile Communication Pvt Ltd
Koshi	G	Sigma Resources
Gandaki	G	Worldlink Communications



LONDON – In what now seems like the information Stone Age—the 1970s—a major concern was that the global flow of news and information was one-way. The dominance of the Northern media, the argument went, meant the South was forced to view the economic and political state of the world through western eyes. The debate raged and fizzled out in the 1980s, a side-show of the Cold War.

Fundamentally, nothing changed. Technologically, everything did. Media conglomerates now dominate the world as never before and the old arguments about information flow are opening up again. Is the Internet liberating thought or reinforcing the views of yesterday? Is globalisation simply another term for westernisation—Americanisation? Such questions are addressed in a new book *International Communication: Continuity and Change* by Daya Kishan Thussu, a journalist who teaches mass communication at the University of North London.

Thussu examines the awesome growth of western media empires that has accompanied the technological revolution. He sets this in the context of the corporate colonisation of the planet, where branding is the name of the game. Over 1.2 billion people use a Gillette product and 38 million eat at McDonald's daily. The world's ten



# Branding news

Despite the growth of the Internet and satellite television, western—mainly American—media forces continue to shape news coverage and analysis.

leading brand names from Coca-Cola to Marlboro are American.

So it is with the media. Associated Press sends 20 million words around the world per day against Reuters' three million and Agence France Presse's two million (both of which are anyway western-based). The world's top eight newspapers and magazines and four of the six top international business newspapers and magazines are American (the other two are British). Only one of the top ten global TV networks is non-American and it is British (the BBC).

Developing countries seem to have little chance to compete or even begin to develop comparable media empires. World Bank communications specialist Akin Rotoyinbo is not so sure. Referring to the 1970s debates about a so-called New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO), he said to the Commonwealth Press Union conference in Barbados last

November that new technologies were bringing in a "level playing field" favourable to developing countries. But he added: "The media in developing countries who could be the biggest beneficiaries of the Internet revolution are not adapting themselves quickly enough to the demands of the technological revolution."

Thussu agrees that in recent years the South has developed a contra-flow. His thoroughly researched book details the growth of pan-Arabic television, the rise of Phoenix's Chinese Channels which reach 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and the international channels of state Chinese television, CCTV. Brazil's TV Globo has spread to Italy, France, Russia and China. India's Zee TV claims to be the world's largest Asian television network, and dispoised, says Thussu, to become a major player in international communication.

But, he adds, examples of counter-flow of cultural products "in no way show that the Western media domination has diminished... The information divide remains as pronounced... as during the NWICO



debates." Nearly 75 percent of international outgoing phone traffic is generated in just 23 Northern countries. "Less than three percent of the world's population—generally male, middle class and fluent in English—is part of the cyberculture, despite the hype associated with the Internet."

Meanwhile, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation claims that every 24 hours it reaches nearly half a billion people. It adds: "Virtually every minute of the day, in every time zone on the planet, people are watching, reading and interacting with our products... from the moment they wake up until they fall asleep." CNN, already powerful when it expanded hugely as part of Time Warner in 1996, is seen by 150 million households in 212 countries. For many, says Thussu, it remains the voice of the US government and corporate elite, despite claims to be free from US geo-strategic and

economic interests. In this market-driven environment, these mega-media empires are reducing complex international issues to soundbites and sightbites. Foreign coverage is out back. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka barely gets mentioned but when the West bombs Yugoslavia, coverage is almost wall-to-wall. In his speech Akin Rotoyinbo said: "Today all management... is the management of information... The primary commodity of the 21st century is information." The World Bank's 1989-9 World Development Report said information was becoming as important as land and physical capital. This may be true, but we seem so mesmerised by new technology that

words are becoming almost secondary. Yet in the end it is the words—the message—that matter, not the means by which they are delivered. There's no indication that the quality of reporting or writing is better than it was 30 years ago; on the contrary it has declined. Electronic speed is diminishing story depth. Thussu's book ends on a sombre note: "As corporations strengthen their control over the portals of global power while a majority of the world's population is excluded from the benefits of the emerging electronic economy, the potential for social unrest is enormous." ♦ (Gemini)

Derek Ingram founded Gemini News Service in 1967 to counter the imbalance in international news.

OPINION

MARTIN KETTLE

## A President without precedent

More than four years ago, Bill Clinton had a remarkable conversation with his rogue adviser Dick Morris. Their subject, as recorded in Morris's book, *Behind the Oval Office*, was one of Clinton's favourites—where he will rank in the history books when he leaves office. Morris took the initiative in the discussion. Eighteen of Clinton's predecessors deserved to be ranked in the top three categories, Morris suggested. The first rank of presidents was reserved for those who did great things in great times: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt. The second was for those who did great things but in less compelling eras: Jackson, Polk, Reagan (in Morris's view but not Clinton's), Theodore Roosevelt and Truman. In the third tier, reserved to presidents who did some great things but whose claim to higher rank is contestable for some important reason, Morris placed Madison, the two Johnsons, Arthur, Cleveland, Kennedy, Nixon and Bush. "Good list," Clinton responded. "Where do I fit in?" "Right now, to be honest, I think you are borderline third tier. It's too early to rank you yet, but you are right on the cusp of making third tier," Morris responded. "I think that's about right," Clinton agreed. The president then asked Morris what he would need to do

Clinton shaped and marked the actions of others, even while having little to show for it himself.

over the next four years in order to achieve second tier rank. Morris suggested three big things and four medium things. The big things were to make welfare reform work, to implement the balanced federal budget and to smash international terrorism. The medium things were to begin to eliminate cigarette smoking, to establish national standards in school education, to make further progress towards universal health care insurance, and to use the power of the presidency more emphatically on "non-economic lifestyle issues." "Good list," Clinton said, for the second time in the conversation. "I've got it down. I'll think about it a lot." Four years on from that conversation, perhaps the most unexpected thing about it is how realistic it still seems, inspired of all that has happened in between. Clinton has, in fact, carried out much though far from all of Morris's agenda, and has notched up some other positive achievements too. Welfare reform has been far less painful in the years of plenty than most of its opponents claimed in 1996, although the true test will come in times of hardship. The federal budget has been conclusively balanced, again on the back of taxes on prosperity and full employment, which have turned the years of

deficit into years of surplus. Only the international terrorist agenda remains largely where it was four years ago. On the medium level agenda, the progress has been less dovish. The battle against big tobacco waxed and then waned, leaving Clinton unable to convert major interim victories into a conclusive ending. US education standards have risen in many respects, as several recent official and unofficial reports have indicated, but the overall picture still remains patchy. Health insurance reform remains a major area of failure, a challenge that the Bush administration will have to address even though it does not greatly want to. And Clinton's ability to use the presidential bully pulpit has of course been massively compromised by events since 1996. Most people would instinctively say that Clinton's second term has consisted of four years blighted by the Monica Lewinsky affair. Its shadow has lain heavy across the administration for the final year and a half that Clinton has remained in office. No president since Nixon leaves office so synonymous with a major scandal. And yet Clinton also left office with precedent-defying job ratings. Even in his last days in office, 65 per cent of Americans approve of the job he is doing (only just short



of the peak of approval he reached in the month that the Starr Report was published). After eight years, his ratings exceed those of Reagan, a point that many Republicans cannot even bring themselves to think about. What is more, as he himself observed in a recent *Rolling Stone* interview, there is little doubt that Clinton would have stood for a third term, had the law allowed it, and equally little doubt that he would have easily been re-elected. In his final year as president, Bill Clinton achieved remarkably little to live in the memory or to bequeath to the history books. And yet Clinton remains in some strange but important way the absolutely defining figure of modern America. He has shaped and marked the actions of others, friend and foe, intimate and stranger, even while having little to show for it himself when he left the stage. ♦ (Guardian)

