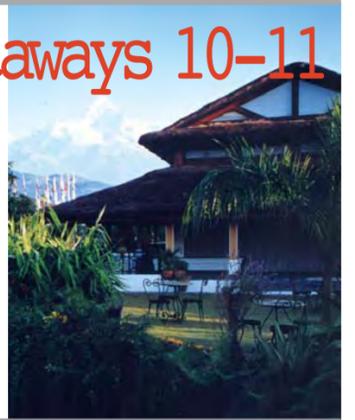


Exotic new year getaways 10-11



Sitar sudha 19

UNDER MY HAT  
20 Rivers run through it



BINOD BHATARA

One month after the declaration of the state of emergency and an information blackout on the military's campaign against the Maoists, questions arise about an exit strategy.

Constitutionally, the government needs to muster a two-thirds majority in parliament by midnight 25 February to extend the emergency by another three months, and after that parliament can decide to extend it for yet another six months. But till then, what? When are we going to know that we don't need the emergency anymore?

"Our constitution deliberately limits the duration of a state of emergency," Navahari Acharya of the Nepali Congress. Acharya said Tuesday at a panel discussion organised by Himal Khabarpatrika. Acharya maintained that the country was still under civilian rule. "An emergency does not mean martial law," he added, "the constitution does not allow that."

Speaking at the same panel, Krishna Khanal, professor of political science at Tribhuvan University, saw no visible presence today of civil authority. "We don't know how free we are to speak out about what we see, and we also don't see an exit from the emergency," he said. "There is danger of the government finding it more comfortable to work under an emergency, and larger parties also seeing their short-term interests secured by backing it."

There is confusion about the do's and don'ts of emergency regulations. The bottom

line: who is calling the shots? Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has repeatedly assured the public that the government will use emergency powers only against the Maoists, but the emergency automatically suspends civil rights including press freedoms. The Royal Nepal Army has requested media to get reports, commentary and pictures on the war "fact-checked" before publication, while the government says there are no restrictions whatsoever. This week two journalists were picked up from their homes at night on unspecified charges, and released more than 12 hours later.

There are also reports of arrests in the districts, but the government hasn't divulged who have been taken in and where they are being held. The human rights organisation INSEC estimates as many as 1,300 people may be in custody. "We've not been able to verify the incident reports, or question eyewitnesses," Subodh Pyakurel of INSEC told us. "We don't have access."

Official tallies show more than 80 Maoists and security personnel killed after the emergency was declared on 26 November. This does not include the estimated 250 killed between 23-26 November in Dang and Salleri. So far, 24 Royal Nepal Army soldiers have been killed in action and another 58 wounded since the Maoist attacks in Dang. There is no independent verification of these casualties, or the numbers of wounded, from human rights groups or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which have no access to the front.

The independent Human Rights Commission tried to do some fact-finding on Monday by inviting the Home and Defence Secretary for a Q&A. The Commission was concerned about emergency medical equipment, hospitals in conflict zones which have rarely had doctors in the past, and the security and whereabouts of those arrested. "We were unable to get a satisfactory answer," a Commission

# Emergency exit

Will declaring an emergency prove to be easier than getting out of it?



member told us.

Shanker Pokhrel of the UML's Rapti Zonal Committee, who is just back from Dang, is concerned about the reliability of official reports of deaths on the frontline. He asks: "How is such information going to affect the credibility of the state and democracy?"

Some critics say the media's credibility has already been compromised, and actions

like the detention of the two editors this week will intimidate others. "This ultimately calls into question the credibility of the civil government," researcher Pratyoush Onta told the panel on Tuesday. Media commentator, CK Lal, was more worried about self-censorship in media and how this would undermine democracy.

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Animated suspension  
Seira Tamang p6  
Emergency soul-searching  
Puskar Bhusal p7  
Politics as usual

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 13

Q. Do you think the government is doing a good job with news dissemination?

Total votes: 1009

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## "This is not a Royal Army, but the Royal Nepalese Army."

Nepali Times brings the full transcript of the much talked-about interview of Chief of Army Staff Prajwalla SJB Rana by Vijay Kumar broadcast by Nepal Television in its *Dishanirdesh* programme on Monday, 17 December. The army chief re-iterates that his goal is to disarm the Maoists and bring them back to the negotiating table. He also asks his own questions about the roots of the insurgency, and whether or not the army should have been called out earlier.

Vijay Kumar: Now that the RNA is deployed against the Maoists, people say the army should have stepped in earlier?

Prajwalla S Rana: This question is now outdated, because in 1996 terrorist activity was only a spark. Now it has caused massive loss of life and national property. After the RNA analysed the problem, it came to the conclusion that the problem had grown into something that could affect national security and today it has spread like wildfire. That is why we recommended to the government that the ISDP be implemented. If you look at the terrorist problem now, it has spread nationwide. This is why if the army had not been deployed it would have threatened national security. The deployment is constitutional: it was done at the recommendation of the council of ministers, and His Majesty the King, in accordance with the Constitution of Nepal Article 115 (1), declared a state of emergency and we have now been ordered to this task.

Would things have not been as bad if the army had been deployed earlier?

In my view if army had been deployed earlier, this situation may not have come. We have to be deployed in accordance with the constitution. We were deployed under the ISDP to implement development programs and provide security to the citizens. So we moved into several districts, Rolpa, Rukum, Jajarkot, Salyan, Gorkha, etc. We had been deployed for development. Our goal was to win over the hearts and minds of the people and wean them

away from the insurgency. But the Maoists attacked us unnecessarily, and we had no other option but to respond and carry out our duties.

So the army deployment under the ISDP was a defensive posture? That is correct.

But after their attacks, the army is now also on the offensive. Would it have been easier to control the situation if we had been offensive before?

I have already told you that decision is of the government, whether we are to be on the defensive or on the offensive. The army cannot take that decision on its own, based on its assessment, but has to obey the government's orders. They overran the Dang barrack and took our weapons. Now it is our duty to get the weapons back. A soldier loses prestige if he loses his weapons. This is why we had to go on the offensive to retrieve our hardware.

So why did you wait to go on the offensive?

It was the order of the government this time, we were ordered to get back the weapons so we went on the offensive. We did not have a similar order before.



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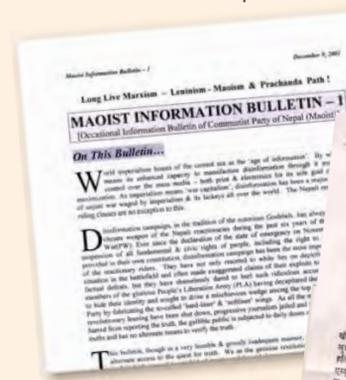
ANIMATED SUSPENSION

We're not sure if anyone reads editorials anymore. There is a creeping sense of frustrating futility about pontificating from this pulpit.

At this time in our nation's history, many of us self-appointed guardians of public opinion have rather unquestioningly given up some of our liberties so that our future freedom will be guaranteed.

We have been asked not to ask how well or how badly the army is doing its job. Fair enough. But this is the Age of Infowar. In essence, the army and the Maoists are both engaged in a war to win the hearts and minds of the people.

The Americans learnt a lesson or two in Vietnam about information warfare, and during the Gulf War tried to manage information



with heavy-handed restrictions and one-sided access to the front. Only grainy television footage showing smart bombs hitting crosshairs were seen by the world.

Our own Maoists have launched their email war bulletins to counter the government's official version of events. This is going to turn out to be a war of press communiqués in cyberspace if we are not careful.

It is better to give it straight, only keeping back the operational details that would jeopardise troops. The Nepali media has in general been sympathetic to the security forces even before the emergency went into force.

COUNTDOWN FOR SAARC

SAARC Summits are like a mirage, the closer we get to it the further it seems to recede. The last time two years ago, the countdown had begun, half the airport road had been repaved, the flagpoles had been painted over...

This time, the SAARC Summit preparations are happening during a state of national emergency. The deconstruction of Kathmandu's traffic islands is therefore being carried out on a war footing.

In one sense, all this demolition, flower planting and street widening would go to waste if Atalji once more decides not to shake hands with the General.

But even if the SAARC countdown is once more aborted at the last moment, all is not lost. We will have one more opportunity two years from now for demolition, flower planting and street widening.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Worrying about Nepal in Paris



And independent nation has to think independently.

PARIS - The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, popularly known by its initials CNRS, is France's premier research institute. Fully funded by the government, it is a huge organisation with sections that conduct scientific research in various disciplines, including the humanities.

But the relatively small size of the team working on Nepal section is rather deceptive. Every member is a hardcore Nepal enthusiast and knows more about our country than many of us do back home in Kathmandu.

In another corner, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine is typing up a paper on kingship in Nepal, which she has been asked to present at a seminar on the royal houses of the world. She is an authority of sorts on Magars and talks so fondly about her days in the country that you would be forgiven for assuming that her maizi was somewhere in the hills of mid-western Nepal.

Marie is presently reading Bir Charitra, an old Nepali book published by Jagadamba Prakashan. At my surprise that she reads Nepali with such fluency, she says bluntly, "You can't pretend to know Nepal without reading Nepali. Despite what you write, the English press and the English books on Nepal barely scratch the surface. To get a feel of the undercurrents, one has to dive deep into Nepali language publications, not only from Kathmandu, but from outside the Valley as well."

scholars are charmed when they find that their 'research' merely confirm their biases.

The sole Nepali member of the team at the CNRS is Mahesh Khakurel, and everyone agrees that he is more French than most French scholars at CNRS. Mahesh speaks upper-class French with the right accent, is a connoisseur of French wines, and concocts the cuisine with such style that he could put some of the best French chefs to shame.

By Nepali standards, Mahesh is remarkably well-off. But I sense a trace of melancholy in his voice when he says, "Life here is without meaning. You wait for death by living in comfort." Is he merely repeating the existential dilemma of Albert Camus, another Parisian, ("Rising, street-car, four-hours in the office or factory, meal, street-car, four-hours at work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm")? Or is his search for meaning representative of the frustrations of otherwise successful Nepalis living abroad?



The charged atmosphere at the CNRS Nepal section puts me in mind of the stale air of the almost moribund CNAS (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies) at Tribhuvan University. How many of our so-called India experts pursue the Dainik Jagaran, Aaj, Amar Ujala, or the Rastriya Sabara published from Patna, Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Bareilly, respectively?

That apart, in Nepal seem to have given the miss to producing knowledge. As in things all else, we have become mere consumers of ideas. Even the few academics that we have pursuing research in the social sciences often follow the agenda of donors funding their project. They are—as some of their own breed call them behind their backs—intellectual bharias carrying the load for researchers from abroad.

Marie shares my gloom about social science research in Nepal—or lack thereof. She says that most social research in Nepal these days is carried out by journalists. That may not be so bad in the short term, but this trend is not sustainable. Journalists tend to be generalists and often lack the rigours of academic discipline, and tend to be too involved in "here-and-now" to be dispassionate about events and trends.

Depending on foreign aid for our economic development has its flip side—it gives birth to a class of neo-rich that doesn't care much about its social obligations. There is much to fear direct foreign investment in media—it may turn newspapers into products peddling illusions. Inviting foreign troops to fight our 'war' is close to hara-kiri—a nation saved by others automatically becomes subservient towards its saviour.

# You may say he's a dreamer

Madanjeet Singh is a multi-millionaire. And he's giving it all away.

BEENA SARWAR

**"E**veryone is a prisoner of his past," said Madanjeet Singh, "We are all affected by events in our lives." The 78-year-old former diplomat was speaking informally at the end of a two-day conference last week at the Yak & Yeti Hotel to discuss the South Asia Foundation he recently set up, making use of his considerable fortune.

An artist, writer and former ambassador of India, Singh is a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador based in France. But it was his personal conviction and passion rather than his CV that really convinced the fifty participants, some initially sceptical, to support the South Asia Foundation as a people's organisation dedicated to regional amity and development.

Their scepticism revolved mainly around the need for yet another South Asian organisation. Not surprising, considering that there were three other South Asian-themed conferences running parallel to this one, conducted by the South Asia Forum for Human Rights, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, and the South Asia Free Media Association. The difference seems to be the South Asia Foundation's thrust on education and grassroots development, and the funds at its disposal. This is an organisation with a purse of its own, and it

is already financing various projects.

SAF has one trustee from each South Asian country, who also acts as chair of the national board. Most are former or serving ministers: Kamal Hossein (former law minister, Bangladesh), Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup (former education minister, Bhutan), Inder Kumar Gujral (former prime minister, India), Ibrahim Hussain Zaki (former Minister of Tourism, Maldives, and former Secretary General of SAARC), Bhekh Bahadur Thapa (Nepal's ambassador to New Delhi), Javed Jabbar (former Minister of Information, Pakistan), and Lakshman Kadirgamar (Sri Lanka's outgoing Foreign Minister).

The projects currently funded by SAF include the UNESCO programme of Integrated Education, Health and Capacity Building for Adolescent Girls being implemented by women's aid groups such as Maitri (Bangladesh) and Maiti Nepal, and the dozens of

community development centres operated by Sarvodaya Suva-Setha Sewa Society in Sri Lanka. Particularly impressive is the Bastar Saarc project—about 40 solar powered health and education centres in a remote tribal area of Madhya Pradesh. Other projects include a six-month IT crash course in Bhutan, a Computer Laboratory in Maldives, a SAARC Cultural Centre in Kandy, Sri Lanka, and the appointment of two teachers to upgrade the BSc courses in the Government College, Lahore, including software develop-

ment, computer programming and engineering, and communications.

Also set up earlier this year was the Rainbow Partnership Organisation's Documentation and Information Centre in New Delhi, which includes a vast portal that "aims to be one of the most comprehensive online sources of serious academic research on South Asia". With so much work already underway, the Kathmandu meeting was meant to draw in people to help Singh implement these and other plans for regional development and peace.

It wasn't an easy task, there were all kinds of objections—the structure of the SAF is too vague, the plans too ambitious and idealistic, the project too closely linked to SAARC to work, the individuals involved, ie, the trustees, had too establishmentarian a past to represent the 'people'. Still others suggested that the foundation was floated to promote the persona of Madanjeet Singh. Yet, by the end of the meeting, the general consensus was that here was an organisation that was different from others of its ilk. As one participant put it, Singh has shown a willingness, "to put his money where his mouth is". The participant added: "If he contributes to a cause, why should we grudge him the publicity. Besides, how many local philanthropists do we have in South Asia who actually reach into their own pockets like this?"

Most objections were swept aside by Singh's personal account of his motives, his obvious sincerity and commitment—and solid financial credentials. "I have not always had money. I have seen poverty," he said, talking about growing up as the son of a university professor in Banaras. While still a schoolboy, travelling to South India, the young Madanjeet saw something that has stayed with him forever. "On a railway platform, I saw a woman cooking something in a small pot, using paper to fuel the fire. She had two children, one of them in her arms. As I watched, she took a piece of paper from under the pot. And she..." Singh paused, too overcome with emotion to continue. "She was putting paper in the pot to feed her children. That sight left a lifelong impression on me."

Another event that shaped his perceptions, was a nine-month long stint in jail for participating in Mahatama Gandhi's non-violent Quit India movement against British colonial rule. In Banaras' Mirzapur prison, "I met people who had deliberately committed crimes to be arrested and get two secure meals a day. And political prisoners who had taken to violence... because they had no other way to survive." Soon afterwards, he was exposed to the "ugliness of communal violence". In Banaras and elsewhere

during Partition, the scenes he saw still haunt him. He doesn't dwell on this, but these experiences and memories have all contributed to the making of a man who, now that he has a lot of money, wants to use it to help others grow.

In 1998 Singh instituted the \$40,000 UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence. Distressed by India and Pakistan's nuclear tests, he designated the prize to be jointly shared by Indian and Pakistani anti-nuclear activists. The jury was made up of an international jury including former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali, former India prime minister IK Gujral and French Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat, and was chaired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Singh is deeply committed to the idea of a South Asian identity. "I travel with a laissez-passez, the blue United Nations passport. When I visited Karachi a year ago, the immigration officer asked me what is your nationality, and I answered 'South Asian!' I very much liked doing that." Arguments that the agenda of the SAF and SAARC are too close to work don't cut any ice with Singh—he strongly believes that in order to make life better and safer for people in this part of the world, regional countries must come together at all levels, governmental and outside. This is a conviction whose strength has only grown with the years, he says, recalling his stint as India's ambassador to Uganda. "I have always been and felt a South Asian. Back then, during the stressful times there, my driver had taken off and I myself used to drive to outlying regions from Kampala to pick up Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans and bring them to safety. I hardly felt the need to sit back and distinguish between the nationalities. Back then, in the 1960s, they were all South Asians to me."

And where does all this money come from? "In 1995, my mother died, and I sold my house in Vasant Vihar (New Delhi) for INRs 50 million. I set up the Sumitra Foundation, named after my mother, and went to Bastar". Bastar was where Singh's long-time dream of solar energy-powered health and education centres would become reality. "Many of my friends in Delhi thought I was a madman to sell my house and put my money in a tribal area."

"Things happen by accident. My only son, who went to MIT, set up a software company. I had put money into it, and he had given me some equity. It turned into millions. Some was in shares that have dropped since 11 September, but it is still substantial. It is no secret... We get approximately \$700,000 a month in interest

alone. That is what we will spend. I do not need money for myself. I have written eleven books. The royalties from my Himalayan Art book alone are enough for me. So I decided to put all the money into this project."

Madanjeet Singh's son, whose name is Jeet, put aside an interest in music to study IT and rode the software wave with his company, the Art Technology Group. Now Jeet provides the funds with which his father can engage in philanthropy. Says Singh: "Earlier, you would have had to go to Western foundations for a small amount of money, now we have a South Asian foundation that can provide substantial help."

Singh is patient with criticism, but will not let much hamper his projects. "I am not doing this because I want aggrandisement for myself, although some people think that," he says. "Putting my name to SAF did not make it a South Asian foundation, so I got trustees from all SAARC countries, and registered it in Switzerland. Bureaucracy and paperwork can slow down an organisation, and here in South Asia there is no time to lose. We need to move fast, it's a question of survival."

Singh tells one last story that shows why so many people have been won over by him. "I was in Lahore four years ago, I visited Government College," he says. This was Singh's alma mater, thanks to having been asked to leave Banaras and his state, Uttar Pradesh, after his prison sentence. "The auditorium was packed. I asked the students whether I should speak as a diplomat or an old student, and they shouted, 'Punjabi ich gal karo!' So I spoke in Punjabi and spoke my heart out. I told them, you are talking of Kashmir? Indians and Pakistanis have destroyed Kashmir. I have been there, the houseboats are lying vacant, the beautiful lake is choking with weeds... Kashmir is of strategic interest only because India and Pakistan are fighting. There is not even any oil there, like in the Gulf, to interest Americans."

Singh continues: "When I finished, I thought I had overdone it... the students are going to call me an Indian, a communist... But you know what happened? They stood up and applauded. Afterwards, the principal came up to me and said, 'We don't come together because we are both (unprintable expletive, which Singh says unhesitatingly).'"

The genteel gathering at the conference in Kathmandu greeted the unprintable with stunned silence, and then laughter. Some were embarrassed at Singh's unexpected demonstration of his Punjabiness, but he went on, unfazed: "Every time this issue comes up, I think of that. Now we have made nuclear weapons, and there's a woman putting paper in the pot to feed her children. Aren't we [expletive]?" **8**



MIN BAJRACHARYA

## LETTERS

### NEPAL'S NEPAL

Re: Interview with Madhav Kumar Nepal (#72). Madhav Nepal and the likes of him in the opposition make me sick (I am not saying that the Nepali Congress is any better). In a responsible democracy like ours, the opposition has a very

important role to play. When has Madhav Nepal played a constructive role? What did Madhav Nepal do when he was briefly in power? How many times has Madhav Nepal done about turns in his position? How can he blame only the Congress party for the mess that the country is in? The Congress party will not do it because they do not have the moral authority to do it, but I think the Emergency should be widened to bring all politicians and everybody who have plundered in the last twelve years to book. This would go some way to address the problems of our country that you have so well outlined in your editorial, iUncivil war.

**R Khadga**  
by email

I really see no point in reading the Nepali press anymore, since

it has nothing but government statements on the progress of the war. This is a struggle between the forces of freedom and those opposed to it. You do not fight Maoists by destroying freedom and suspending democracy. That is exactly what they want you to do, isn't it? Please, let's not be like the enemy.

**Janak KC**  
Kathmandu

Let me commend you on your hard-hitting editorials iUncivil warsi (#72) and iPressure cooker war! (#71). We can imagine the constraints that you work under with the new media guidelines, but it is encouraging to see sober and responsible voices like yours who still call a spade a spade, and remind us

that the Maoist insurgency is fundamentally a failure of development and the political leadership. As you say, it will not be resolved on the battlefield with Nepalis killing Nepalis. We wish you all the best.

**N Thapa and L Gurung**  
New Delhi

### MORE SUMMITS

If only there were more SAARC summits in Nepal, the country may be a better place! The recent efforts by the Government and Kathmandu Metropolitan City to clean up the capital so as to give an impression about the beauty of the city to the distinguished guests of the summit, came as a no surprise. Same was the case during the last SAAF Games. Roads are being widened, new traffic

islands are being made, hoarding boards and temporary shelters demolished, posters being blasted off walls, within days (and nights). Lets hope that from next time onwards, the summit takes place in other parts of the country as well, and they may also get a facelift. Here is the answer to Nepalis development, have more SAARC Summits.

**Sunil Narayan Shrestha**  
Pennsylvania, USA

### CORRECTIONS

- The last issue of Nepali Times was mistakenly numbered. It should have been #72.
- The photograph of men sunning themselves outside Patan Museum in 'ilimage and imagination' (#72) was mistakenly credited. All pictures were taken by Navin Joshi.



IFHSOT



SUBHAS RAI

# “If the Maoists are smart, they will lay down their arms and come to the negotiating table...if they don't we will be forced to defeat them.”

- Prajwalla SJB Rana

from ⇨ p1

**Vijay Kumar: Earlier it was said the army was unwilling to move against the Maoists?**

**Prajwalla S Rana:** That is wrong. I said it yesterday and will repeat: there is a constitutional process for mobilising the army, there is a law. The army has to be deployed under the provisions of the law, that is our position. The RNA won't be deployed without fulfilling that process.

**So it is not true that the army refused deployment?**  
Not true.

**Then why the controversy over that?**

The army never stirred that controversy and will not do so. Our position is that we can be deployed legally, and then we will follow the government's orders. That is it.

**So the controversy is baseless?**

Yes. We have not raised any controversies on our side. If others do that, it is not our problem.

**You are trying to say the army was not ordered in this manner before?**

Yes. We were not ordered this way. We need mandate from the government in accordance with the constitution, and that mandate is an order based on which we will move forward.

**A strictly constitutional (mandate)?**

Absolutely. We have to move in accordance with the constitution. Let me explain. If the army is not deployed in that manner, in accordance with the constitution, then there is the danger that we may move on our own. The RNA can even do that but no army in any country can move without constitutional orders. On the other hand, if the army is not legally deployed it could taint both the government and the army which is not in the nation's interest. That is why we say give us an order that is constitutional and we move forward. That is the bottom line.

**Sometimes we say 'Royal Army', is our army a Royal Army?**

I would like to correct this. I have to. This is not a Royal Army but the Royal Nepalese Army. 'Royal' is only a title. This is a Nepali army, and by that we mean the army of the state. It is an army for the state, for its security.

**What is its mission?**

The RNA is not something formed today. The RNA has been around since unification. It was there yesterday, is there today and will be there tomorrow. Many people do not know about the army's tradition. If you read our history, you'll understand our traditional positions. We have to abide by the traditions. What this means is that we have to be deployed constitutionally, there would be controversies the moment we are deployed unconstitutionally which is not in the interest of the nation. The army's concern is not about politics, only national security.

**Your concern is that the army has to be deployed constitutionally?**

Absolutely.

**This is all you want?**

Yes. We got a constitutional order and now we are deployed.

**Do people in the army have political knowledge?**

The RNA will not put its hands into politics because that is not our profession. But because politics is associated with national security, it is important for us to understand politics.

**So you understand politics?**

Yes, we have to understand it because it is related to national security.

**You are aware of what is happening in politics?**

Yes we have to know.

**Once you are aware aren't you tempted to intervene?**

That is not our profession.

**How are you tackling the Maoists now?**

Based on our orders we are moving ahead successfully, in some areas. In Salleri, Ratamate, Kapurkot, we counter-attacked and we were able to inflict heavy casualties on them. So far we have lost 24 brave men, and 58 have been injured. Our morale is high, and will remain high. Because they are unable to face us, the terrorists have shamelessly targeted our families and families of former servicemen. That is unacceptable to us and it will be very counter-productive to the terrorists if they continue doing that.

**How do you feel about fighting a war within the country?**

In any country, not only in Nepal, no country likes having to fight its own people. Definitely, our intention is not to kill Nepalis. We were not after the Maoists or their lives, we were engaged in ensuring development. But they attacked us and we had to respond. Our patriotic army will not let those that have committed wrongs to get off lightly.

**Why do you think they dared to attack your base in Dang?**

I cannot say we did not expect them to attack. Invariably in the army we have various options, and a possible option was an attack. We made a mistake and had to face a reversal in Dang, in other places we are ok.

**It was a surprise attack in Dang?**

Yes that is correct.

**Are there possibilities for another surprise like that?**

It will now be difficult for them.

**Do you think the terrorists thought they could defeat you like they did to the police?**

Possibly.

**How do the strengths of the police and army differ?**

Our work is different, the police have theirs and we ours. We are trained to fight, police are trained in maintaining law and order. Possibly, they (Maoists) did not understand that the army is unlike the police. They are now seeing the result.

**What are the chances of civilians being caught in the crossfire?**

The army is sensitive about the protection of citizens and their property. That is why we have called on people not to be present in areas where there are Maoist activities. They are using human shields and when we attack some civilians may be harmed, we cannot deny that. In such types of operations there is also a possibility that some physical infrastructures could be damaged. The army has taken measures to avoid such losses and has set up systems to solicit the help of citizens.

**What is your report on the reaction in the Maoist camp after the army moved against them?**

It is still early in the operations. But we understand that their morale has been affected. If we are able to push harder we could cause greater damage in the long run.

**Before the army moved the Maoists were on the offensive and state on the defensive. What is your position now?**

After they looted weapons, it has become very necessary to get back the weapons and we have to be offensive to get the weapons back and we are.

**Have we recovered some weapons?**

Yes, some. Not all. This has been made public.

**Are you satisfied with the operation so far?**

I am satisfied absolutely, but we are trying to do better.

**How long will the operation last?**

There won't be a time limit to the operation because of the nature of the terrorist problem and our training, we cannot fix the time for the operation. But if all citizens and army come together and move forward together, this operation could end fast. What I mean is we could use information on the Maoists. If that happens we can intensify our action and try to end this fast.

**What type of support are you getting now, from the citizens, politicians, the state?**

From government we have very good support. But other departments, if they were as dedicated as we are, it would be better still.

**What about the press?**

On this, in an emergency the press has a major role. News has to be correct, and if that can be done and the nation informed accordingly it would be good. From our experience we feel some newspapers have been disseminating unnecessary information and confusing the people. If they play a responsible role to inform citizens then the role of the press can be very important in this campaign.

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

## Death in Dang

*BOTULPUR, DANG - Fear lives here, as real as an explosion in the dead of night, as intangible as a mythical demon from the dark tales of centuries past. We came here to find out what everyone in the capital, Singha Darbar and the newsrooms of the nation, was afraid of. We also wanted to shed some light on this murky war of press releases couched in patriotic piety and the growing paternalism of authority.*

*The remote battlefields of the middle-hills lie concealed behind the mists of early winter, and the uncertainties of a self-censoring press treading new territory. I hoped to hear the real story from intrepid local journalists, campaigning NGOs or ordinary people caught in a war zone. The latter, at least, did not disappoint.*

*From the beginning, our trip was fraught with risk, real and imagined. The drive from Nepalganj to Tulsipur took us along a deserted Mahendra Highway. Armed police at the lone checkpoint looked us over sceptically, but it was too cold for more than a perfunctory search. Up we drove into hills wreathed in low cloud, along a narrow bumpy road little better than a path.*

*Halfway along, I realised this hadn't been a wise choice of route, from the point of view of safety. You couldn't see more than a hundred metres, and thick jungle grew right up to the roadside. We stopped an outbound bus and he told us the 12 remaining kilometres to the Dang valley were clear, no fallen tree check points, no land mines that he was aware of. I thought of my first aid kit, sitting at home in Kathmandu, forgotten by the door in the rush to get going.*

*Emerging at the top of the outer Mababharat hills, we were above the clouds, awash in sunlight. A sense of security flooded over us with the warmth, but the descent into cloudy dankness restored the fear of the unknown. A forest admired from above for its lushness became a haven for beasts, an ambushcade concealing guerrillas in the mist. Later, safely in Tulsipur and feeling slightly foolish, we laughed about our concerns.*

**Amid this doom-laden devastation, a ray of hope shone brightly: resilient Nepalis without the time or luxury to indulge in angst.**



*But then a local human rights activist told us we'd driven through two "Maoist villages" on our way down the hills. All we saw were people going to offer puja, or beginning the day's labour. No camouflage or side arms in sight.*

*We heard about the explosion in nearby Botulpur, seven, possibly eight, dead after what seemed to be a ghastly accident. "Don't go there," advised our activist friend. The army may stop you and there could be Maoists along*