### Everything But Arms

BRUSSELS – The European Commission (EC) last week revised its groundbreaking Everything But Arms (EBA) proposal, which seeks to eliminate tariffs on almost all non-military goods entering the EU from the world's poorest countries—by postponing transition periods on three sensitive products: sugar, rice and bananas. Last September's original proposal would grant duty-free, quota-free access for over 900 categories of goods to 48 countries defined by the UN as the poorest. The proposal met strong resistance from the international sugar industry and European farmers, forcing the EC to revise it. The Commission now has an informal proposal to phase out tariffs on bananas by 2006 and on sugar and rice by 2008. Under consideration is the possibility of introducing a "temporary quota" for sugar and rice based on, among others, the highest level of exports in recent years. Opposition to the original EBA initiative from the EU farm lobby was such that some EU officials jokingly refer to an "everything but farms" initiative. Within the EU, major sugar producers are in France, Germany and the UK. Rice is produced by Italian interests and bananas by multinationals based in Spain. An EU study released last month said the EBA's impact would be greater than originally expected and could cost the sugar industry over a billion euros (\$900 million). A report by Oxfam, however, says the initiative is quite modest and that, "claims that EBA will result in a substantial increase in imports are not supported by data." Oxfam's David Bryer says, "Some developing countries that already benefit from preferential access to the EU market have legitimate concerns. But these can and should be addressed through positive measures, rather than an EU retreat from the EBA proposal." The EBA goes further than any previous EU concession to LDCs (least developed countries) and is a "confidence-building" measure designed to entice poor countries into accepting a new round of global trade talks. "Obviously, the idea is to bring these countries into the world trading system. They now account for only 0.4 percent of world trade and 1 percent of total EU imports," an EU trade official said. EBA builds on a promise by the "Quad Group"—the EU, the US, Canada and Japan—made in May 2000—that it was ready to dismantle duties and quotas on 99 percent of imports from the LDCs. LDCs sharply criticised this, saying it didn't go far enough in granting them market access, as the one percent of total imports still been subject to trade barriers would include "sensitive" products such as sugar and bananas in the case of the EU, and textiles in the case of the US and Canada. Oxfam's report says that under EBA prices received by LDCs would be subject to negotiation: "EBA allows LDCs to export unlimited quantities of sugar to the EU, but at lower prices, probably much lower, than apply to quota-restricted preferences of the Sugar Protocol." ♦ (IPS)

# Estrada, friend to a fault

JOHANNA SON IN MANILA

In the less than three years he was Philippine president, Joseph Estrada was always the generous buddy, loyal to and comfortable with powerful friends of all sorts, yet quite at home with poor people.

His popular touch, which included eating with his hands in Manila's slums, was no pretence. As a youngster he preferred to hang around with the poorer guys in the neighbourhood, and he dropped out of school, unlike his nine siblings who finished university.

Estrada's personal approach was a plus in his political career, which started in 1969 when he ran for mayor of San Juan town in Metro Manila and then took him to the Senate and in 1992, the vice-presidency. This populist style is a key difference between him and Ferdinand Marcos, the other president booted out of office in a popular uprising. It may be why he has not had to go straight into exile after being replaced by his vice-president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo last Saturday.

As he left the presidential palace, the soldiers whose commands had withdrawn their support for him nevertheless reached out to say their goodbyes. Some reporters who had covered the presidential beat were tearful, recalling how he was one of the few presidents who would ask how they were doing. "The military and the Presidential Security Guard like him because they can drink with him," said one military officer last week. This former actor was also generous, quick to whip out 1,000 peso bills (\$20) from his pocket to



Street protests in Manila late last year.

give to those who ask for help, or to a pilot who flies him around. Estrada's feel for the masses—his nickname Erap comes from the Filipino word "pare" or pal—translated into the biggest election win in the country—40 percent of the vote in the 1998 election.

But Estrada's personal approach was also his nemesis. His choice of friends and his standing by them—protecting them from government probes, helping them get business deals—began to grate on Filipinos soon

after he took office in May 1998. These accusations ranged from Estrada helping friend and tycoon Lucio Tan evade a government tax inquiry to making his friend Mark Jimenez, a fugitive wanted in the United States, presidential adviser for Latin America. In mid-2000, Securities and Exchange Commission chief Perfecto Yasay said Estrada asked him to block a probe of gambling magnate Dante Tan, accused of share-price manipulation. Estrada denied these charges.

Erap had to go, but some will miss his charisma. And he may have to re-think his friendships.

The impeachment was spurred by claims in October by provincial governor Luis Singson, a former buddy and drinking pal, that Estrada had received \$8.5 million in payoffs from illegal gambling and \$2.7 million from tobacco taxes. Among the most damaging testimonies was that of a bank vice-president who said she was "shocked" to see Estrada sign documents for a trust account worth \$10 million using another name. Later, a former Estrada official recalled that Estrada told him he had made a windfall from the rise in stock prices of a company he had asked a government agency to help.

Estrada's lawyers and supporters in the Senate, which was sitting as an impeachment court, moved to block the opening of documents prosecutors said would show bank accounts worth \$66 million funded from illegal activity. The pro-Estrada camp won in an 11-10 vote to reject the opening of the documents, unaware that this would ignite street protests. The 11 senators won the vote, but helped Estrada lose the presidency.

By Friday, military leaders had withdrawn their support for Estrada and the majority of the Cabinet had resigned. Estrada called the prosecution witnesses "liars", and said his conscience was clear. In his last hours as president, he offered a snap election, just as Marcos had done in February 1986. After Arroyo's

camp-backed by former presidents Corazon Aquino and Fidel Ramos—rejected it, hundreds of thousands of people massed at the EDSA shrine, put up on the site of the 1986 revolt.

The last few weeks have taken their toll on Estrada, who has lost weight and kept almost exclusively within the presidential palace grounds. Friday night might have been Estrada's lowest point, as politicians from his and Arroyo's side tried to work out his exit and the transition process. At one point, Arroyo supporters said, he spoke of going on leave from the presidency, or being assured of a pardon from Arroyo.

Early Saturday morning talks stalled as a congressman said Estrada was intoxicated and "you can't talk to him sensibly." His drinking habits had already been a joke among Filipinos for some time, along with talk of long gambling sessions and mansions for his mistresses. Estrada fired a new chief of staff last March, after he said that often, he was "the only person sober in the room at four in the morning." Recently, officials said Estrada was trying to change.

During the trial, prosecutors led the discussion to funds from secret accounts he used to build mansions for his mistresses. Estrada's philandering ways were not a liability in Philippine politics. But the corruption claims during the trial were a



Estrada and his wife leaving the presidential palace last Saturday

different matter. They ate into the support that Estrada had gained after he was elected—from intellectuals and progressive activists.

But Estrada's ways may speak more about the ways of Philippine politics. Some wags say Estrada just didn't hide money well. Now Arroyo's camp talks of bringing him to court or seizing his assets. Others say that unlike Marcos, Estrada didn't have his opponents killed. Estrada must have learned a lesson by now—that some people he thought were his friends were not. His associates who figured in the trial, including the man who he said was the real owner of the money Estrada was suspected to hold in the bank, have left the country. Senator Tatad, who moved for the 11-10 Senate vote, turned around and said Estrada should quit.

Still, he remains a likeable fellow to many. Orlando Mercado, Estrada's defence chief who quit Friday, said: "Erap is not a bad person. He is a good friend." ♦ (JMS)

# Still weathering Desert Storm

DILIP HIRO IN BAGHDAD

As Bill Clinton left office, he might have pondered the thought that but for the Gulf War between the United States-led Coalition and Iraq in 1991, he may not have occupied the White House as US President. The popularity of his predecessor, George Bush, shot up in the aftermath of the war, which began in August 1990 when the US deployed its forces under Operation Desert Shield to counter Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. It ended with the 42-day-long operation Desert Storm.

In the subsequent race for the presidency, Democrat heavyweights decided not to seek party nomination, thus handing an opening to the eager governor of Arkansas. Today, Desert Storm has no more bearing on US domestic politics, but its devastating impact on the daily lives of 22 million Iraqis is still palpable.

On the 10th anniversary of the last century's last major conventional war—involving 1.36 million troops, 7,400 tanks and 2,400 warplanes, and costing more than \$82 billion—Iraqis continue to suffer. They survive on a ration of basic necessities, given almost free by the government—a system installed

Ten years later, a new George Bush is in office, Saddam Hussein still rules Iraq, and Iraqis are still suffering.

in January 1991. The US and Britain continue to maintain a 24-hour air surveillance in the northern and southern zones of Iraq, controlling airspace over 60 percent of the country's territory in the name of protecting Kurdish and Shia minorities.

As for the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, besides the continuing humiliation of enduring the Anglo-American violation of its airspace, its most prized natural resource—oil—is under a de facto economic mandate of the United Nations. Though Iraq has been pumping and exporting oil without any UN-imposed limit for the past year, the earnings are deposited into a UN account and Baghdad receives half of that sum. The UN allocates the rest to a compensation fund for those who suffered Iraqi aggression in Kuwait and for administering the UN's oil-for-food scheme, inspections and monitoring.

Ten years on, the vexatious issue of disarming Iraq of its facilities and capabilities for producing non-conventional weapons—biological, chemical and

nuclear—remains unresolved despite a further Anglo-American blitz against Iraq for four days in December 1998. As United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in September 1998: "I personally believe that disarming Iraq fully is never going to be possible. At the end of the day, the Security Council must decide whether Iraq is disarmed to the extent that it is not a threat to its neighbours, that it has no weapons of mass destruction, and that it has no capacity to make weapons of mass destruction."

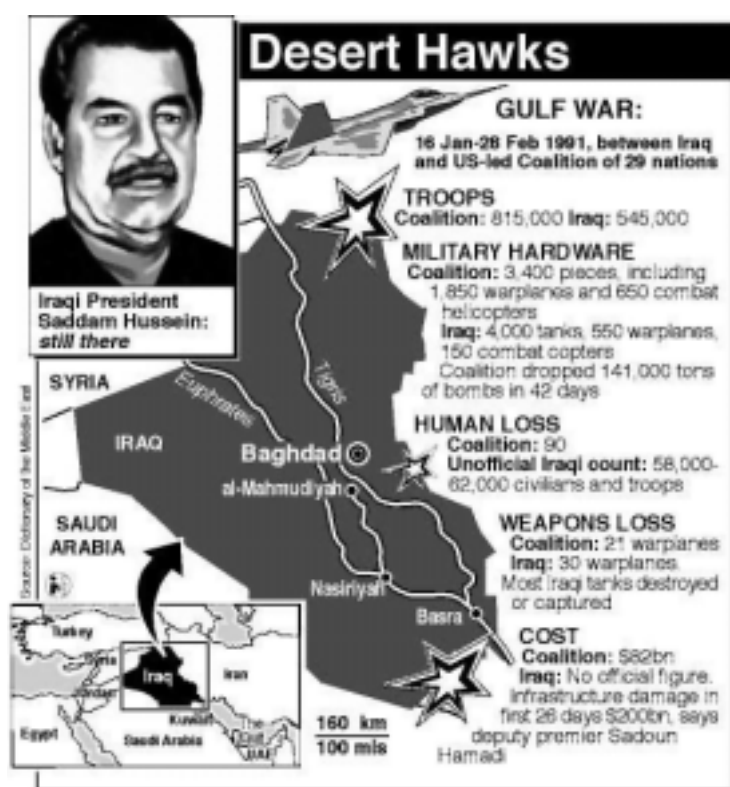
Although three of the five permanent Security Council members take the view that Iraqi disarmament has gone as far as it could possibly go, they have been unable to convince the US, where the anti-Iraq lobby working closely with Israel remains powerful.

The fact that Saddam is still in power has led many Western commentators and politicians to suggest that the Coalition forces should have marched to Baghdad, overthrown the Iraqi dictator and established a democratic order. General Sir Peter De La Billiere, who commanded the British forces

during Desert Storm, addresses the question in his book *Storm Command*. "We did not have a [UN] mandate to invade Iraq or take the country over, and if we had tried to do that, our Arab allies would certainly not have taken a favourable view," he wrote. "Even our limited incursion into Iraqi territory had made some of them uneasy... No Arab troops entered Iraqi territory."

Sir Peter had no doubt that Western troops would have reached Baghdad in another day and a half. "But in pressing on to the Iraqi capital we would have moved outside the remit of the United Nations authority, within which we had worked so far," he continued. "...The Americans, British and French would have been presented as foreign invaders of Iraq and the whole Desert Storm would have been seen purely as an operation to further Western interests in the Middle East."

"Saddam Hussein... would have slipped away into the desert and organised a guerrilla movement, or flown to some friendly state such as Libya and set up a government-in-exile. We



would then have found ourselves with the task of trying to run a country shattered by war, which at the best of times is deeply split into factions. "Either we would have to set up a puppet government or withdraw ignominiously without a proper regime in power, leaving the way open for Saddam to return."

It is noteworthy that Sir Peter was also reflecting the view of

General Colin Powell, then chairman of the US Chiefs of Staff. Now that Powell has taken charge of the state department in Washington, he will have his opportunity to tackle Saddam and Iraq for the next four years. ♦ (Gemini)

Dilip Hiro is author of *Desert Shield To Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War*.



# We don't want a Peru here

Chhalphal, 21 January  
(Excerpts from an interview with Madhav Nepal, General Secretary, Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist-Leninist)

The ruling party holds that Maoists lack political character and therefore at a time for dialogue, numerous reasons are given to hinder talks. Because of the political character of the Maoists, the ruling party has an opportunity to say this. This does not however mean that there aren't any honest people among the Maoists. There are people in that organisation who are for building of an ideal society, for establishing a republic and people's government, for providing direction to the country, for providing equality and justice for all, for an end to foreign intervention in our country's affairs, and for upliftment of the poor.

Could you clarify some of the issues and wrongs in the Maoist line of thinking? First of all let us discuss the new society that the Maoists want to create. Are other parties going to enjoy the same amount of space and freedom in that society? Is everyone, and every political party going to be treated equally? Is everyone going to enjoy the same fundamental rights? Are political parties going to be allowed to present their line of thought and action to the masses? Can they counter the wrong thinking and actions of Maoists? Can they go to the people? Can they meet the masses? Are the Maoists ready to accept criticism?

We say all these should be allowed. These are the rights of every individual. The Maoists have to make all these points clear, spell out their answers to these questions. They should not be bent upon destroying anyone who does not toe their line. We have protested against the negative actions of the Maoists. We have criticised them to help them understand what is wrong with their actions and thought. The Congress is another issue. While we provide constructive criticism, the Congress tries to capitalise on those very issues and gain political mileage. The Congress is not keen on seeing problems solved, and therefore sees nothing good with the Maoist revolution. We have been telling the Maoists to rectify their actions and enter the political arena in a proper way. We are prepared to help them in whatever way is feasible. We think that this is the only way the nation can benefit.

Will the Maoists rectify their mistakes and take corrective action? If the Maoists desire the creation of a new society, want communist movements to benefit, provide new direction to the nation and society, want to rid society of all exploiters, want people to lead better lives and want a better country, they have to give up arms. They have to move according to the wishes of the people and the country. At present, they seem to be more of a terrorist organisation. This has helped the Congress in committing more crimes against people.

The villagers are caught between the police and the Maoists. How can they be freed from this situation? The country cannot accept the terrorist behaviour of either the Congress or the Maoists. Both of them will have to rectify their mistakes. Both have a very narrow vision and line of thought and action. The Maoists smash the hands of villagers who wipe out Maoist slogans from the walls of their houses. If the slogans are not wiped out, police move in and torture these villagers. Therefore, villagers are caught between the frying pan and the fire. The Maoists who call themselves communists are acting like the police. The people's army cannot behave in the same way as the police.

The Maoists have brought to the fore the problems of the country. How do you view this? It is true that the actions of the Maoists have highlighted many problems of the country that had remained hidden till now. Now that the country has taken notice of those problems, if we could use this opportunity for the benefit of the nation it would be very good. The country needs drastic changes, not minor face-saving changes.

The Maoists are attacking and destroying all their opponents. How is the UML going to counter that? To think that one communist party will fight against another is the thought of reactionaries. We do not want to fight with anyone or any particular party. We are prepared to fight any party politically, in the political arena, but if some party wants to destroy us physically then we will have to rethink our line of action. We will be forced to act accordingly if anyone acts against us, and we will react to it in an appropriate manner.

In 1991, Congress workers in Gulmi were attacking our party workers. We asked our followers to retaliate, which they did. We were forced to take that decision. If a situation arises where the UML is forced to form an army and fight the Maoists, it will only benefit the reactionary parties. They will be very happy. We want a political solution to the Maoists problem. We want the Maoists and the Congress to come to the negotiating table and find a political solution. We want to fight against the evils of this society and nation and not fight any other political parties. The attacks on our followers are raising problems for us, and we are really bewildered by these attacks. If this does not stop then we will have no option but to retaliate. Then this country will be another Peru. In Peru, communist parties are forced to raise their own armies, are forced to fight back. We do not want the same situation in this country. We believe that the present crisis cannot be solved with guns.