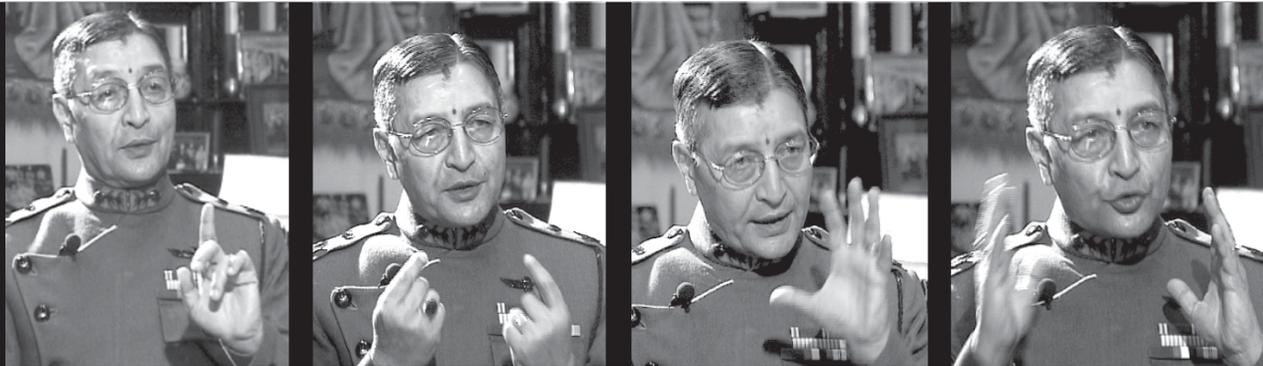
*the way. By now, we were getting tired of bogie men lurking in the bushes so we took a local guide and set off. The road lead across a dry river-bed, empty of both water and rebel fighters. Another safe passage despite local advice, but we're not feeling cocky or proud of ourselves.*

*In the village a grim, yet somehow encouraging drama awaited us. Up on the river bank, behind a screen of trees, a wrecked house was the centre of village attention. Several dozen people were bent over shovels and baskets, clearing rubble and poking gingerly through piles of broken mud bricks and scraps of paper. It was the detritus of a family's life wrecked by violence, by ideology, by a dreadful mishap involving Maoist bomb makers and at least six innocents. I averted my gaze as I walked over a heap of earthen shards, a wall once, perhaps a bedroom. But on the far side, a severed human foot reminded me of how such bloody interventions in the illusion of daily life are ignored at one's peril.*

*The village chief told me in anguished tones how much of a surprise it all was. "We don't support the Maoists," he said in Tharu-Nepali, "And this family was one that we respected. No one knew that the eldest son had such connections." A stranger, he said, had come that night with two black bags.*

*Shredded flesh and torn papers from schoolbooks hung from trees around the house. Yet even amid this doom-laden devastation, a ray of hope shone brightly, a glimpse at the resilience of poor Nepalis without the time or luxury to indulge in angst. Most of the women sifting through the wreckage were looking for one thing—rice grains from this year's harvest. They carefully carried baskets of rubble to a nearby farmyard and tossed it on nanglos, separating the brick dust and bone chips from the precious food.*

*"For the survivors," one woman explained, "We can't stop working and helping our neighbours, however horrible the tragedy." Can Kathmandu's self-indulgent elite learn something from the villages? Self evident, I'd say, but what do I know... 8*



**The press has its own problems about information flow from you.**  
We have not distorted any information we have received in our statements. We have been passing on the news based on facts. For example, our helicopters may have attacked Maoist columns and killed them, but our troops are not on the ground. How can we provide information on their casualties? We cannot provide that information, because of the terrain. Newspapers say this happened in so and so place, is that verifiable or not? We have been giving the information we can give without distortion.

**You don't give operational details?**  
We will not give operation details to anyone. That is a military secret and could be used by the other party against us. Operational details are strictly on a need-to-know basis, even parts of the army will not know what the others are doing.

**The impression is that the army aloof of national life, what can be the relationship in a healthy democratic system?**  
Frankly, the army has its traditions, beliefs, character and discipline which bind us. We in the Royal Nepal Army haven't intermingled with citizens except in times of natural disasters. That is when we have been directly involved with the problems of national life.

**If you need support of all for national security, where does this fit?**  
I will give you an example. We have a military academy at Kharipati to train officers. In our career structure we found that the education was not uniform and to bring that to one level we tried to bring the education at Kharipati to the Bachelor's level. For that we need affiliation with Tribhuvan University. We requested for that and they said security was not our subject, how could they affiliate us? I told them that national security was the responsibility of every citizen, not just the RNA. We should have a syllabus in every campus and that would help all. They said they had not thought about it this way and gave us the necessary permission.  
What I am trying to get at is the thinking of the people, institutions and our culture. All these have made national security the responsibility of only the army. We have to change that. Every individual has a responsibility

towards national security.

**Does the army have a solution to solve the Maoist problem?**  
Basically, in every country there are problems. It is necessary to find ways to solve them and there are ways to do so if you try hard. The RNA did not ask for the present situation, and as the prime minister has said: 'We won't go to talks until the Maoist terrorists lay down arms.' Until that time, the RNA's duty is to create an environment for holding talks.

**What type of environment?**  
We have orders from government to defeat them. Defeating them means killing many Nepalis, which may happen. But before that happens, if the Maoists are smart they will lay down their arms and come to the negotiating table. We may be forced to disarm them and that may get them to the table. If that does not happen, we will be forced to try to defeat them and bring them to the table.

**What would you like to happen personally?**  
I feel Nepalis should not kill Nepalis. The Maoists should realise this, and avoid more Nepali bloodshed. They should peacefully hand over their weapons, and I believe that the government would talk with them if they do that.

**Anything else you would like to add?**  
Before the Maoist problem is resolved, we have to seriously try and find out how this problem emerged. We have to ask: did this situation arise because of the lack of good governance? Our country Nepal, after unification, has never been a colony of any power. It has been a garden of four castes and 36 ethnicities. A visionary king and sacrifices by our brave forefathers made all this possible. In this historical hour all citizens have to gear up for the security of our motherland, to take on national responsibility and move forward. Today we have a question we should all be concerned about: should we Nepalis be united or should we be divisive? I hope all Nepalis get the opportunity to develop in accordance with the values and norms laid down by the Constitution of Nepal, under the able leadership of the symbol of the nation and unity, His Majesty the King. That is what the Nepalis want and is what the Royal Nepal Army believes in. Long live the Nation, long live the Monarch.

## India arrests Maoists

Delhi Police arrested two Nepali nationals said to be involved in supplying explosives to Nepali Maoists this week, according to the Press Trust of India. Police, acting on a tip off, reportedly arrested Krishna Bahadur and Suraj Bahadur from Old Delhi Railway Station on 19 December as they were preparing to leave the Indian capital for Nepal. The two were held with 50 kg of poly-propylene powder, 389 detonators, 46 fuse wires and 28 gelatine sticks. The suspects are said to have admitted belonging to the rebel group and were to deliver the consignment to one Karan Bahadur.

Maoist violence has continued in different pockets of Nepal, mainly in the mid-West, even after the army was sent to fight the rebels on 26 November. On Wednesday a Maoist leader told the BBC that the insurgency would continue despite the army operations. He added that his party was ready to come to peace talks if government would agree to form a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution.

## Bhutani verification

The verification of Bhutani refugees living on one of seven camps in Nepali Jhapa and Morang districts was completed last week. On Sunday officials of the Joint Verification Team said they had screened 12,071 people from 1,935 families housed in the Khundunabari refugee camp. However, this may not mean that the refugees will begin returning home any time soon because the two governments have yet to agree on how to move on. Nepal wants the repatriation process to begin, while Bhutan has been insisting on completing the verification of the remaining camps before continuing. The verification process began on 26 March and refugee sources say that at this rate it could go on forever unless both governments decide to expand the verification teams. Roughly 100,000 refugees have been living in the camps in Nepal since the early 1990s.

## Kamaiyas still in the cold

Thousands of kamaiyas, or bonded labourers, who were freed by a government decree about a year-and-a-half ago are still homeless. Reports from Bardia, Dang, Kailali and Kanchanpur districts suggest that the government may not be able to resettle the kamaiyas by its mid-January deadline. Of the 2,600 kamaiyas who were registered in Bardia, so far only 1,200 have been resettled. However, this number does not include another 1,000 kamaiyas who have applied for government support, but have not been registered by the authorities as genuine claimants. In Banke, the government claims to have almost completed the resettlement of 165 former bonded labourers but the problem in this district is there are over 800 others who claim to be kamaiyas but are not registered by government.

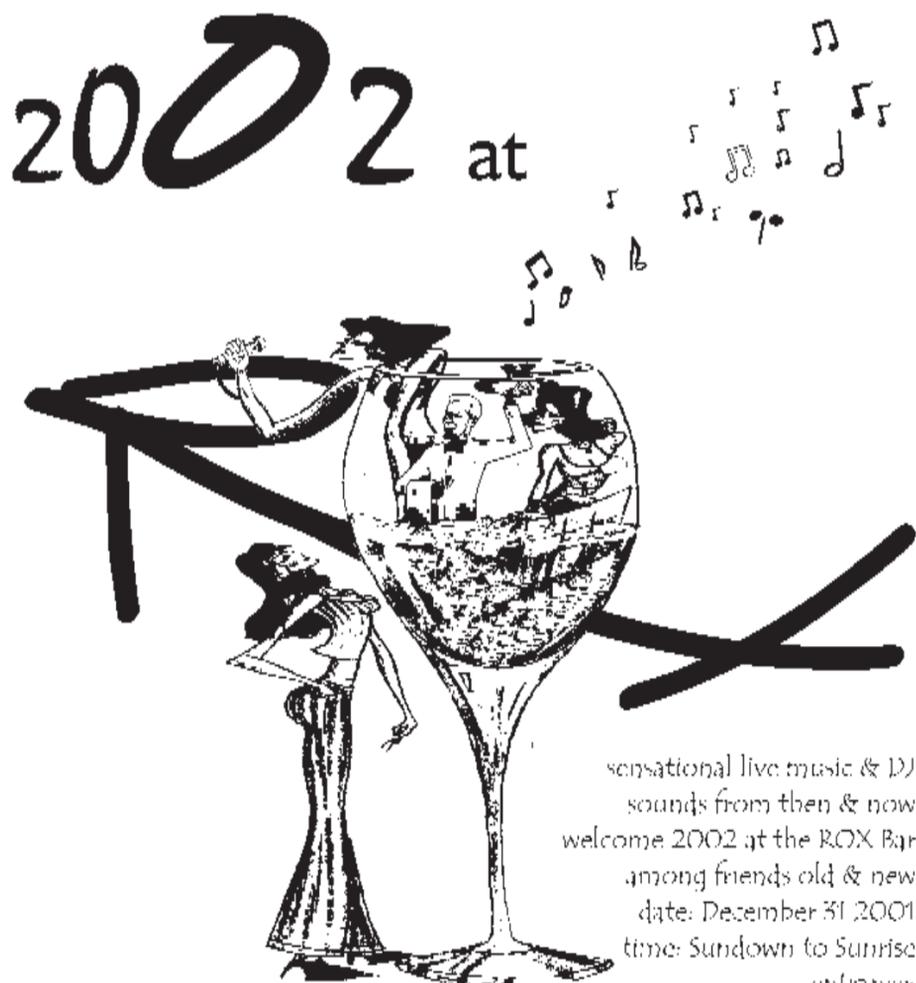


## Child workers

The International Labour Organisation says Nepal has close to 2.6 million children working as domestic help in the country's urban centres. The numbers could be higher because this does not account for children helping out in rural families. Besides this, there are another 42,000 children working as porters or engaged in other forms of labour.

## Bert van den Hoek

Bert van den Hoek, a Dutch anthropologist who conducted research and wrote on Nepal, especially Newari culture, was killed last week in a car accident in India. Van den Hoek worked at TU and at CNWS at Leiden and was also into documentary filmmaking. With Dirk Nijland and Bal Gopal Shrestha he made *Sacrifice of Serpents*, which was shown at the Film South Asia 1999 in Kathmandu. He also contributed to *Anthropology of Nepal*, edited by Michael Allen and published by Mandala.



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from p1



The UML's Shanker Pokhrel is convinced it would be in the government's interest to let civil society function more independently. He told the forum on Tuesday: "I know of locals that have been killed in the offensives, some were even Congress supporters. In the villages people are frightened of being shot from the sky."

The other civil society concern is about the economic cost of the war, and the lack of transparency in procurements. "It is a national tragedy we're being forced to divert funds from development to armaments," said professor of political science Dhruba Kumar. He asked: "Can we afford this? How long can we fight the Maoists using the army?" Kumar was also concerned about the tendency for "rightist forces" wanting a greater say in government decisions in times of conflict. The military was planning major weapons upgrades even before the fighting began, and there is an added sense of urgency about it now.

The Nepali Congress' Narahari Acharya is sanguine that after the emergency is over, there will be an opportunity to take excesses to court. Trouble is, no one knows when that will be. However, there is one constitutional clause saying the king can cancel the emergency order at anytime while it is in effect. **8**

COMMENT

by SEIRA TAMANG



# Emergency soul searching

Calling on civil society to defend our rights in these troubled times is pointless. Just consider what we call civil society.

Following the unfortunate, but necessary, declaration of a state of emergency here, critical voices have been saying with some frequency that we need to monitor the state's actions as we go through this unprecedented situation. The suspension of fundamental rights means we need to think about the present and future of democratic Nepal. All this concern takes the form of calling upon civil society to stay alert to the dangers of unrestrained state power.

The assumption in such calls is that there exists in Nepal a civil society that, while admittedly small, is still ready and willing to defend the interests of democracy. Amidst the images of poor government leadership, bickering political parties, the poverty and short-sightedness of Left politics and so on, civil society remains the unsullied arena upon which democracy now heavily relies. At a time of national urgency, civil society needs to rise to the occasion.

Perhaps reasons for its past inability lies with the usual suspects—political parties, state leaders, corruption, the short period of democratic experience, etc. But it is still unclear where exactly civil society is coming from today, and what direction it will take. As for the outlook on civil society's willingness and ability to fulfil its designated role, well, that is equally murky. Just consider civil society's history of defending democracy and the rights of people, and it is hard not to come up with questions about its own culpabil-

ity in the events leading up, finally, to this emergency. It is difficult not to be sceptical about the ability of our so-called civil society to function, at least in its current form, as a force for democracy.

There are scores of instances of so-called civil society being simply missing from places it should have been most active in. I will only point to a few: Civil society had little to say when famine regularly hit Humla and Jumla. Where were the street protests on behalf of fellow Nepalis having to suffer the annual outrage of not having their basic needs tended to by the state? We never objected to television clips of politicians grandly dispensing foodgrains to the respectful namastes of recipients—food that was not a gift, but a right that had been withheld from them. We never demanded apologies from our politicians then. And why did it need an uproar in the British press for Nepali politicians to finally start pushing for equal pensions for ex-British army Gurkhas? More generally, feminists have not pushed for the rights of dalits, nor have janajati activists called for day-care provisions for women working in factories. Human rights activists have not and do not demand that rice prices be stabilised for poor farmers.