What is the reason for UML's opposition to the Armed Police Force? If the Maoists are prepared to sit down and find a political solution to the problem, then the formation of an armed police force is not a step in the right direction. Arms will not solve the problem. The police will acquire more arms and the Maoists will do the same. Where will all this end? Only arms dealers will benefit. Nepal's will fight and kill themselves. Nepal's will be the losers and this will lead to the start of a civil war. The only solution can be through dialogue; a political solution must be found. The formation of the Armed Police Force is the work of some insidious elements in the Congress. We do not want the start of a civil war in this country. That is why we oppose the formation of the APF.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I wanted to make him the ex-president but he has turned out to be ex-traordinary  
—Former prime minister, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, on Prime Minister Giring Prasad Koirala's re-election as party president in Ghatara Ra Bichar, 24 January.

Giriraj Babu! Don't you see you can't? You'd better get out.

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Himalaya Times, 21 January 2001

# Petition against deputy secretary

Chhalphal, 14 January

A petition has been filed against Prabhakar Adhikary, deputy secretary at the Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC), by his office colleagues. The case has been filed at the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Adhikary's colleagues accuse him of abusing his authority to assess illegal wealth and of turning his office into a centre of illegal activities. Adhikary is chief of the frequency division.

Earlier Adhikary was posted at the airport under the Civil Aviation ministry and at that time he was in league with many gold smugglers. His colleagues have collected proof of his illegal activities while he was working there and have handed this over to the CIAA.

# Loveless Congress

Suryodaya, 18 January

It has been learnt that women leaders of the Nepali Congress, especially



minister Kanala Pant, are keen to table a motion at the forthcoming NC convention regarding love and inter-caste marriages between members of the NC. Speaking at a function, Minister Pant stated that the UML and other communist parties encouraged inter-caste marriages between members of the party and those parties took the initiative in getting members of their party married if the members so desired. Inter-caste marriages were normal in the communist parties.

The NC, in contrast, only abuses its female members—male members fall in love with female colleagues, use them and then move ahead. NC men do not have a very positive opinion about their female colleagues and this leads to discrimination against NC female members. It is in this regard that minister Pant is going to table a motion soon.

# Koirala coterie

Jana Aastha, 17 January

On 16 January, Sher Bahadur Deuba attended the wedding reception of Inspector Deep Sunsher, son of ICP Pradeep Sunsher JBR. He was overheard saying: "For the new Congress leadership I have taken into account and supported the candidature on the basis of caste, region, sex, plains-based and hill-based, Bahun, Chhettri, Newar, Rai, and Limbu. Let's see what Koirala will do? In his list, there are already nine Koiralas—Giriraj, Nara, Subnil, Prakash, Bipin, Ashok, Sujata, Lila and Narayan. There are three Acharyas—Sailaja, Mahesh and Nar Hari. For the remaining nine he will nominate people close to him—Sukhranj Sharma, Baldev Majhiya, Laxman Ghimire,

Gopal Bahadi, Chakra Bastola, Shanker Pandey, Dil Bahadur Gharti, Ram Chandra Poudel, and Govind Raj Joshi. Where is the place for other people then?"

# Clairvoyant Baba

Jana Aastha, 17 January

For the past few days an Aghori Baba in Galdhi has been predicting the future of many people in this country. It has been reported that people from all strata of society have come to meet him and have him predict their future. He has predicted that Koirala will be in power for the next four years and that no one will be able to dislodge him. The Baba, after studying the hand of the King's chief military secretary, said that this person would get only one more promotion in his life. Sujata Koirala too went over to have him predict her future and it is rumoured that the Baba asked her to file nomination for the Congress CWC. The Baba asked Nara Koirala not to file her nomination.

The crowds at Galdhi are just growing bigger and it seems there is an endless line of people waiting their turn. Officers from the police and army are almost always present there to meet the Baba and it has been heard that soldiers from the nearby barracks go once a fortnight to clean the Baba's ashram. Sources say that the Baba is the same one who had recently been chased away from Peshupatinagar in east Nepal.

# Govt should learn from private media

Nepal Samacharpatra, 21 January

Five years after the entry of FM radio in the country, the Ministry of Information and Communication has banned the broadcast of news and news-related programmes on private FM stations. If news is to be broadcast the station has to name the government source that provided the news.

The only reason for the government action can be that private FM stations were broadcasting baseless news. Among all the private FM stations there is only one that does not quote newspapers as their main source of information. Even this particular FM station has its own newspaper, and airs the news given by its reporters. In many cases the news sent in by the reporter may not have been verified. It may be pre-planned or even false and the government has every right to prevent such news from being broadcast. The government's decision has supported the claim that news published in the papers is false. The government is right in trying to prevent false rumours. But it is not always the FM stations that are at fault. What's more, the private media gives more specific and detailed news than the government media. The government knows of the biased news that Radio Nepal or Nepal Television broadcasts. Biased news will never satisfy anybody. People demand information on different aspects of religion, economy, culture, entertainment, arts, etc, the dissemination of which must be done in an

independent manner, without any pressure from any side. Private FM stations have fulfilled this demand for unbiased information. Many more people in the capital tune in to FM stations compared to those who listen to Radio Nepal. The government should understand why there are so few followers of Radio Nepal, and why people always tune into Sagamatha FM, Classic FM, KATH FM, and the like. The only reason is because they provide more quality information and entertainment than their government counterpart. News of current events is aired immediately, giving listeners immediate access to information. This is a trait the state-owned Radio Nepal should learn to adapt itself to the changing times.

Some people have also assumed that the government decision has been influenced by the Hritik Poshan scandal as well as Bharatiya Janata Party leader KR Malkani's comment. The government has accused private FM stations of fuelling the violence. KR Malkani's comment on Nepal was aired by Sagamatha FM in its seven o'clock news programme "Haal Chaal".

If the FM stations claim that the government has not been able to talk to the Maoists or provide security for the people, that is also true. In saying so they are certainly not supporting the insurgency but only asking the government to solve the crisis. It is foolish to cover up one's weakness instead of facing reality.

Whoever was tuned into Radio Sagamatha on the evening of 16 January must have thought the same because two of the regular programmes "Haal Chaal" and "Aajko Kura" were not aired. People were asked to listen to the programme but the station apologised for not being able to do their job saying that the government had banned the broadcast of news and news-related programmes, and so aired music during the time. Everyone should have the right to express their views in a democratic country, but moves like these only block the path to the development of democracy.

Instead of banning news and related programmes from radio stations the government would have done better to direct private FM stations to only broadcast true and real news and to take responsibility for anything they air. Because the government does not trust private FM stations they need to be constantly monitored. Now private stations can only broadcast news given out by the government media. Why did this situation arise? Why did the same ministers and government officials whose speeches were aired through FM stations create a hurdle for them? If FM stations cannot broadcast self-collected news and information why were they allowed in the first place? The government could have liberalised policies regarding the broadcast of news and information.

This government decision opposes the fundamental democratic right to information and media as laid out in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047, Section 3 and should therefore be immediately done away with. The government should instead follow the example of the capital and focus on spreading FM stations throughout the Kingdom so that all Nepalis have access to news and information and learn to love the culture and tradition of Nepal.

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

❖ **Nepali and Hindi film** tickets bookings online at [www.nepalshop.com](http://www.nepalshop.com)

❖ **Russian Film Festival** Jointly organised by the Kathmandu Film Archives and the Russian Cultural Centre. **Brothers Karamazov (based on Dostoyevski's novel): 26 January Friday, 5:30pm** Tickets at Mandala Book Point in Jamal, GAA Hall in Thamel, Martin Chautari in Thapathali, and all Momo King branches. Rs 100 and Rs 50 per show. For more information ring Martin Chautari at 246065 or email: [chautari@mos.com.np](mailto:chautari@mos.com.np)

❖ **Le Dernier Metro (The Last Ten)** French with English sub-titles at Moliere Auditorium, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. 28 January Sunday. 2pm. Free. 242 832.

❖ **Free movie** of your choice on big screen at The Conference Room, Gazabko Cocktail Café, Marcopolo Hotel. 27 January. 2pm. 416432.

SLIDE SHOW

❖ **Glimpses of Nepal and White Water Challenges** Slide show on Nepal's lifestyle, culture, and the jungles of the tarai. Also the challenges of white water rafting & kayaking in Nepal. 6pm at Ultimate Descents, Northfield Cafe, Thamel. Admission and drinks free. 419295, 426329.

❖ **Challenges and opportunities in re-building and re-vitalising Kathmandu** Slide lecture by Anil Chitrakar. Evening raises funds for a new project of the Kathmandu 2020 campaign: Training teachers to teach better about Kathmandu. Baber Mahal Revisited. 27 January, Saturday. 5.30 pm. Rs 500 per head, includes refreshments at the K2 Bar and a status report booklet about Kathmandu. Reservations at 251647 or [g2@mail.com.np](mailto:g2@mail.com.np).

MUSIC

❖ **Unplugged concert and art show** Voice of the Youth is a joint initiative of Godavari Alumni Association (GAA) and Academy for Audio-Visual Arts and Sciences (AA-VAS). The launch programme is an unplugged concert and art show. Artists, including Dev Rana, George Subba, Tilak Malla, Om Bikram Bista, Yogeshwor Amatya, Bobin Pradhan, Sital Pun, Lasmit Rai, The Mystic and others, will work all day at the venue. Verge Leisure Inn. 26 January, Friday, 4 pm. Rs 555 per head, includes drinks and dinner. Available at the venue or ring 265718.

❖ **Fever at the Jazz Bar.** Piano (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday), piano and violin (Tuesday), live jazz (Thursday and Saturday) and live Irish music (Friday). Contemporary and traditional jazz with international cuisine with drinks from a bottomless cellar, gourmet food and espresso, cognac and cigars. 435741-43 [www.hotelshangrila.com](http://www.hotelshangrila.com)

❖ **Jazz** by Cadenza at Upstairs, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7:30pm—10pm.

DANCE

❖ **Odissi Dance** by the renowned Odissi dancer Madhavi Mudgal and her group to mark India's Republic Day. Sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). The Royal Nepal Academy, 25-26 January. More details at the Indian Embassy. 413174, 410900

❖ **Traditional Dances** every evening at Dwarika's Hotel courtyard. Enjoy drinks from a choice of two bars. Entrance free. Reservations recommended for diners. 479488.

❖ **Dance Party @ Simply Shutters Bistro** under the "Nepal-India *bhai bhai*" title to promote better Nepal-India relations. Baber Mahal Revisited. 26 January 9pm. Rs 500 per person, includes five drink coupons.

EATING OUT

❖ **Chinese Food Festival** A month-long festival offers a wide variety of authentic Chinese cuisine prepared with Chinese ingredients by special chefs. Hotel Shangri La. For reservation and information 435741-43 or [www.hotelshangrila.com](http://www.hotelshangrila.com)

❖ **Authentic Nepali sekuwa (barbecue)** Regular Friday night sekuwa in a lamp-lit courtyard. Starting 2 February at Dwarika's Hotel. Select your own appetisers, momos, salads and choice of meats as well as delicious desserts. Package includes one free drink and lucky draw. Reservations recommended. 479488.

❖ **Weekend Brunch** Mixed cuisine with a salad bar & desserts at The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel. 10:30am-2:30pm. 27 January, Saturday. Rs 550 per person. 411818

❖ **Lavish brunch** with free swimming at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La Hotel. 12pm-3pm Rs 750 with 25% discount for members. 435741

❖ **Chulo Batta.** Local Nepali cuisine—buffet lunch with live Nepali music at the Sunrise Cafe, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Rs 700 + Tax. Noon. Reservations recommended, 248999

EXHIBITION

❖ **Made in Nepal 2001** Seven artists from four different countries display their work on Nepali Lokta paper using natural pigments and dyes. The travelling artists came together in Kathmandu to be influenced by Nepal's light, its people and culture, and to gather and share inspirations. They will start working at their temporary studio at the Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal until 7 February. Visitors invited to observe the works and the process. Organised by Siddhartha Art Gallery. 25-30 January. 11am-6pm.

SPORTS

❖ **Royal Stag Maitree Football Match** Nepali film stars vs. the trekking stars of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN). The friendly match will feature film actors Jal Shah, Bhuwan KC, Gauri Malla, Melina Manandhar, Madan Krishna Shrestha, Vijaya Lama and others. Proceedings will be donated to the Nepal Federation of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Organised by Om Films and TAAN. Dashrath Stadium. 1:30 pm. Tickets 500, 200 and 50. Available at the gates of the venue.

FESTIVAL

❖ **Shree Panchami.** 29 January, is celebrated as the birthday of Saraswati. Saraswati temples, like the one behind Swoyambhunath, are packed with young and old praying to the goddess of speech, letters, arts and sciences. Parents take their kids to temples and teach them their first alphabet. The day also marks the beginning of spring. The King visits the Hanuman Dhoka Palace at Basantapur Durbar Square.

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

CLASSIFIED

**Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre.** Kamaladi. Reiki II 31 Jan—1 Feb. Video screenings, meditation, residential retreats, art workshops, yoga, dance, Reiki treatment. More info at 221875. [www.dharmatours.com/hbmc](http://www.dharmatours.com/hbmc)

**House for rent** Bhaisepati. Three ropanies. Three-storey building with dining, kitchen, three bedrooms, pool, servants quarters, guard room. Ring Prakash 981024199.

**The most intricately carved statues in Kathmandu.** Handmade Nepal, #211, Sanchaya Kosh Building, Trievi Marg, Thamel. 253361. [www.handamde-nepal.com](http://www.handamde-nepal.com)

**Naya Lito baby food and Nitti Gritti Porridge.** Available in all major department stores.

**Soft toys, doll and flower-making.** Six-month course Rs 4,000. Ring Shama at 521196.

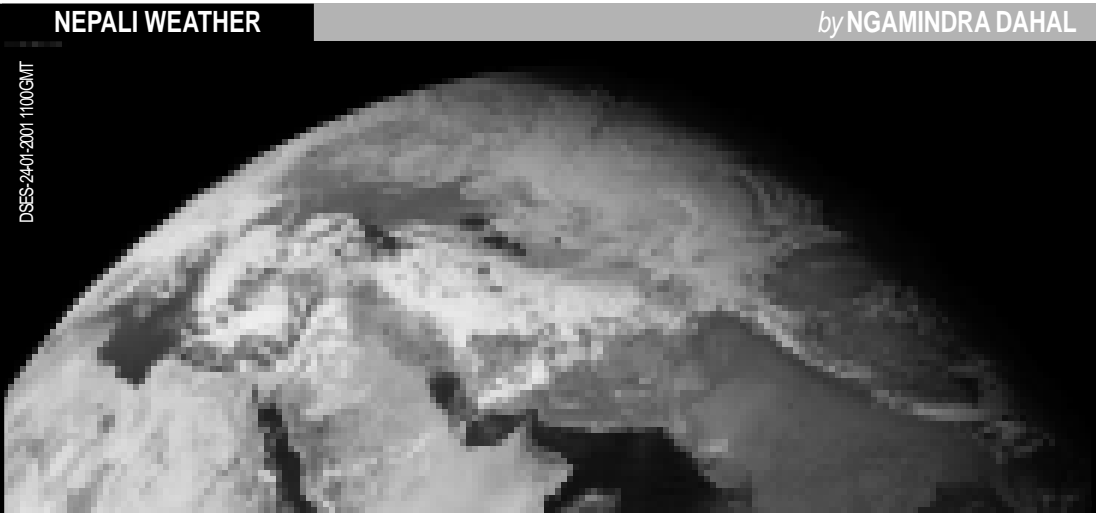
**For sale** Kinetic Marvel scooter '98. Ring 270924 after 6 pm

**Wanted** mountain bike. 10-speed, not too fancy, in good condition. Email [anaghan@rocketmail.com](mailto:anaghan@rocketmail.com)

**Starting this week Nepali Times offers a Classified section. For info about insertions, ring NT Marketing at 543333-36.**