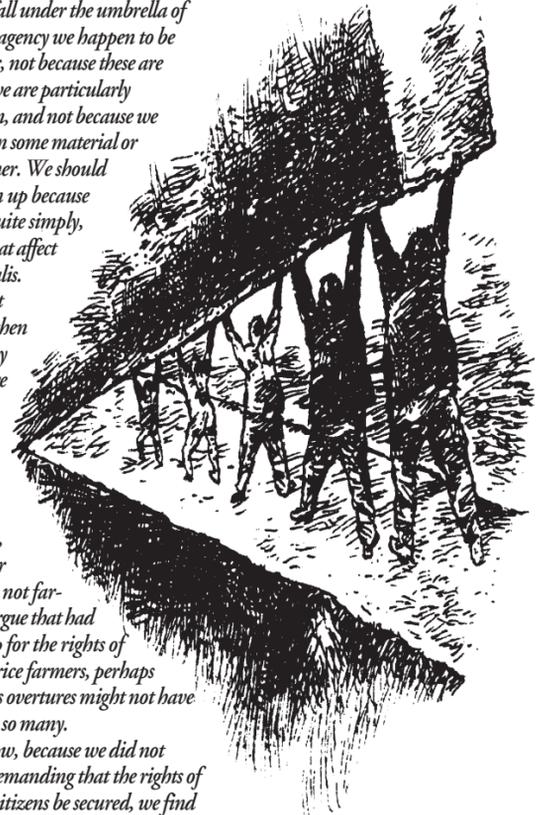
We take the moral high ground in our isolated tundikhels, and sit in our little zones of "activism", "issues", and "projects". And in doing so, we have made ourselves individually and collectively vulnerable to the state and the usual suspects. We did not

challenge outrages that we should have protested against—not because they directly affect us, not because they happen to fall under the umbrella of the specific agency we happen to be working for, not because these are issues that we are particularly interested in, and not because we will profit in some material or other manner. We should have spoken up because these are, quite simply, injustices that affect fellow Nepalis.

It is not surprising then that so many offences were repeated, in similar form or in different guises, in other places, against other people. It is not far-fetched to argue that had we stood up for the rights of Humlis or rice farmers, perhaps the Maoist's overtures might not have appealed to so many.

And now, because we did not speak out demanding that the rights of our fellow citizens be secured, we find that we ourselves are in danger of losing our rights. And to whom will we turn for an outcry of rage on our behalf? This particular historical moment is important on so many levels, and if we are lucky, it will go down as a time in which those of us

who constitute civil society sat down and did some serious, honest soul-searching. Perhaps such an activity will



move us away from the narrow confines of "civil society" to the other spaces of our own democratic potential. **8**

Seira Tamang is a student of political science.

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# Politics as usual

The country doesn't need a constituent assembly or constitutional amendment to solve its problems. But we could inquire into the causes and effects of the phenomenal economic prosperity of the political class.

For almost a month, Nepalis have been surveying the state of emergency from all conceivable sides. The swings between the euphoric repose of the present and recurring anxieties about the future have often been strenuous. Nevertheless, the people, worn out by six years of violence, vendetta and vituperation, are enduring the oscillations as a vital part of the process of national recuperation. Our leaders, however, took little time in discovering that it's politics as usual.

The ruling Nepali Congress is cavorting in the same gyrations of internal conflict. The faction in power takes justifiable pride in the army's advances against the Maoists insurgents in our own Tora Boras. The anti-government camp, although aware of the electoral benefits the entire party stands to gain in case the Maoists' political leadership regains control of the cockpit and decides to make a safe landing, doesn't want the prime minister to take all the credit. Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala has pledged his "full support" to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the party's spokesman can't stop speaking about the "broad mandate" the government has been given to smoke

out the rebels from their remote hideouts. Ordinarily, such magnanimity on Koirala's part should have more than bolstered Deuba. It should have inspired humility in the prime minister, who appeared to relish his predecessor's tribulations at the hands of the combined opposition during the stalled winter session of parliament. But when key lieutenants of the Congress supreme like Sushil Koirala and Govinda Raj Joshi begin defining those terms of encouragement, they take on entirely different connotations. If Deuba feels he needs to keep his jumbo cabinet intact even under the state of emergency, it's because he's been reminded so often by party satraps also to read between the lines while executing the central committee's directives. Similar apprehensions lay behind the urgency with which the government is making changes in the bureaucracy and corporations.

Struggling to stretch out his own space, Ram Chandra Poudel steps in with the latest update on his one-man crusade for political renewal. The latest revelation from the nation's pre-eminent middle-of-the-roader is that he knew all along the prime minister's job was coming his way and all he had to do was stick with Koirala for a few more days. But Poudel tells us he had his inner eyes firmly set on the nation's interest. Granted, such altruism is rare in a career politician, especially one who invested so much in the deputy prime minister's post even

after having served as the speaker of a precariously hung parliament. But you can't stop wondering how much more this man could have done for his country if he were a little more modest about his ability to make sacrifices.

Maintaining its illustrious tradition, the CPN-UML has chosen to sit on the fence. It's hard to say whether the main opposition party supports Deuba's recommendation to impose the emergency. If you're confident it doesn't, try to crack this one: what alternative would the courtiers at Balkhu Darbar have proposed? Actually, the shadow cabinet hasn't been keeping the people entirely in the dark. The UML has been warning the government not to take the opposition's support for granted when the emergency proclamation comes up for ratification in parliament. But it has also been suggesting that a government of national unity, complete with an equitable distribution of portfolios, might help Deuba not only get his two-thirds majority but also marginalise rivals within the ruling party.

To be fair, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party has maintained some consistency. The party is still pushing the "broad national consensus involving all parties and institutions" it enunciated two years ago.

Okay, no party can solve Nepal's problems alone. But you still can't understand whether the former panchas want their own

ministries or are offering to do all they can from where they are. The Saadhavana people are able to exude maturity because most of them had sensed a national emergency during the panchayat years, when the group was still in its incarnation of a parishad.

The smaller communist organisations are testing how far they can incorporate the teachings of the Great Helmsman in their cause without being branded terrorists. The tiniest parties are having the best time, especially with NTV carrying tight shots of the most obscure personalities solemnly contemplating the Nation's future.

You can castigate Deuba as much as you want for resorting to military action against the Maoists after all those grand promises of a negotiated settlement. But you can't accuse him of not having given peace a chance. For some reason, though, the prime minister isn't emphasising enough

what could be his strongest claim to staying in office.

Meanwhile, on the battlefield, those risking their lives and limbs countering the insurgents have their minds on root causes. The military can disarm misguided youths this time, but they can't do the Politicians' job of rectifying the anomalies that spawned the dangerous sense of social alienation in which the Maoists thrived. The country doesn't need a constituent assembly to make those corrections. It doesn't even need a constitutional amendment. The objective of "obtaining to the Nepalese people justice social, political and economic, to be available long into the future" is enshrined in the second paragraph of the preamble to the constitution. Perhaps a palpable beginning would be to probe the causes and effects of the phenomenal economic prosperity of today's political class. But our leaders have launched a pre-emptive strike by warning how a prolonged state of emergency would be detrimental to multiparty democracy. Can anything stop politicians from doing what they're best at? 8



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## FOLLOW-UP

# Tinkune and Maitighar

In this new weekly feature, Nepali Times will follow up on a previously reported story, update it and pick up where we left off. This week we focus on the pre-SAARC demolition at Tinkune and Maitighar. Nepali Times first covered Tinkune in August 2000, #4.

SRIBHAKTA KHANAL

Bulldozers moved into Tinkune on Sunday and razed shanties in the triangular eyesore on the road from the airport to the city. Next to go are residences and businesses at Maitighar, the triangle near the Army Headquarters.

The landscaping of both Tinkune and Maitighar are part of the government's effort to clean up the cityscape in preparation for the forthcoming summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Kathmandu. The plan is to use the land to build public parks.

Something like this was long overdue for Tinkune, but the haste with which the demolitions were carried out and the uncertainties about compensation have raised hackles against the government. The government issued a public notice giving the owners and tenants at Tinkune just 15 days to vacate the property. On the 15th day the bulldozers arrived and began tearing down the buildings.

As citizens we expected at least individual notifications, because this was private property, says Rajendra Sharma Parajuli, whose three-storey building was pulled down to the ground. This is unfair. Like Parajuli, 14 other families claiming ownership of the land, say they will not accept the compensation offered by government because it is far less than prevalent rates.

The government is offering Rs1.6 million, but house owners say Maitighar owners are getting Rs 6.4 million and they should get the same. In normal times the Tinkune episode would have attracted much political opposition. But the pressure of pre-SAARC beautification and the emergency mean these are not normal times. They are willing to give up the land, but they want to be paid equally, Bidur Mainali, deputy



Buildings at Maitighar triangle, and Indira Parajuli.

Mayor of Kathmandu, told us.

The Tinkune dispute goes back to 1974 when the government first appropriated the land to build a park. It did not build the park, but it did not acquire the land legally either. An earlier feeder road allowed construction within five metres from the centreline, but with the Ring Road, the rule is 15 meters. However, after a lawsuit in the mid-1990s, the Supreme Court ruled that the government had not completed the acquisition procedures, and the landowners moved into what used to be largely open agricultural land.

The story at Maitighar is slightly different. Ten households have been living in this triangle since 1955 and there were no plans whatsoever to turn this 0.52 ha patch into public space. I have spent a lifetime here, where can I go and find space to live within this short period? asks 84-year-old Indira Parajuli. The Parajulis are not as unhappy with having to move out it is a government decision anyway but with the way in which the decision was implemented. The money they are offering is also far less than the government's own evaluation for tax purposes, it is completely unfair, she adds. 8



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## Load shedding

Winter is here so can long, daily blackouts be far behind? Perhaps not, this year. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is expecting a shortage of 50-60 mW as peak winter demand for electricity shoots up, but says the blackout schedule may not stretch for months, as was the case in the past, because a new power project is coming on line. NEA sources say the power cuts won't be formally announced, but will take place to manage demand and supply until the second week of February when at least one generation unit of the Kaligandaki A project is expected to begin work.



## Telecom loan

The World Bank has approved a \$22.56 million loan to finance telecom reforms. The bank's investments in Nepal had come to a virtual standstill pending financial sector reforms, especially the inability of government to bring in external firms to manage the Nepal Bank Ltd and the Rastriya Banijya Bank on schedule. The telecom loan is a way of recognising more successful efforts at liberalisation, including establishing an independent regulator. The money is to be used to strengthen the regulatory capability of the Nepal Telecommunication Authority and provide capital subsidies to private companies that will deliver telecom services to 534 rural communities.

## MTEF initiative

The government has begun exercises to adopt the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), essentially an instrument used to match development plans with available resources. Implementing the MTEF is also a precondition for getting budgetary support from donors, who would also need assurances that money put in the basket is not siphoned off. As things stand now, the National Planning Commission (NPC) prepares five-year plans but these are not backed with budgetary commitments, and hence are effectively little more than a wish list. The mismatch of projects and funds is one of the reasons for the low rate of project completion—the NPC says this is only around seven percent.

## Net billing

Paying your bills online in Nepal may still be a distant dream, but the Internet is making it easier. The Nepal Telecommunication Corporation has begun making the monthly telephone bills of its customers in Kathmandu Valley available online. You need to go to [www.ntc.net.np](http://www.ntc.net.np) and complete formal registration procedures using information from your last receipt. Upon completing registration, you get password-protected access to your bill. The corporation is said to also be working on ways to enable customers to eventually pay the bills online.

## Bleak outlook

The signs of an economic downturn have been evident since early this year, and now we have the sorry figures. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) says economic growth in fiscal year 2001-02 will be the lowest in the past 14 years. That is because of lower than expected agricultural yield which was washed out by late rains in east Nepal last year and slowdown in both manufacturing and tourism. The GDP, based on data for the first three months of the current fiscal year, may grow by just 2.5 percent, barely a third of the projection announced in the budget in July (6 percent). Agriculture contributes roughly 40 percent of the GDP, and the growth in the past years mainly reflected the increased agricultural yields thanks to good monsoon rains. Agriculture this year is expected to grow by just 2.1 percent. The non-agricultural sector, which grew by 5.6 percent last year, is expected to slow down to just 2.6 percent, the result of increasing disruption of industrial production and tourism by unstable politics and Maoist violence.

# 11:59



## Nepalis have a curious penchant for the last-minute and the short-run.

Who says Kathmandu is boring. It is positively hopping with action these days, preparing for the SAARC Summit. An event like this allows Nepal to showcase its hospitality industry as well as the sensitivity (or otherwise) with which we preserve our culture and heritage. For instance, there are cleverly preserved antique lampposts (sans lamps) inclined at various degrees and covered with cursory coats of paint. The city is a canvas—potholes are being covered and sidewalks plastered, and positively Cubist white lines being drawn through roads. Yes, a lot is happening.

As with so many other things your Beed has drawn attention to in this space, the Trade treaty being just one of them, this is another example of the Nepali love of doing things at the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute. We have come to the conclusion that this reflects two possible aspects of our national psyche—either we are brilliant with deadlines and work best under pressure, or we are plain complacent. A less sanguine view, though, is that we are so engrossed in the vicious circle of moneymaking through convoluted nexuses that we simply succumb to the dictates of people who gain by making haste. It is an awful thing to say, but it appears that Nepali mediocrity in thinking and doing has stooped so low that no one bothers to even comment about this blatant misuse



of resources. Are we just resigned to the fact that these events are moneymaking opportunities for people and things will get back to normal once the circus leaves town? The shopkeeper who has been evicted and the hawkers who have been thrown off the sidewalks for them, but they can always return.

This SAARC madness and other fits like it are among the reasons for Kathmandu's growth as an unplanned urbane jungle. If it were not for this event, squatters and hawkers in many areas would have converted their spaces into permanent homes. We conveniently forget how in some similar time shack owners were evicted with promises of compensation along Exhibition Road, turning a potential hub for exhibitions into lanes of shops. The squatters for their part simply moved on elsewhere. The various agencies that have allowed haphazard constructions for decades are now calling foul and want to take action

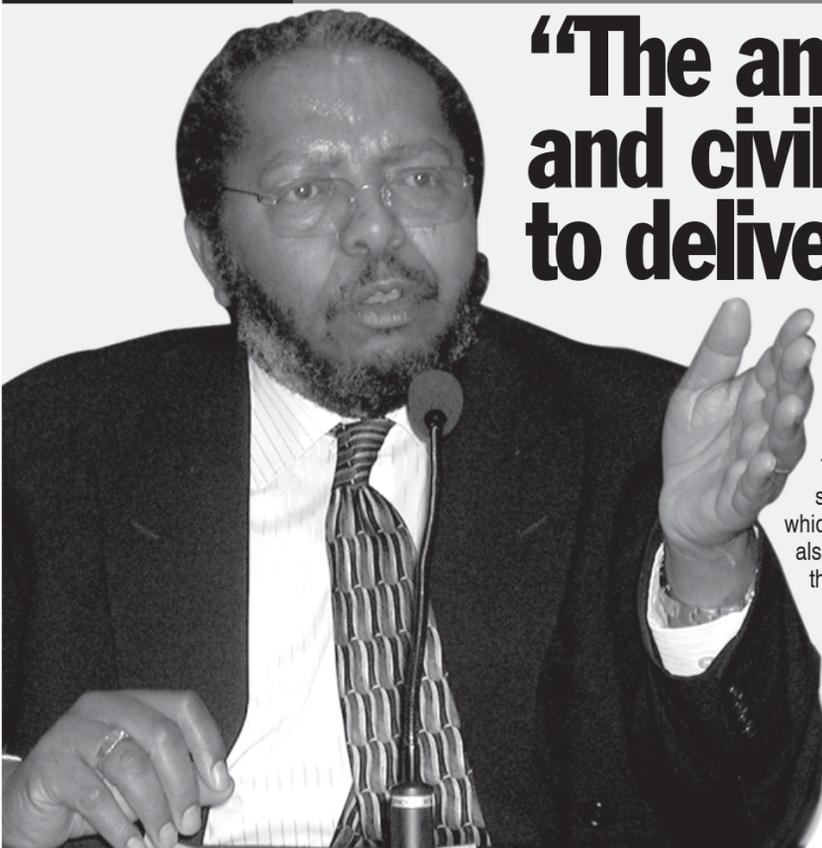
against the erring structures. Sure, the buildings are being pulled down, but that is a short-term solution. Those who constructed them are not being penalised, and there is no sign that building regulations will be enforced more strictly in the future.

Millions of rupees have been poured into patchwork repairs on roads, pavements and other places, all for the short run. We need to have preventive and regular maintenance so scarce resources are spent better. We need stringent construction guidelines that are enforced, and we must devise ways to manage the proper functioning of our city's systems. We need, above all, to have regulated a marketplace that gives all players a level playing field, and help shacks that survive by paying protection money into retailers that pay rent and electricity.

What sort of a future are we creating for ourselves? Hasty last-minute decisions always cost the country dear. From the way we negotiate treaties to the way we handle enterprise labour relations to even the way we dig our roads and install electric poles, a lot needs to change. For the greater good, we need to learn, otherwise it will always be like this, with a few making good off the stupidity of the system. 8

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

## INTERVIEW



# “The answer is providing politicians and civil servants the right incentives to deliver the goods”

- Emmanuel Tumuslime-Mutebile, Governor, Bank of Uganda

deliver. The incentive structure for politicians and for public servants is perverse from a development point of view.

### Did you sense some positive signs?

The prime minister is serious and wants to see change, wants delivery of public services, which is clear from his eight-point program. It is also clear from his analysis of the root cause of the insurgency, that ultimately it is due to the failure of government to deliver public services to the grassroots. The answer is providing politicians and civil servants the right incentives to deliver the goods.

### What about resources, how do you deliver when you can't pay for it?

One has to be very frank about this. I think it is not a question of resources, it is a question of priorities. Resources will never be enough, at least on earth (in heaven there might be). We are condemned to having scarcity of resources relative to needs. I think the ultimate objective of any government or political activity ought to be delivery of public services with the resources you have.

### What about borrowing?

You can, but prudently. Certainly not from the domestic banking system. I was amazed about your long record of macroeconomic stability. Clearly this has been a result of prudent monetary and

fiscal policy. But from our experience in Uganda I can tell you that this stability can go up in flames overnight the minute the government begins to use central bank borrowing to finance its expenditures because that is creating money. As darkness follows daylight, it will cause inflation, not in years but in months.

### How serious is the possibility of us overspending in a war economy?

Here is how you should handle the war. It is the new priority and it must displace some other priority. You should reprioritise all government expenditure in such a way so as to create enough resources to fight the war within the existing sources. Once donors have seen that you are doing your best within the resources available, it is most likely that they will come in and give you money for the non-security-related expenditures. But I doubt if they will give you money for the budget unless they can see evidence that you are re-prioritising.

### Have you got some sense of the donor role in Nepal so far?

There has been a policy and program vacuum (on government part) and donors have moved in to fill that vacuum. That is why there are so many different small projects financed by this or that donor. Because this money is being put in Nepal without a coherent framework it is virtually being wasted because it is like pouring water into a sieve. There must be a coherent framework identifying priorities within the budget constraints, donors can then come in and help once they see the good intentions. Nature hates a vacuum, they (donors) are there and they will come and fill it if you keep the space. What you need to do is to channel their resources to where you want it to go. Don't allow them the

### You've met different Nepali officials, tell us what you found.

It is a bit presumptuous for me to draw conclusions on the basis of the short experience. I have come away with an overwhelming sense that there is a need to find a mechanism for lengthening the planning horizons of politicians, in particular, lengthening the planning horizon of government leaders. When prime ministers change so quickly one runs the risk that politics becomes the politics of shuffling the deck, moving from one person to the another without giving anyone enough time to think strategically and implement programs they want to

# Learning from Uganda



Uganda's remarkable turnaround after decades of conflict holds important lessons for Nepal.

BINOD BHATTARAI

In terms of human development, Nepal is at the bottom of the heap in Asia, but with the economy stagnant there are indications that our country is even more badly off than some countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Now with a full-blown insurgency raging in the countryside, there is a real danger that vital resources will be sucked away from development. But there is hope: if a country like Uganda could rise from the ashes, why can't Nepal?

That was the message Emmanuel Tumusime-Mutebile, governor of the Bank of Uganda had for Nepal last week at the end of a four-day visit. Mutebile was one of the key technocrats hired by Uganda's visionary president Yoweri Museveni to turn the east African

nation around. Uganda's remarkable recovery did not happen by sheer good luck, it was sheer hard work.

"Even up to the mid-1980s we were literally like playing a game of political musical chairs on the deck of the Titanic," Mutebile told us.

"Governments were changing fast and all were unable to deliver basic public services." The transformation began in the mid-1980s after Yoweri Museveni was elected president. As the Governor of the central bank, Mutebile helped clean up its moribund financial system and keep watch on the government's purse.

Nepal and Uganda have many things in common: both are landlocked and about the same size in geography and population. Both are relatively resource-poor, and share the same economic make-up—over 40 percent of the Gross Domestic

Product comes from agriculture. Nepal may have better resources in terms of hydro and tourism potential, but Uganda has superior governance structures which have been key in improving development parameters.

"The key is the involvement of the political leadership in development and poverty alleviation programs," says Dr Shanker Sharma of the National Planning Commission who was in Uganda earlier this year. "That has not happened in Nepal so far." In fact the key seems to be visionary leadership that can impart direction and hope to a country ravaged by poverty and war.

Mutebile is careful not to sound too prescriptive. "I should be careful not to say too much about my hosts," he told us, "but not saying anything won't help either." Some of his observations:

freedom to pick and choose. Donors have, through their interventions, taken the pressure off Nepalis in positions of power to effect changes for the benefit of the people. Fortunately the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance have started the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) which is an important development. It means the government is beginning to confront the constraints.

## What is this new acronym, MTEF?

A MTEF is essentially about three things. It is about overall fiscal discipline, meaning that the resource you have is the limit for your expenditure. Of course, the resources include money committed by donors to the budget to the extent you get them to put in the support. But that must be the limit to public expenditure. Secondly, there must be strategic prioritisation of resources within and between sectors. For example your priorities could be agriculture, roads, power and water. Everything else is not a priority. You may now have to add security to the list, and cut resources from elsewhere to pay for it. The third point is operational efficiency to get the output you want, which you have to achieve through cost-effectivity.

## Assuming we do everything right, what does your Ugandan experience tell us about the turnaround time for Nepal?

Improvements can be obtained very quickly, if you determine what outcome you want. You can reduce percentage of people living in poverty or increase health delivery, agriculture productivity very quickly. In Uganda we reduced poverty from 56 percent in 1992 to 46 percent 1997, we had a reduction of 10 percentage points in the poverty head count in five years. That is not a long time to deliver such reduction. I cannot see why it cannot happen in Nepal because you have a similar economic structure and you have been even better in terms of macro-stability and external reserve management.

## If you were asked to start something tomorrow, what three things would you start with?

I would try to increase agriculture productivity which would require high-yield seeds, irrigation and extension services to farmers. I would deal with transport more generally and mainly building feeder roads in the mountains. I would also attempt to increase the number of children going to school. Our program in Uganda doubled the number of school-going children in one year. Over more than five years we have increased the number of primary school goers from 2.5 million in 1996 to 8 million this year.

## But how do you deal with a bureaucracy that barely functions?

Without apologising for civil servants, I think that politics is the most important. Once the politics is right, once the incentive framework is improved from your short-term preoccupation (to get to power), in the longer term the civil servants will also have the right incentives to implement projects. You should not transfer people from one office to another, as it seems to be happening here, but one should also not be a permanent fixture. People should be kept in an office long enough to see a program through. If they have that prospect they then have the incentive to do things. It is thus important to change the incentive structure facing both the politician and civil servant to lengthen their planning horizons. Political leaders of all parties need to have some sort of a compact: they should ask the prime minister to provide a vision and he should be given at least five years to deliver.

"I see the credibility of the state is a major problem, and this may haunt Nepalis even after the Maoists are crushed"

"I have been talking to many politicians here and I regret to say that I have the impression that politics in Nepal is only about who sits in the chair. If this goes on and if we meet in 10 years from now Nepal will be worse off"

"Political power must be used to deliver public services. Leaders must have a tenure that is long enough to make it possible to deliver what they promise. Maybe having an agreement on this between political parties would be the place to start and nurture real development"

Uganda has seen the worst a country can. In 1989 it had almost 60 percent of the people living on less than one dollar a day and a parallel

economy, where the dollar was sold for 10 times the official exchange rate. If that was not bad enough, HIV/AIDS struck Africa at about the same time.

"We worked with a cash budget based on spending only how much revenue we were able to earn," says Mutebile. "If a ministry did not have money it did not spend it." It was a tough decision and put many development programs on hold, but that also put pressure on the government to create resources, by improving revenue collection and checking leakage. Simultaneously, the government was forced to prioritise development investments—which it actually did, by throwing out over 50 percent of the programs it funded and concentrating only on a few. Many

donors were hesitant in the beginning, but it did not take them long to be convinced.

"Once donors see you are serious with what you want to do they will put money because they also want to be associated with success," says Mutebile. Today, Uganda's economy is growing by about 6 percent each year and more donors and private investors are willing to be a part of the success story. Aid is flowing faster making up about 30 percent of its GDP annually.

One reason why all that was possible according to Mutebile was political vision, and the space for the political leadership to deliver on its promises. Mutebile says Africa doesn't have a shortage of strong leaders (Uganda's own Idi Amin was one), but it has lacked leaders with vision. Mutebile's prescription for Nepal is a visionary and strong leadership, political will, a political consensus on development priorities and fiscal discipline. 8

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# Stop the world and let me off

Places to get away from it all this new year.

Shangri-La Village, Pokhara

It's been a rough 12 months. Conventional wisdom has it that the dawn of the new year needs to be celebrated with lots of food, drink, people, noisemakers and funny hats, in as exotic a location as one can

guide to celebrating the festive season has some rather different suggestions. We asked where one could go to get away from it all, really and truly. Where one would see few people, catch the news two days late, if at all, and

truly block out the world was... Nepal. We're willing to bet that no beach in Thailand, and no jungle in Indonesia will come close to offering the pure relaxation that our eight picks do. Go on, get out into the country. What

Valley from Pokhari Thumko, barely an hour's drive from the eastern edge of Patan, from the Ring Road towards the old town of Lubhu. At 2,000 m and approximately 15 km south-east of Kathmandu, the Adventure Tented Camp offers the perfect combination of sweeping views of snow-covered peaks and magical sunrises, sunsets, and night views over the Valley. You feel like you're in deepest forest here, surrounded in season by luxuriant rhododendrons, magnolia, wild orchids, and an astonishing variety of other greenery at all other times. A great place for nature lovers and birdwatchers, the Camp is also the ideal starting point for short hikes and bicycling over to Panauti and Phulchowki, among others. The thatched roofs give a whole new meaning to camping, and the Country Kitchen provides delicious cuisine from all around

the world. The resort has special discounts for the holiday season. 418922

### River Side Springs, Kurintar

A resort with a difference, River Side Springs is perfect for families as well as couples and groups of friends. A two-and-a-half hour drive from

Manakamana temple, get out to Pokhara or stop in on the way back from a tiring jungle trip in Chitwan. Or, if you're short on time, you could just stay here and enjoy the white sand. The resort is extremely well-equipped, and even the hard to please will have



Adventure Tented Camp, Pokhari Thumko

manage. We beg to differ. Sure, the food, drink and stunning locale all make sense. But does a year like the one just passing need to get any more hectic than it has already been? Perhaps not. So this year, the annual NT

be able to pass the hours just watching unbeatable vistas, walking, reading or talking to a loved one—without being startled by the collective clicking of a busload of tourists' cameras. We realised that the best place to

are you waiting for?

### Adventure Tented Camp, Pokhari Thumko

If you can't go too far, don't worry. There are splendid views of both the mountains and the

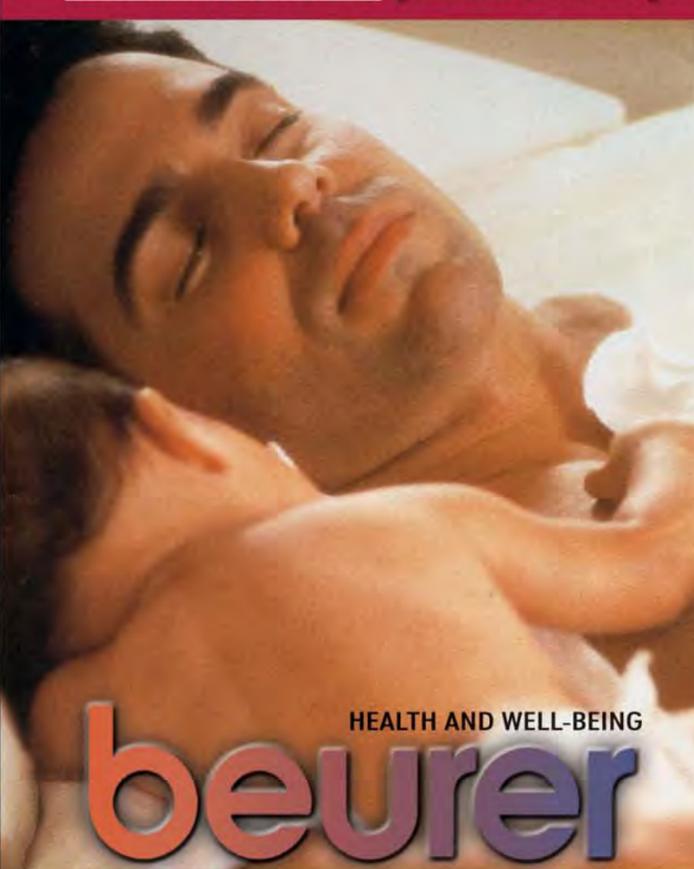


River Side Springs, Kurintar

Kathmandu (102 km), just beside a lazy bend in the Trisuli river, the resort is a good way to begin or end a holiday. You can make a short trip to

little to complain about—there is a large landscaped swimming pool, an a la carte restaurant, a gymnasium, a mini movie theatre, and pony rides. 241408

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### Horse Shoe Mountain Resort, Mude

In Mude village in Sindhupalchowk district, 110 km northeast of Kathmandu, the Horse Shoe Mountain Resort is a spectacularly scenic place. It is confusing—so nice you want to tell people about, but so very nice, really, that you don't want it overrun. Run by a retired army major and his wife, the Resort is at a height of 2,800 m, has simple, clean rooms, and a very homely restaurant and bar that serves Nepali and continental food. Their trump card, though, is the Finnish sauna. Short one-day hikes to nearby villages, and trips to the Dolakha Bhimsen and Kalinchowk Mahi temples can be taken from the resort, while the sunrise and sunset, and mountain views are worth just sitting around. Special Christmas and New Year discounts are available. 011-63174.