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL




No big surprises in store in the coming week. The satellite weather imagery shows isolated cloud patches moving toward the western Himalaya from West and Central Asia. The westerly jet stream has begun shifting south of the Himalaya, blowing in some of the clouds. A few stray patches from the Tibetan plateau even brought a sprinkling of snow in the higher altitudes this week—still nowhere near the average precipitation for January. Winter drought conditions prevail in the Himalayan foothills. Sporadic drizzle and flurries are indicated for western Nepal, but nothing major. The daytime temperature has already begun to rise and will continue to go up by one degree per week on average. Look out for continued haze blowing in from the Ganges plains topping off at 11,000 ft, and morning fog in Kathmandu, which will dissipate earlier than usual.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
22-01	23-02	22-03	21-04	24-02

QUICKWORD 17

by CROSS EYES



**Across**

1. Celestial mutts, perhaps (4)

5. Shield of Zeus, Americanised (4)

9. Pago Pago's counterpart (4)

10. Inuit home (5)

11. Net (4)

12. Brazilian raccoon (5)

13. What a puparium does to a housefly (6)

15. Only half-energised (3)

16. Smooth contraception (7)

18. Pure alcohol (7)

21. Some overused sound of admiration (3)

22. Time takes its toll (5)

26. Come back with new vigour (5)

28. Response to a catty remark (4)

29. Jittery but brash (5)

30. Opposing, at the beginning (4)

31. Puzzle the eye, partly (4)

32. Stop the trunk (4)

**Down**

1. Deer's fair play (4)

2. Old sesame accompaniment (4)

3. Ouch, a saucer slipped (4)

4. Home of the Tibesti massif (6)

5. First step into Freud's being (3)

6. French candied sweets, say cherries (5)

7. Ninth letters of the Greek alphabet (5)

8. Baby does its diaper again (5)

10. Pre-fridge kitchen (6)

14. Texture, nice on men, though in meat (6)

17. Spitting Andean "horses" (6)

18. Grecian urn nets owner money (5)

19. Fat twins' chirpy sound (5)

20. Eighth king with six wives (5)

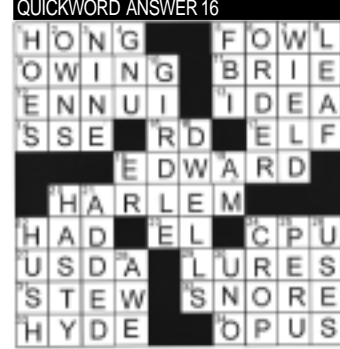
23. Little Latin currency, partly (4)

24. A duffel, or something handier? (4)

25. A fence-sitter's aquatic activity (4)

27. First woman's dusk (3)

QUICKWORD ANSWER 16



The only correct entry was sent in by **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.

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# The water gardens of Balaju

When I first came upon the gardens some thirty years ago, they sagged naturally into the mountainside they were built upon. Clear water tanks fed from mountain springs were full of carp, some so large they must have been there for years. They glided about in the most subtle of greys, greens, blues and silver, rising in splashing excitement to be fed by visitors. At the time of the bathing festival in April, when the area is crowded with vividly dressed pilgrims, the fish go mad. But they alone do not make Balaju. The gardens, built by a Mallaking who apparently craved peace and solitude, are famous for their twenty-two carved stone fountains, that stand in a line below the tanks, emptying themselves into a long, shallow bathing pool. The central fountain is enormous and bathers battle the force of its gushing water. All are carved to resemble water monsters with curled turks, staring eyes, ferocious teeth and tongues aflame. It is explained that the sculptor responsible for these handsome water spouts had never seen the crocodiles he endeavoured to portray; an

The new pools are stagnant, their fountains refuse to play. The flowerbeds try valiantly to battle the press of people.

amusing story that dismisses an artist's creativity too glibly. I can remember laws as natural as forest clearings, and a pilgrim's rest house hidden behind willow trees. Also, a small sacred tank, untouched, in which a large stone image of Vishnu reclines on a bed of snakes. It is a fairly faithful replica of the great Lichavi image at Budhanilkantha, north of the gardens, but lacks the serenity and perfect proportions of the original. It is said that a Mallaking had water channelled from the sacred pool at Budhanilkantha to the palace in Kathmandu. On the very night that the water splashed into a palace pool, the monarch had a dream in which Vishnu of the blue throat appeared to him. The god warned that not only the king but his descendants would die if ever they went to see the reclining image at Budhanilkantha. So the king had a replica of the image made and installed with due ceremony

at Balaju. Here the kings of Nepal may worship without fear, for it is generally believed that were the king to die as a result of looking upon the Budhanilkantha image, great and terrifying would be the misfortunes that would befall the kingdom. Today this garden carved from the forests that cover the sacred mountain of Nagarjun, have been landscaped with an elaborate use of concrete. There are flowerbeds and pools shaped like fish and clubs and diamonds and spades and hearts. Usually the new pools are stagnant and their fountains refuse to play. The flowerbeds try valiantly to battle the press of people. At one corner of the gardens is a modern swimming pool, which is a source of great pleasure to locals and visitors. I am being romantic and outdated, I know, but I love the natural levels of the old gardens, the forests all about and the trees full of birdsong. It hardly matters. Balaju is essentially a place of pilgrimage, and pilgrims and Saturday bathers have their ablutions firmly in mind. Beauty is secondary.

The whole of the Balaju area is sacred. The mountain Nagarjun that rises in great folds about it is associated with the Buddha. It seems that when he visited Nepal and intended to journey into Tibet the forces of evil in that country were so strong the Buddha was advised not to go. Instead, he climbed the Nagarjun hill from where, facing the great barrier of mountains that separate Nepal from Tibet, he delivered a sermon to the

Tibetan people. As a result, it is a place of deep significance to Tibetan Buddhists who have erected a stupa on the summit of the mountain. Close by also is the sacred hill of Mhaipi from which clay was taken to build the temple of Madhankarath in Patan. It is known to be the abode of powerful witches and spirits who had to be subdued by tantric priests before the earth could be removed. And just across a shallow river from Balaju is the hill top retreat of Guru Nanak, the great saint of Sikhism, who cured a Nepalese monarch of



unsound mind before disappearing into Tibet. None of these considerations prevented Balaju from becoming a modern industrial area, where almost everything is manufactured from silk and watches to Coca-Cola. The town spreads alarmingly below Nagarjun but stops short at the forest wall. The trees and the still comforting peace of gardens will surely remain. There are still fat carp in the water tanks, sailing

idly through the clear water. And though some of the fountains threaten to run dry, there will always be pilgrims and weekend bathers to use them. If only the modern fountain would play. ♦ (Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, HarperCollins, 1999.)



Some of the fountains try to pump water today.



## OUR MISTAKEN PAST, OUR MISTAKEN PRESENT: Bhupi Sherchan

When Kathmandu erupted in riots end-December, I got a request to write about Bhupi Sherchan's *Yo Hallai Hallako Desh Ho*—'This is a Country of Hearsay and Rumour.' The request came from none other than Nepali Times columnist Artha Beed: that all wildly hard-headed business minds would keep an active interest in arts and literature. Indeed, for many dark days, parts of Nepal resembled the land described in Sherchan's poem:

where the daggers of security  
are carried by plastered hands  
where baskets and baskets  
dokus and kharpan's  
trucks and trucks  
of decorative souls  
are adorned on verandas and pathways  
where those who buy and sell souls  
like shares in the stock exchange  
become our leaders

This poem was widely quoted in papers at that time, and many agreed with Sherchan in saying:

if one were to dig up the foundation of each house here  
only hearsay and rumours would be heaped up there  
that's why this is a country of hearsay and rumour  
this is a country standing on hearsay and rumour  
this is a country founded on hearsay and rumour  
this is a country of hearsay and rumour

In another less-quoted poem, Sherchan deepens this theme further, and I've translated it in its entirety below:

### THE HISTORY OF MY COUNTRY SEEMS WRONG TO ME

When I take a few days' lodgings  
and witness  
these junctions drowned in hunger  
these alleys like wilted blossoms—  
the history of my country seems wrong to me

These deities who excavate dirt  
in the middle of the road,  
these people who understand  
but act dumb,  
this earthquake-stricken shrine  
and  
these crooked temple tops,  
these lords who stand as statues  
at the intersections  
When I see all these always here  
always like this  
always the same—  
my history of windstorms  
seems wrong to me

Seeing innumerable Sitas  
forever at the roads and crossings  
in the alleys  
in the markets  
through the world  
stripped naked like a eucalyptus tree,  
and seeing innumerable Bhimsen Thapas  
who stand unmoving still calm quiet,  
stopping my soul's song

and letting both arms sag  
like the boughs of a willow tree  
I feel like performing  
a sacrifice of my own blood

When I take a few days' lodgings  
and witness  
these junctions drowned in hunger  
these alleys like wilted blossoms—  
the history of my country seems wrong to me

Amar Singh reached Kangada I hear  
Tenzing climbed Sagarmatha I hear  
Buddha sowed seeds of peace in the earth I hear  
Arniko's craftsmanship won the world's heart I hear  
I always hear and only hear I hear  
but I don't believe

When I take a few days' lodgings  
and witness  
these junctions drowned in hunger  
these alleys like wilted blossoms—  
the history of my country seems wrong to me

My true history—

Sherchan's astonishing, emotive and uncompromisingly critical poems can be read in the original in his classic collection *Ghumne Mechmaathi Andho Manchhe* (The Blind Man on a Revolving Chair). Scattered translations have also been done by Tara Nath Sharma, Michael Hutt, Wayne Amtzis, Kunda Dixit and others.