### Everest Panorama Resort, Daman

There are few places you can get absolutely brilliant views of the Himalaya without having to trek for hours. Daman is one of them, and the Everest Panorama Resort is a worthy addition to it. 80 km from Kathmandu along the Tribhuvan highway, Daman is one

ALL PICS COURTESY RESORTS IN STORY.

PHOTO: OAM 1027/01



Everest Panorama Resort, Daman

of the premium mountain viewing locations—at 2,500 m above sea level, it offers views of the Himalaya from Dhaulagiri to beyond Everest on a clear day, and such days there are plenty. There are walks to be taken among pine and oak forests, with an abundant variety of bird-life. The Resort has luxury facilities such as modern rooms with central heating, cottages and private balconies, all facing the mountains. In addition, you can walk up the viewing tower equipped with powerful binoculars, and in the evenings, sit at the cosy bar with a comprehensive range of local and imported drinks. There is lots more—a friendly restaurant, a mini golf green, a tennis court, a children's playground, a jacuzzi, suana, and indoor games including a pool table. You can take a short hike

data ports, minibars, television with satellite connections, private balconies, and terrace gardens. Hanging around the swimming pool and outdoor jacuzzi are a



Nepal Wildlife Resort

perfect way to spend the afternoon as more energetic people go on short hikes and less wired ones take a nap. The Village offers special Christmas packages. 412999

**Nagarkot Farmhouse Resort, Nagarkot**

Calling the Farmhouse a resort is inaccurate. This is possibly the most soothing retreat in the country. Just two km from Nagarkot proper, the Farmhouse feels like the former home it is. And few hilltop resorts can offer what it does. Surrounded by thousands of fruit trees, it is a typical Nepali building with traditional art and huge windows from which to look through to spectacular mountain views. There is a cosy and homely restaurant with an open fireplace, which truly feels like sitting in a friend's home. The food is all local and organic, and set meals are the order of the day. If you're feeling spiritual there is also a meditation hall and a white Buddhist stupa. There are day

in the heart of the Royal Chitwan National Park. One of the few deluxe jungle resorts, Temple Tiger offers the usual jungle trips a lot more. For one, you don't have to venture out into the forest for a glimpse of the wildlife, you can do just as well from the Lodge itself. It has individual villas furnished with twin beds, attached baths, and private balconies with hammocks and umbrellas, well suited to relaxed wildlife watching. And if you want a real thrill, the Lodge has trained naturalists and ten elephants to guide you. If you go now, there is a new addition to the stable, so to



Nagarkot Farmhouse Resort, Nagarkot

speak, a calf called Ojaswao Prasad, the first time in recent years a healthy baby elephant (a cross between a wild and a tame elephant) has been born in Nepal. In the evenings you can relax with the excellent food and listen to the sounds of the jungle and the low tones of men recounting their war stories, such as wrestling with tigers. Special offers are on. 244651

**Nepal Wildlife Resort**

The Royal Bardia National Park is about as far as you can go from the Valley and the idea of Mountainous Nepal. The Nepal Wildlife Resort at the southern border of the park sits right beside a tributary of the Karnali river. The Resort has all the facilities of a jungle lodge. The fact that it has no electricity and has to make do with generators in the evenings only adds to the safari feeling.

There are plenty of safe and exciting opportunities to go wildlife-spotting, and it is particularly exciting to look across the river from your porch and spot a wild boar, blackbuck, tiger or even Asia's largest wild elephant. There is more to do in the evenings than just the time-honoured safari tradition of having a couple of chbota pegs—Tharus from surrounding villages come to dance for guests at the Resort. 246923



to a nearby monastery or to the surrounding Tamang villages, or go fishing in the nearby Indra Sarovar. 415373

**Shangri-La Village, Pokhara**

This isn't any old resort with a mountain-view, it actually complements the majestic Annapurna range. The Shangri-La Village Pokhara, a "boutique resort", is just about a five-minute drive from Pokhara



Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge

airport, but you'd never guess it. The traditional Nepali architecture is appropriate, comfortable and beautiful, and the garden is stunningly landscaped, with water bodies strewn around here and there. It is hard to think of a more perfect place from where to sit and take in Machhapuchhre and its neighbours. The Village is a deluxe resort with modern facilities including rooms with individual temperature controls,

trips, short hikes and mountain bike-rides to be taken along the Valley rim, but the Farmhouse is also the perfect place to just be. 271545

**Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge**

There are many places to stay in Chitwan, but few like Temple Tiger Jungle Lodge and Wildlife Camp. A two-hour drive from Narayanghat, and another 15 minutes more across the Narayani River in a safari jeep, the Lodge is





DAVID CELDRAN

When life resembles fiction, reality becomes the biggest blockbuster in town. Aware of this, entertainment companies are scrambling to package this phenomenon called life on television. Just take a look at the growing number of reality-based programs. This television genre is called Reality TV, which encompasses news and talk programs, game shows, sports, comedy, horror and drama. In fact, each reality show is often a bit of all these rolled into one.

Once again, a news reporter revisits sensational crimes and shocking acts of terror through the increasingly common use of news footage spliced with drama sequences reconstructed for television.

Journalistic methods are combined with the techniques of entertainment to document true stories, and in cases where footage is unavailable, to simulate reality. The common thread that runs through these programs is the ability to capture reality unfolding in the raw and in real-time—or at least the impression of it.

Because human beings are a complex bundle of drives and instincts, Reality TV attempts to record, through the use of the omnipresent video camera (hidden or otherwise), how ordinary people, put under extraordinary situations, grapple with their primordial selves and succumb to or overcome greed, lust, fear, and the basic instincts of survival and self-preservation.

# Video voyeurism

In the brave new world of Reality TV, war is adventure, crime is drama, politics is competitive sport, and all of existence is reduced to spectacle.

The more faithfully these drives are documented, manipulated, or, in a growing number of situations, recreated, the more convincing the effect of reality. In "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," the thrill of answering questions is less important than the gratification the audience gets seeing contestants crumble under pressure or lured by greed.

In many ways, Reality TV is more than just a genre. It is a set of techniques that aim to simulate the real. Since not all events are captured on tape as it happens in real time, what is not recorded is reconstructed. Today, a lot of effort is spent making video material look and feel like the original experience of living. If traditional television entertainment idealises life with polished scenery and breathtaking camera work, Reality TV provides the opposite by approximating the viewer's imagination of the natural texture of reality. The rough, the gritty, and the jerky are replacing decades of traditional camera and editing techniques.

According to this "new" aesthetic (which was actually popularised years ago by MTV), the less "staged" a scene comes across to viewers, the more authentic the experience of reality becomes. Never mind the fact that humans experience life in colour, and not in the grainy, black-and-white look habitually used by Reality TV producers. Or forget for a while that we go through each day without once hearing background music rise and fall with every emotion we feel.

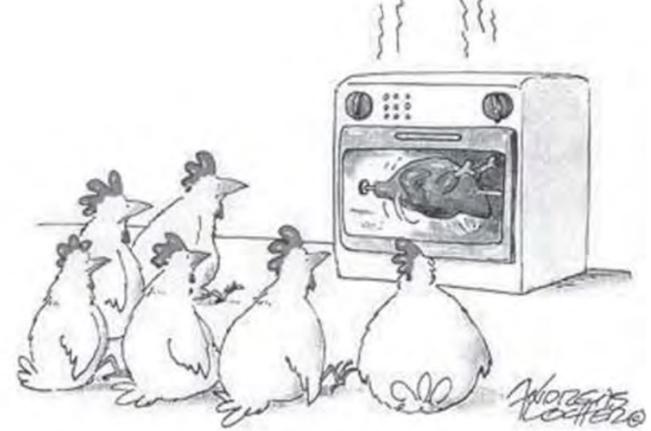
Scoring and splicing—these are the other ingredients that are being employed to simulate life. Because reality unfolds in a timeline different from the limits imposed by television schedules, footage is spliced and reality edited into easily digestible sequences that pick the juicy

highlights and leave out the uneventful rest. The material of life when recorded, edited and scored to the tune of the real thing produces an experience that is arguably more believable than the real.

TV stations superimpose the words "actual footage" on screen to help viewers differentiate fact from what has become known as "faction", or the reconstruction of factual events using fictional methods for visualisation.

When the texture of reality cannot be simulated by footage and sound, it is reconstructed for the viewer by the reporter. A reporter's self-conscious narration and point of view has been around since the beginning of broadcast news where it has been used to point out detail and context otherwise not obvious in the report. But in Reality TV, reporters become the news event themselves. Why the emphasis on a reporter's inner conflicts and fears, innermost joys and epiphanies? In Reality TV, viewers' experience of reality is made even more real when authenticated by the reporter's presence. When a reporter thinks aloud, it creates the effect that he or she is whispering to the viewer in a private conversation that resembles a secret among friends. This personalised approach not only verifies reality but also gives it a more exciting meaning. And by stepping into the lives of the reporters that cover reality, viewers can go beyond merely watching life to living life—if only vicariously.

One can argue that such techniques of Reality TV are not different from traditional methods used by novelists and filmmakers. To be sure, the detailed style of an Ann Rice novel and the cinema-verité methods of the blockbuster suspense movie *Blair Witch Project* are only



REALITY-TV

two examples of how recreating the texture of reality can make for convincing fiction.

But the fundamental difference between reconstructing reality as fictional entertainment and reproducing it as news is often overlooked and underestimated. When fiction simulates reality and reality resembles fiction, the line that separates fact from make-believe evaporates in the minds of viewers, thus making it increasingly difficult for them to see the world objectively.

This is what the social theorist Jean Baudrillard calls the phenomenon of hyperreality—the postmodern condition where television dissolves into life and life dissolves into television. In hyperreality, people can no longer distinguish between the spectacle and the real as the line that divides reality as it is and reality as it should look like dissipates.

Extending this analysis, television does not mirror reality, television creates it. News becomes a collage of select and fragmented images that have no original, no source or counterpart in the real world. What we perceive to be real is nothing more than a simulation of it. Reality programs, therefore, do not only run the risk of providing a distorted view of life, but also a sometimes imaginary version of it where entertainment co-opts reality and repackages life to out-do life itself.

This ability to inflate reality explains the global popularity of the genre. Hit series like MTV's *Real World*, *Survivor*, *Cops*, and *America's Most Wanted* are just some of the programs that have been captivating audiences worldwide. And this is no surprise. The success of Reality TV is based on the same impulse that makes us stare at accidents on the highway or at a couple arguing in the next table. The endless melodrama and spectacle life dishes out on a daily basis satisfy this voyeuristic appetite.

Reality TV has been likened to gladiatorial combat where spectators cry for blood for no apparent reason other than the entertainment it offers. The more carnage the better, the more intense the conflict the more satisfying it is to viewers. This may all sound extreme, but the public isn't the only one lining up for a bit of the action—so, too, are television networks. After all, reality is double the entertainment value at a fraction of the price of fiction.

The current recession and the corresponding dip in advertising revenue have forced network

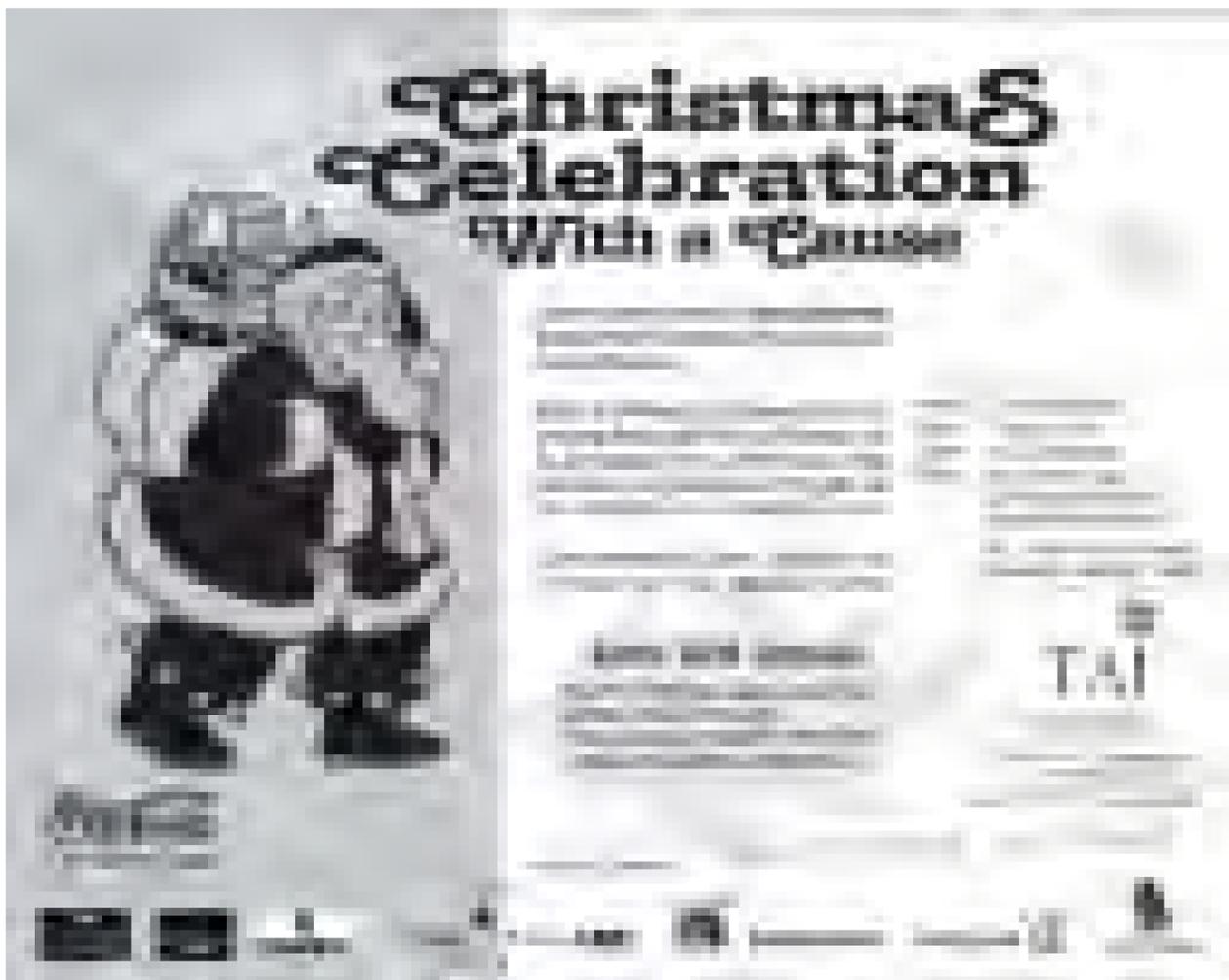
programmers to seek formats that provide more bang for the buck. Variety shows, dramas, and sitcoms are becoming too expensive to produce because those rely on bankable stars, professional directors, established scriptwriters, and a whole army of production personnel to run them. Compare that to the often scriptless and raw production values of reality programs and the choice to network bosses is clear.

In the rush to plug the holes in network programming, news departments are fast crossing the already-fuzzy line separating news and entertainment. Across networks, journalists are stretching the definition of news and current affairs to include a variety of subjects based on reality. Under this ever-widening definition fall topics like celebrity gossip, the occult, human adventure, and even comedy, as in the case of *America's Funniest Videos*.

As reality and the imaginary become indistinguishable from each other, so too does the role of the journalist with that of the entertainer. The primary objective of journalists, of course, is supposed to be to provide the public with information that is not only relevant, but also accurate and truthful. At the same time, for it to reach the widest audience possible, journalism should attempt to be interesting and engaging, although it should be careful not to become pure entertainment.

In the new century of hyperreality, Reality TV has emerged as a powerful and inescapable form of entertainment. For as long as viewers crave for entertainment that resembles life, reality programs will continue to proliferate, change the way we cover news, and redefine our notions of objective reality and truth. The challenge to journalists is to stop considering Reality TV as the next evolutionary stage of journalism, but rather just another form of entertainment that is cheaper to produce than traditional forms. As such, network news should keep to producing news and leave the entertainment—reality-based or otherwise—to the entertainment divisions. This divide is necessary, if only to keep journalists from framing reality in the language of entertainment where war is adventure, crime is drama, politics is competitive sport, and where all of existence is reduced to spectacle. **8** (PCJ)

David Cel dran is a producer with the Philippine television channel, ABS-CBN.



ANALYSIS

by IAN DAVIDSON

# Going solo



**NATO might be irreparably damaged by the American "war on terror", and EU is not unharmed either.**

As wars end, diplomatic and political autopsies begin. It is not too early to draw some preliminary conclusions from the "war on terrorism". One concerns the revolutionary changes being contemplated in NATO's relations with Russia. Less visible is the deep and self-inflicted wound that, I suspect, has opened within NATO itself.

After 11 September, NATO's European members, among others, promptly lined up with the US in moral and political solidarity, and offers of cooperation. For the first time since NATO's founding, Article 5 of the Washington Treaty was invoked. Article 5 is the keystone of the Treaty—it says an attack against one member of the alliance shall be considered an attack against all. This article distinguishes NATO from any

other defensive alliance in history, in the sense that it incorporated an open-ended guarantee of collective defence.

Here was a momentous event in NATO's 52-year history. You'd think its activation would lead to collective defence by NATO. European NATO allies, including Britain, France, Italy and even Germany, offered military forces. But the Bush Administration intended to fight this war by itself; it did not want NATO involved, and Britain's was a small, essentially marginal military contribution.

Some conclusions follow. First, it is clear that President George W. Bush's administration remains as unilateralist as it seemed coming to power 11 months ago. It has opted out of or denounced multilateral engagements, such as the Kyoto protocol on climate change. Though it

sometimes seemed that this disengagement from its friends overseas might soften under Secretary of State Colin Powell, events since 11 September have confirmed that this US administration remains unilateralist.

Second, the attempt by the British to secure influence and advantage by playing on the "special relationship" with the US is again exposed as a myth. Prime Minister Tony Blair has made heroic efforts to exert influence on the US, by total military commitment to support the US campaign in Afghanistan, and by arguing that the war can only be won if it addresses political and economic issues, not only military ones. But Blair's influence on US military strategy is as marginal as Britain's military contribution to the American military campaign. This dilemma is clear inside the British

cabinet, where Foreign Secretary Jack Straw argued for an international peace-keeping force in Afghanistan, but was opposed by Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, who agrees with the Pentagon's hostility to such proposals.

Third, it is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine Article 5 can be invoked again. You cannot say "we call on NATO for collective defence," and in the next breath say, "we don't need you, we're doing it our way." NATO's centrepiece seems seriously, perhaps fatally damaged. The fourth conclusion mirrors this—the US has been patently reluctant to accept help offered by European NATO members. Public opinion in favour of European NATO will be vulnerable if the military campaign does not produce fairly quick political successes, more so if the US moves to a wider military war against "state sponsors of terrorism."

Finally, this crisis may have seriously damaged efforts to create a common foreign and security policy between members of the EU. Everything Blair has done since his rush visit to Washington after 11 September seems designed to prevent integrated EU response. His systematic promotion of meetings of "big" European countries, independent of EU institutions or mechanisms, culminated in the recent farce over a dinner at Downing Street. Intended as one between Europe's Big Three (Britain, France and Germany), it ended up with determined but unwelcome gatecrashers from the EU's other governments. The Big Three have often resented being dragged behind the US on defence. Now smaller EU members fear being co-opted into an EU foreign policy in whose development they had no say. **8** (Project Syndicate)

(Ian Davidson is a fellow of the European Policy Centre, Brussels, and columnist with The Financial Times.)

OPINION

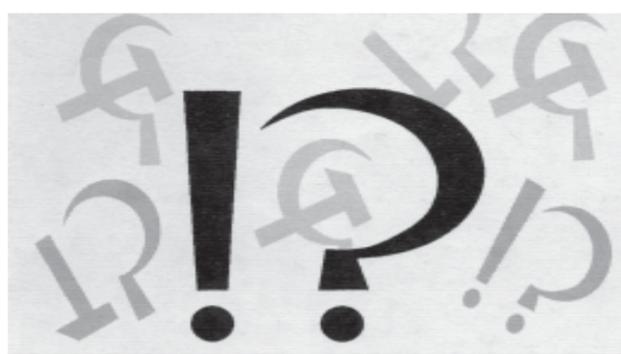
by SUSIE LINFIELD

# THE ILLIBERAL LEFT

Around the world, the Left was thrown into crisis after Khrushchev's 1956 speech exposing (some of) Stalin's crimes. It wasn't only Communist Party members dazed by Khrushchev's revelations; progressives of all stripes—from trade unionists to Trotskyites—were forced, if they were honest and brave enough, to reassess long-cherished beliefs. 11 September has thrust those of us who consider ourselves progressives—who believe in democracy, feminism, human rights and socialism—into a 1956-type crisis. Questioning authority must now start with our own. Years of political correctness have resulted in muddled, strident and obtuse ways of approaching (avoiding?) the world. This piece is primarily a self-critique, but though the universe of "progressives" I am addressing is not infinite, it is larger than one.

The holy grail of much Leftist thinking over recent decades has been cultural relativity. Terrified of being thought racist, imperialist, arrogant, elitist or "too Western," we averted our eyes from (and sometimes supported) barbarisms of all types. Along with this came an odd reverence for "traditional cultures"—strange for those who fancy themselves forward-looking rationalists. For example, a student of mine defended female genital mutilation in Africa on the grounds that it is "traditional." True, I replied, so was slavery in the American south. That's different!, she cried. Ah, but it's not. If Marx were writing today, he'd be vilified for blasting the idiocy of rural life. Then there is the opiate of the people, which has somehow metamorphosed into a self-conscious, nay dialectical, cry for national liberation. Ah, but it's not.

Bitter irony: this attempt to purify ourselves of racism resulted in a racist worldview. What else can we call our wilful ignorance of the agony of so many in the underdeveloped world: the torture chambers that litter virtually every Arab nation, the million "martyrs" in the lunatic Iran-Iraq war, the thousands of state executions in China, the grotesque subjugation of women? (The Taliban's strictures against women make the Nuremberg Laws look almost mild, though in spirit the two sets of decrees are one.) Our "solidarity" with the Third World has been anything but.



**Is it 1956 for the Left? Well, yes.**

put it well in 1951: "No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as 'inalienable' those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilised countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves... Equality... is not given us, but is the result of human organisation insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights."

Starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Left has defined itself as the defender of knowledge, science, secularism, progress, sceptical thought and universal (not relative) freedoms. All this has been horribly turned on its head. 11 September—not just the World Trade Center massacre, but the skein of reactionary worldviews and organisations it revealed—is a clarion call. We must un-learn the wretched habit of thinking truthfulness resides in the messenger, not the message. If a neo-liberal or conservative has more to tell us than a Noam Chomsky, so be it. All morality begins in realism: our ability to see the world as it is, rather than as we want it to be, must henceforth be the starting point of Left-leaning politics. Are we honest and brave—and scared—enough to shuck our romantic fantasies about the downtrodden, and our shameful rationalisations born of guilt, bravado and indifference? **8** (Project Syndicate)

(Susie Linfield teaches Cultural Reporting and Criticism at New York University.)

## Budget trouble

OTTAWA — The Canadian parliament is debating a national budget that would dramatically increase military and security spending—some say at the expense of health, education, and international aid. The budget includes \$5 billion in new money for security measures over the next five years, \$1.5 billion of which would be spent on air travel. Other security-related additions to the budget include \$1 billion for police and spy agencies, \$750 million for the military, and \$630 million for tougher screening of immigrants and refugees. By contrast, the government proposes spending \$250 million over three years on international aid. The Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace expressed disappointment. How can Canada set an example by allotting only \$250 million over three years to foreign aid while in the same budget setting aside \$1 billion per year, creating a false sense of security? the agency said. Gerry Barr, president of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, noted the aid budget included an increase of \$80 million in the Canadian International Development Agency's budget. It's real, but moderate, and some good may come of it, he said. Parliamentary opposition leader Stockwell Day said Canada's foreign aid all too often goes to countries steeped in corruption. Other critics of the budget, including eight of Canada's ten provincial premiers, also criticise the government for not increasing support for domestic priorities like the cash-strapped universal health care system, the homeless and the unemployed. (IPS)

## Nowhere to go

BRUSSELS — Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has strongly criticised governments' attitudes to asylum-seekers accusing them of failing to meet their international obligations and endangering lives. Rafael Vilasanjuan, MSF's director general, said on the release of MSF's *Activity Report 2000-2001*: The image of refugees is related to conflicts, crises, infectious diseases and so on. So the international community finds solutions to the problem without increasing the right of choice for refugees. Their solution is the return of refugees, no matter what the conditions in the country. They fund for repatriations, but give little money for refugees to be attended to outside these troubled regions. People suffering because of war, violence, exclusion, displacement, famine and neglected diseases have been the focus for the organisation, which this week marks its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This year is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, created to define protection and rights for those who flee countries because of insecurity and persecution. A ministerial conference in Geneva on 12-13 December adopted a declaration which committed signatory nations to implement our obligations under the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol fully and effectively. At a time when countries are reaffirming the Convention, we see a continuous deterioration of the conditions on these people, said Vilasanjuan. MSF began the year with refugee crisis in Guinea and are ending it with a big humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The EU annually takes in about 500,000 refugees and displaced persons, three percent of the world's estimated total 14.5 million; there are over 3 million in Africa and 6 million in the Middle East. Liesbeth Schockaert, an MSF jurist, said the EU was applying border control policies, non-arrival policies and other deterrents, to push for reception of people in the regions they come from. While Europe is shutting its doors, said Schockaert, countries like Iran, Pakistan, Kenya and Guinea are expected to host large numbers of refugees, sometimes for decades. (IPS)

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ANALYSIS

by HADI SOEASTRO

# Indonesia's radical Islam



## Can Megawati handle the Islamic and separatist groups?

With the Taliban on the run, sighs of relief can be heard as far away as Indonesia. Protests against the US-led coalition's bombing campaign had roiled Indonesia for weeks, increasing the country's already perilous instability. The war in Afghanistan may wind down soon, and there is a fear that President Megawati Sukarnoputri will do little to change her do-nothing ways. As Megawati's first 100 days in office end, there is grumbling about her "slow motion" style of government, but little applause for her few accomplishments—such as weathering the Islamic storm.

Public expectations about Megawati were modest from the start. In her report to the annual session of the People's Consultative Assembly, delivered on 1 November, Megawati admitted her government had achieved little. The Assembly sought to fill this policy vacuum by outlining the steps her government must take to jump-

start the economy. The Assembly is dubious about her, but Megawati was heartened when Assembly Chairman Amien Rais foreswore any challenge to her presidency for the remainder of her term, which expires in 2004. But Amien Rais' statement is as self-serving as it is in the interest of political stability. He is the only viable rival candidate for the president's job, and no politician with common sense would unseat Megawati right now. She faces daunting challenges with little chance of success. Many suspect Megawati's inactivity results from her recognition of the almost intransigent nature of the challenges facing Indonesia. Hers is a "self-healing" administration, events are left to run their course in the hope they won't get out of hand. Her sense of security—and indulgence—are also increased because her political opponents are in complete disarray.

But government by sleepwalking is risky in a country's whose territorial

integrity seems to be coming apart at the seams. The unified Indonesia of the past 40 years or so is finished. A new regional autonomy law will provide greater freedoms for regions and local communities to express themselves. This decentralisation process is manageable now, but may not remain so without a firm policy hand at the centre. If the central government refrains from re-imposing its power in the regions, administratively or militarily, they are more likely to remain within the republic. Granting special autonomy to the two most strife-ridden provinces—Aceh and Papua (Irian Jaya)—may also reduce tension between national and local military commanders. Jakarta must also bring human rights abusers to justice, as Megawati promised earlier. Regions must be prevented from promulgating regulations that violate national laws or impose negative effects on other regions,

as has happened with the creation by some regions of internal trade barriers.

Regional autonomy has not pacified ethnic tensions either. Violent conflicts among Indonesia's myriad ethnic and religious groups continue. Radical Muslim groups have declared holy war, "jihad," which has complicated and aggravated conflicts in the Moluccas. Fundamentalist Islamic groups raised the most consistent challenge to Megawati's "secular" government even before the attacks on America. They are not yet a serious threat, because they aren't backed by Indonesia's powerful Islamic political parties. Megawati's challenge is to keep these parties within Indonesia's conventional political framework. In the beginning of the "war on terrorism", some Islamic political parties were drawn into anti-American protests and even Vice President Hamzah Haz (chairman of one of Indonesia's strongest Islamic parties) was tempted to join in. During Megawati's trip to America to support President Bush, Jakarta was almost incapacitated by these small, noisy and radical Islamic groups.

On her return, Megawati restored her credibility by ordering the security services to act. But credit for the absence of a truly serious Islamic challenge should perhaps be given to Indonesia's moderate and mainstream Muslim leaders and groups, such as Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, who avoided incendiary words and deeds. Their responsible behaviour demonstrates the growing importance of Indonesia's civil society. Megawati should forge alliances with the many civil society groups emerging in Indonesia and which support a democratic regime. Such activity will do ground Indonesia's democracy than any other action Megawati might take. **8**

(Project Syndicate)  
(Hadi Soeastro is director of the Indonesia Council for Strategic Studies in Jakarta.)