# A last victory lap

Michael Johnson, one of the greatest athletes of our time, is calling it quits.

LONDON—Michael Johnson formally embarked on the longest victory lap of his career last week with the ruthless business sense that has characterised his career. The only man to win both 200 and 400 metres Olympic titles confirmed he would retire at the end of the season and said he had no plans to compete in the Edmonton world championships.

Instead, the 33-year-old American said that he would make a farewell tour of the athletics circuit before moving on to the next stage of his life. Yet, as always, there was no misty-eyed romanticism as Johnson looked back on matchless achievements and forward to a lucrative future in television and the lecture circuit. Johnson, who retained the Olympic 400 metres title in Sydney last year, agreed that the Goodwill Games in Brisbane this year would be a fitting place to finish his final year in the sport he has graced for a decade. But, keenly aware of his commercial value, he made no promises. "It would be great for me to end my career at the Goodwill Games at the end of the year," he said. "But, as with everything, it will depend on my negotiations with the promoters."

Johnson said he could have waved goodbye after Sydney after bringing the curtain down on an unmatched career during which he won five Olympic gold and nine world titles. Confirming his complete dominance over the half and one-lap sprints, Johnson was never beaten in a major final. "But it's important for me to go back and see all the fans who have supported me over the years and say goodbye," he said in his deep Texan drawl.

During his first European tour in 1990, Johnson realised for the first time he could become a millionaire in a sport he had first entered through a pure love of speed. He devoted himself through rigorous preparation, the power of positive thought and a keenly analytical mind to becoming the perfect running machine, with his distinctive rapid strides compensating for legs comparatively short for his long upper body. The result was a unique 200-400 double at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and a world record of 19.32 seconds in the shorter event. Johnson identified the Atlanta Games, staged in sultry heat against the backdrop of raw southern rock 'n' roll as the highlight of his career. "I was the first man to compete the 400 and 200 meters double," he said. "This was probably the biggest challenge in my entire career, I am very proud of it."

Further notable feats were to follow, including running the anchor leg in the world record-breaking 4x400 meters relay team at the 1998 Goodwill Games and setting a world record over 400 meters at the Seville world championships the following year. Still after Atlanta, the challenges inevitably dwindled and the one match-up, which could have elevated the Sydney Games track program from good to great, was never destined to take place. Neither Johnson, the defending Olympic champion, nor his compatriot Maurice Greene, current world champion, finished the 200 meters final at the US trials and the great duel finished before it had begun. Johnson expressed no regrets about not now having the chance to vanquish the world 100 meters record holder. "I think that Michael racing against Maurice this year is dead," he said. Greene, along with nine-time Olympic champion Carl Lewis, did not get attention on Johnson's all-time favourite opponents. In their place, he chose Namibian Frankie Fredericks, the 1993 world 200 champion and the only man, Johnson said, to have defeated him over 200 or 400 when he was completely fit.

Fredericks beat Johnson over 200 in Oslo before the Atlanta Games but, like the rest of the field, was demolished in the Olympic final. Now, with athletic ambition sated and no further goals on the track, it is time to say goodbye. There will be no special times and no further targets for Johnson.

"No, I'm tired," he said. "Now I want to go out and enjoy it." ♦ (am)

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OFF THE BEATEN TREK

# A devotional marathon



Clockwise from left: Sprinkling holy water on a devotee ready to begin his roll; the power of devotion becomes apparent as another goes about it; Bhimsen Mandir, where a major puja will take place at the end of the month; puja at Bajrayogini, where devotees pray before the first pilgrimage; and Rabi Nath Shrestha, manager of the event.

## The Swasthani Brata is one month of fasting, prayer and penance. Not to mention the walking and rolling.

If you're interested in extreme displays of faith, go to Sankhu next Wednesday. It may not match fire-walking, body-piercing and self-flagellation, but it is still hard penance—a group of men wrapped in white and rolling on the cold ground all over Sankhu, followed by women chanting *payas*.

These are the *bratalu*—fasting devotees who attend the month-long festival on the banks of the

Shali river in Sankhu to re-enact an ancient custom. This year, there are 329 people (18 men, 311 women) undertaking the penance—most are from Bhaktapur (108) and Sankhu (81), and the rest from the mid-hills and the tarai. The festival began on the full moon night of 9 January this year and ends on 8 February, the next full moon, with a big *yagya*—the devotional pyre, all-night puja, and the chanting of Vedic verses.

This very Nepali festival revolves around the *Swasthani*, a text with stories from the Puranic tradition. The book has creation myths, stories about Parvati's devotion to Shiva, and about the marriage of a girl-child, Gona Brahmani, to Shiva disguised as an ageing man. The *Swasthani* has been criticised by Hindu reformists for glorifying child marriage and sanctioning discrimination against women, but this time of year households across the country—Thakali, Gurung, Newar, Chhetri and Bahun—have readings from the

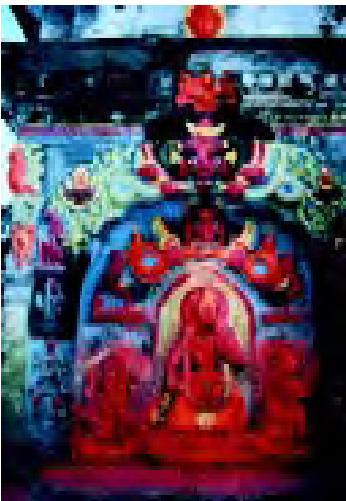
book. There are Newari, Nepali, Maithali and Hindi versions of the *Swasthani*. Last year, an English version was also published.

The *bratalu* at Sankhu undertake the fast to cleanse their souls and pray for good spouses and happy families. There's no temple specifically for them—the river is their god, and they also pray at other temples like the Bhairab temple, Shiva temple, and Bhimsen temple. Each day begins with a dip in the river. Snickers are dragged and pushed into the water. Then there is a collective puja by the riverbank. And, once a day, the men circumbulate the shrine at the Shree Ram Jhopedi at Sankhu Bazaar, rolling on the floor.

The devotees don't only remain

in Sankhu. They also undertake a barefoot pilgrimage to four sacred sites in the Valley—Pashupatinath, the Sekh Narayan Temple in Pharping, Panauti and the Changu Narayan Temple nearby. They follow the *ka-jee*, who carries the idol of Madhav Narayan—the chief deity of the *bratalu*—and live on a diet of rice, red radish, *chaku* (hard boiled molasses), ghee, sugarcane, fruit and peas, milk and *galingo saag* (spinach) grown at Patan. "This is a very old tradition. Only *galingo* grown around Chyasal in Patan is allowed," says 62-year-old Ravi Nath Shrestha, chairman of Swasthani Brata Sewa Committee, which manages the *bratalu puja*.

The walk is restricted to devotees, but their route makes for



great hikes anytime of year. The first takes in Pashupati and Sekh Narayan and it began on 23 January. The first night out is always at Pashupati, after an early-morning dip in the Shali river and a hike to the hilltop temple of the power-goddess Bajrayogini. The next day, a dip in the Bagmati at Pashupati Aryaghat, and they're at Sano Gaucharan for lunch. The march then continues to Narayan Hiti outside the Royal Palace, though Bhotahiti, Asan, Jana Bahal, Makkhan Tole, Hanuman Dhoka and Basantapur, onward to Thapathali. It passes over the Bagmati bridge at Kipondole and heads towards Pharping's Sekh Narayan Temple via Jawalakhel, Nakhu, Bagmati Korikhan and Hattiban. They reach their destination for the night halt.

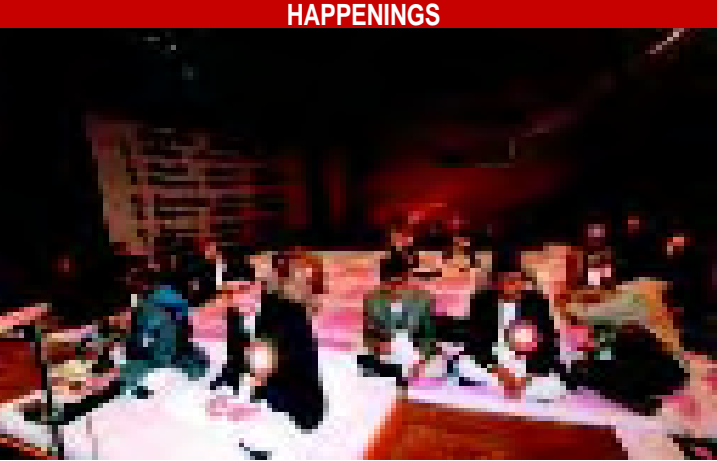
After puja at the Sekh Narayan temple the *bratalu* go through Pharping Town and head back, taking a slightly different route through Bungmati, Jagarkhel and Mangal Bazar. They stop at Sankhamul for a meal. After that it's a long hard trail as the road winds through Banewar, Pashupati, Baudha and finally to Sankhu.

The second pilgrimage this year starts on 27 January. It takes the *bratalu* to Panauti for the night, before moving the next day through Kharpati, Bageswori, Pasuram Chhap, Nala and on to Banepa.

The third and final one is held on 4 February and this is the relatively short one to Changu Narayan. The grand finale takes place on 8 February. The night sky of Sankhu is lit up with flames from the grand *yagya*, and the *bratalu*, together with friends and family, sing devotional chants and pray as they end their vows and get ready to return home. ♦

*Getting to Sankhu:* The ancient Newari town is 12 km northeast of Kathmandu. Microbus services are available from Jorpati. Sankhu once lay on the trade route to Tibet that went via Kuti, before its importance diminished after a new route was established to Tibet through Kalimpong. The day to be in Sankhu is 31 January, the day the *bratalu* roll on the ground.

HAPPENINGS



**SEVEN COMMANDMENTS:** Nepali Congress leadership gets down to brass tacks at the beginning of their party convention in Pokhara on 19 January under a banner proclaiming "seven social sins".



**ROTARIANS, ALL:** Participants at a Youth Leadership Award organised by the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Midtown, 12-16 January at Budanilkantha School.



**CATCHING UP WITH THE TIMES:** Bollywood star and niece of Prime Minister Girija Poirwal was in Pokhara last week to campaign for her father's candidacy in the Congress working committee.





Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Madame Chair, Their Excellencies, Their Highnesses, His and Her Eminences, Honourable Donors, Honorary Self-Appointed Guardians of this Country's Morals, Ordinary Fellows, Distinguished Ladies, and the Distracted Gentlemen at the back. Yes, I mean you, near the window wearing the red muffler. At the outset let me thank the organisers of this Six-Day Interaction Programme on the Sustainable Development of Grassroot Constituencies Through Empowerment of Local Multi-Stakeholders Through a Paradigm Shift in Their Agenda-Setting Role in the Context

A multi-stakeholder approach

of Economic Globalisation organised by His Majesty's Government in corporation with FEDUP, UNDO, USURP, DEFEAT and FINITO. So, now that Nepal Television has finally arrived, we can get on with the job of declaring open this seminar-workshop without further ado and beating around the bush.

As you all must be knowing Nepal is a landlocked Himalayan kingdom that is entering a new millennium. It is important for all Nepal is not to be disoriented by the thickets of jargon in the fanag of twisted facts, and be clear about our short-, mid-, and long-term goals. The fact is that we now need a steering committee that prioritises a bottom-up approach to internalise the totality of the changing paradigms. And we are not just paying lip service today in

this mid-term review to the complex dynamics of underdevelopment. We are taking a holistic approach, a strategic macro-economic perspective in attaining end-degree refinement, a multi-sectoral institutionalisation of all trilateral and bilateral monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the process of re-intermediation of sequenced interventions for sustained resource mobilisation within the framework of economic globalisation and national-level programme strategies so that a selective allocation of these resources can be fine-tuned for optimum utilisation and disbursement to all and sundry. To this end, the requirement of a supportive environment from all stakeholders cannot be overemphasised and understressed. Self-correcting mechanisms for proper TORs to meet the governance goals of appropriate CCP, self-fulfilling SICRP/RSP, and participatory LSDA are going to be

vital ingredients in creating an enabling environment in the Phase II of the DSRSL Framework and empowering the grassroots through the construction of earthquake-resistant capacity buildings. We must look at mis-directed priorities by military society and civil society for effective political advocacy. In this day and age no one can say, hey, there it is not a proactive participant in action research and an exchange of experiences to bring about a win-win situation for all beneficiaries and target groups. This is why we have to doubly redouble our efforts to rectify all wrongs so that we address the structural policy-polity dichotomies that hobble our efforts to empower our energy sector so that the initiatives will ultimately trickle down to the light-bulb at the end of the tunnel. It is imperative that at the present time, as soon as I give you the signal, we observe a one-hour silence to re-read all our past speeches so that we can self-evaluate how much of it has been hot air. "Ready? On your mark. Get set. Go!" ♦

mayos

NEPALI SOCIETY

PAC Man

Politicians have learnt the hard way not to underestimate this soft-spoken chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Subash Chandra Newwang, Nepal's foremost anti-corruption crusader, feels his job is to raise hell. And he is giving everyone who has something to hide a hard time, from the Prime Minister down. Newwang is a member of the Central Committee of the Unified Marxist-Leninist party, but he seems to take his PAC job much more seriously. This is his third stint in parliament, his first eight years were spent in the Upper House. Since May 1999 he's been representing his Ilam constituency in the Lower House.

The 47-year-old Newwang's trademark gentility belies no-nonsense investigative instincts honed over 22 years as an attorney specialising in constitutional law and criminal jurisprudence. It's the same potent combination of humility, politeness, wit and intensity that has disarmed the most reluctant of witnesses in courtrooms, that is now at work at hearings of PAC. Newwang laughs off his reputation for politeness: "Last week some officials we were questioning were even more polite than me!", he says, referring to the hearings on bank reforms.

Newwang's PAC has taken on ministries considered untouchable. It killed a plan by the Royal Nepal Army to buy a British jet, and has looked into the shady dealings of the Nepal Police, not to mention the jet-leasing deal of Royal Nepal Airlines where he had the prime minister on the stand. Says Newwang: "Sometimes they



MIN. BAJRACHARYA

Subhash Chandra Newwang, the soft-spoken MP from Ilam, strikes terror in the hearts of corrupt government officials

accuse us of trying to run a parallel executive. That probably means we are doing our jobs right." Newwang and his PAC of about two dozen MPs has latched onto almost every shady government decision and ripped it apart—in most cases rightfully.

At PAC hearings it is MPs who do most of the grilling. Newwang listens quietly, and when he does speak it is always to have the last word. Not only has he chaired almost all committee meetings of the PAC, but he's also managed to get the polarised parliament to vote unanimously on all PAC decisions. A donor-funded project aims to make parliament more accessible to the media. They needn't bother: Newwang's

PAC is already fully accessible to the press. Journalists are not just present at PAC hearings but there's a good chance of finding one in Newwang's chambers as well, either chatting with MPs, making phone calls or sipping tea—courtesy PAC. "This is called transparency," quips Newwang.

"I knew corruption was a major problem facing Nepal before I joined the PAC, now I have seen for myself what a deep mess we are in," he says. PAC meets throughout the year, with a hearing almost every week. That means Newwang has little time for his constituents in faraway Ilam. But he is not worried: "My voters told me to rock the boat, and that's what I am doing." And what a boat-rocker he's turned out to be. ♦

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