COMMENT

by LI FAN

# Trickle up

## The prognosis for grassroots democracy in China is not too bad.

Critical assessments of grassroots democracy in rural China are hard to make. Have the reforms created a genuine democracy that represents a significant step toward participatory government? Can they be implemented beyond the village level? Where does China's Communist government fit in? What role will elected village leaders play in the future?

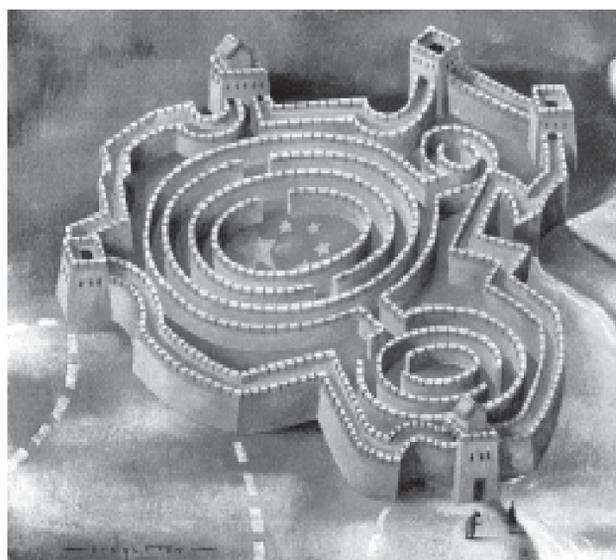
In 1987, the Chinese government quietly launched self-governance at the village level. Originally intended to liberalise agriculture and stimulate economic growth by allowing villagers to freely decide what they would produce, reform-minded officials of the Ministry of Civil Affairs soon introduced local elections for rural farmers to elect local leaders. Gradually, this spread to nearly every village and a simple decentralised system of checks and balances between the village committee chief and the village assembly was established. Rural farmers found themselves empowered to organise themselves, criticise some authorities and even dismiss their village chief.

The regime in China remains authoritarian, and decision-making, highly centralised. But grassroots democracy has returned political power to the people.

In recent years, the Party made determined efforts to weaken village democracy while preserving the fiscal benefits of rural economic liberalisation. One such strategy can be seen in Party attempts to exert influence by installing their officials as heads of village committees. A second method is to interfere and encroach upon village government affairs through higher-level township officials. Such strategies produce a highly contentious dual power structure that pits Party secretaries and village committee chiefs against one another.

But the proliferation of rural elections and the establishment of local electoral systems and self-governance has raised democratic consciousness, which will serve as a powerful foundation for future demands for higher levels of democratisation. Already, township elections are widely welcomed as a mechanism to stamp out political corruption, and reduce conflicts between peasants and the government.

Three years ago, under the direction of liberal local cadres, Buiyan town in Sichuan held the first-ever direct election of a township chief, the next level of



governance above the village. Numerous towns attempted to follow with elections of their own. In response, the Chinese government prohibited township-level direct elections earlier this year.

Despite this, prospects for higher-level democratisation within China will remain. The experience of democratic empowerment, and the expression of popular will this has allowed, has left a deep and indelible impression on ordinary rural Chinese people. Political rights and local elections may be at the mercy of the Party, but the historical memory of millions of people will not be easily erased. Village level democracy will continue to inform and educate individual rural Chinese on the fundamental aspects of participatory government. Calls for political reform are strong at all levels in China. It is a matter of time before calls for democratic reform spread to cities and urban communities. The question is no longer "if" but "when". China's political future, and the survival of the Chinese Communist Party, rest on whether the Chinese government chooses to continue cultivating the seeds of democracy or thwarts their inexorable growth. **8** (Project Syndicate)

(Li Fan, is the director of the World and China Institute, a non-government institute in Beijing.)

## The emperor's new clothes

DHAKA - Global recession and the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States have dealt a heavy blow to Bangladesh's garment sector, with at least 1,000 ready-made clothing factories (almost 30 percent of the total) already forced to close in Dhaka and Chittagong. If the situation does not improve, more will have to close, with serious repercussions for the country's economy. The garment sector earns 75 percent of Bangladesh's annual foreign exchange revenues that reach more than \$5 billion. It is also one of the country's biggest employers, with nearly 10 million people depending on it directly or indirectly. Kutubuddin Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) says we are faced with disaster. Over 60 percent of the garment factories are lying idle. The industry has been feeling the pinch since the US Congress passed the Trade Development Act (TDA 2000) May last year, allowing 72 sub-Saharan Africa and Caribbean countries duty and quota-free access to the US markets, presenting competition for local exports. Such access to the US market is crucial for Bangladesh, having been the source of some 45 percent of the 4.86 billion apparel export earnings last fiscal year. A BGMEA study says exports to the US market in the current fiscal year could plunge by 60 to 70 percent should the downtrend in the global economy continue down by \$600 to 800 million from the previous record figure of \$2.19 billion. (IPS)

## No road to success

TOKYO - Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is bracing Japan for deep economic and institutional reforms to pull the world's second largest economy out of over a decade of stop-go growth. Following his campaign pledge of structural reforms without sacred cows, Koizumi has launched a move to privatise or abolish 157 of 163 government agencies, aiming for extensive changes in Japan's political culture. He plans to privatise the powerful Japan Highway Public Corporation, a special state entity established in 1956 and considered a symbol of the clout of Koizumi's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The government pumps in \$2.7 billion annually to the Highway Public Corp, which builds and operates expressways and tollbooths throughout the country. Koichi Ishiyama, political commentator for the Daily Yomuri, says decades of pork-barrel politics have seen lawmakers



push the construction of expressways in their constituencies. By building roads and bridges—even unprofitable ones—in rural areas, the government hands out jobs and money to big companies in return for their votes, explains Ishiyama. Today the corporation's debts are worth \$250 billion. Highway Public executives, supported by major politicians, have outlined a 50-year debt repayment plan, but Koizumi isn't buying it. He also announced plans to slash the public works budget by 10 percent and review the current tax revenue for road construction. He is attacking the heart of the Japanese system, says Ishiyama. Koizumi's battle against the resistance forces—the old guard of his LDP—is entering the second stage, says Keizo Nabeshima, a political affairs writer. (IPS)

## Reckoning and rehabilitation

COLOMBO - The United National Party (UNP) comfortably won the Sri Lankan national polls earlier this month, reflecting people's desire for change amid a flagging economy and a costly war, but human rights activists are not rejoicing. They are concerned that the same regime responsible for a brutal crackdown on Marxist People's Liberation Front or JVP rebels in the 1980s, is back in power. Said a worried Chandra Peiris, chairman of the Organisation for Parents and Family Members of the Disappeared (OPFMD): The highest number of disappearances were recorded during their rule. The OPFMD is leading many families of the disappeared to seek justice against the killers and compensation for thousands of young people who died at the hands of the military and pro-UNP death squads between 1988 to 1990. The crackdown was ordered by then President Ranasinghe Premadasa as the JVP, now a respected third force in Sri Lankan politics, caused mayhem and terror across the country to unseat the government. Estimates of persons who went missing over the three years range from 10,000 to 60,000. The UNP government lost both parliamentary and presidential polls in 1994. It is interesting to see how the UNP will now tackle justice for suspected perpetrators—the Attorney General's office is preparing indictments, and almost 500 cases are pending against military and police officials. Still, the OPFMD is not ruling out the possibility that the new government might be conciliatory. The UNP under Ranil Wickremasinghe, now prime minister, has tried to erase memories of 1988-1990 by promising better governance. While in opposition, it was the biggest critic of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People Alliance (PA) on human rights violations—particularly the notorious Presidential Security Division (PSD) of harassing and intimidating killing political opponents and independent journalists. Kumaratunga, still president, appointed special commissions after winning power in 1994 to probe disappearances, punish the killers and offer compensation to the families of the dead. The process has dragged on even though the commissions identified some 3,000 people, including officers of the armed forces and the police, as being responsible fully or partly for the killings. (IPS)



# Poudel's story

Bimarsa, 14 December  
Excerpts from an interview  
with former deputy prime  
minister Ram Chandra  
Poudel, NC

## My ISDP

Even before the Maoists attacked Dang, I received a report that clearly stated the three reasons the Maoists had withdrawn from the dialogue with the government to test the army, if the army was not mobilised, to defeat the police and threaten the government, and finally,

even if the army was mobilised, to defeat it. If the army was defeated, the Maoists could easily reach their goals. If they could take on and defeat the army, the victory would silence the hawks in the Maoist party, which could then come for a political compromise. The emergency was imposed at the right time.

Earlier, there was a growing concern in our party about how events would turn out if the army was mobilised. As a result, many policemen lost their lives. We had to bear massive losses. We were thinking along the wrong lines and wrong decisions were made. I tried to get the army, tried for the implementation of projects under the Integrated Security and Development Programme, and for the control of terrorist activities. This is the context in which the army must fulfil its responsibilities. How can there be two armies in a country? I told the Royal Nepal Army that they could not and should not tolerate such a thing.

When I was acting prime minister, I had a two-day discussion about this with His Late Majesty Birendra. The king told me that the army could only be mobilised in a very co-ordinated manner. You cannot only look at the problem created by the Maoists. The army is the only organisation that provides security for the whole country, so you have to think of the security of the nation, not only the Maoist problem. You have to make policies that contain ways in which to deal with the Maoists... We have to

take into account the economic and social aspects. The people have to be lured away from the Maoists, lifted out of their present situation. Once you have brought the people over to your side, you can force the Maoists to settle for a political compromise. This is why security operations and development projects must go hand-in-hand. I discussed this with the king, then told the prime minister what we had talked about. We formulated the ISDP and sent it to the palace for approval.

It was delayed there for some days and I told the prime minister that I, as Home Minister, wanted to convey my opinions to the king. We fixed an appointment and 17 of us went to meet him. Since I was Home Minister, I told the king that the ISDP had to be launched immediately. I further requested that the two ordinances [regarding the establishment of a paramilitary force and empowering the regional administrators to coordinate all army and development activities] should also be implemented immediately. I stated all this forcefully and with total conviction. The very next day, both ordinances were accepted, signed and returned, and the ISDP program was accepted. Immediately, the army was mobilised in some districts and development programs started on a war footing.

## Sudden resignation

I was accused of resigning just as the army had been mobilised in Holleri. That charge was proven wrong the very next day, when then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala himself resigned. He said he was resigning since he was receiving no help from anyone and that the army was not being mobilised. If the prime minister himself resigned because the army was not being mobilised, how could my resignation, which came two days earlier, be linked to the mobilisation? Where did this conspiracy originate? There is no relation between my resignation and the mobilisation of the army.

My resignation had been discussed for two months prior to my quitting. When parliament was obstructed by the opposition over Lada Air, I told the prime minister that he needed to win the trust of all political parties and take on the Maoists. I said I was prepared to help him in any way possible. The Congress had been cornered and the situation had to be resolved. A few days later, the Maoists called for a bandh. I told the prime minister that since I was Home Minister, it was my duty to challenge this bandh and stop it, and I would face it down in any way possible. I further reminded him that the budget would be passed in a few days and requested him to accept my resignation shortly after. He told me he himself should resign, not I. I did not want to put the prime minister in a fix, and so

I did not tender my resignation.

The next day at a cabinet meeting, the prime minister told everyone present that most parties had put forward their demands. He asked everyone to formulate a program so every party's demands would be met. Chakra Bastola said, "These programs are all related to your resignation. If you do not resign, these programs are of no interest to the other parties. What do you think about quitting?" Koirala replied, "You either get 57 people to throw me out or wait till I vacate this post of my free will." I then realised that another game was being played. The situation was very tense and the problems could get out of hand.

The police were being slaughtered. There were already rumours that many policemen would resign. I could not find a way out of the mess. The ordinances brought forward by government were not being passed, the army was not moving, parliament could not meet, the armed police would not be formed, and the Maoists were not prepared to come to the negotiating table. I decided that in such a situation I could not remain Home Minister or even deputy prime minister. History would pass its judgement on me. I resigned. The events that followed showed that it was the right decision. The Maoists are now cornered, and alone. For the nation, for democracy I sacrificed my position and the possibility of being prime minister in the future.

## Dunai and Nuwagaon

Rumours were spreading that the army had surrounded the Maoists in Nuwagaon. They were using locals as human shields, which is why the army could not attack. Everyone, everywhere was repeating this. 1,100-armed guerrillas in Nuwagaon had attacked a police striking base where there were 72 policemen, and had taken all their weapons. They were on every hilltop, and 42 army personnel were sent in. This certainly did not mean the army had been mobilised or that they had surrounded the Maoists. I told them they should not spread such rumours. They should not have done this just to corner me, it would only mean bad publicity for the army.

I will not agree that news of the mobilisation of the army was spread to put me in a fix. I have asked the army why they did not help when the rebels were massacring the police. There was pressure from all sides for the army to be mobilised, which was why they sent the 42 soldiers to Nuwagaon. They later said that they could not send more personnel because of the weather. The fact is, the area was only four hours from Dang. Enough personnel could have been mobilised from Dang to control the Maoists. Perhaps the army was not prepared to send these forces. In the Dunai case, the Home Minister resigned. I asked by the prime minister saying that the army had not moved in. My resignation is viewed against this. I want to clear up this muddle: they were not prepared to mobilise the army and later they blamed the army for all that went wrong.

## Political end

Budhabar, 12 December

बुधवार

Excerpts from an interview with Dipta Prakash Shah, MP, Upper House  
You say it was meaningless for the Maoists to forsake their demand for a republic. Perhaps if the government had been more flexible, they may not have gone back to war...

They said they were forsaking the issue of a republic, but were instead demanding a constituent assembly. It was their demand that a constituent assembly be elected for the formation of a republic. From my analysis, I think their attack is on the present multiparty system of democracy also, not only on the monarchy. This is why they have been attacking the foundations of the present political system. So even though they say they were dropping their demand for a republic, by asking for a constituent assembly they were attacking the multiparty democracy and monarchy. This is why the dialogue could not

reach a solution. I feel there was no way the dialogue could have been fruitful...

Being a former army man, how strong do you think the Maoist forces are?

Rather than guess, let me tell you what we have heard so far—the size of the force is put at 5,000 to 6,000. I have also heard that some foreign nationals provide the cadre training and support. Every time their people are killed in an encounter, the Maoists cut off the heads of their fallen colleagues and take them away so the government can't identify their foreign supporters, trainers and advisors. Whatever their numbers, 6-10,000 they are not trained the way our army is. If they do not have support lines, there is no question of them being able to fight our army. Wars are fought on the basis of principles and beliefs. A French philosopher once said: "We can resist the force of an army, but we can never, never resist the force of ideas." I find that very few principled people have joined the Maoists, or any political force for that matter. Because

of the breakdown in the present political system, most people may have gone on their side for fear. I was in Dailekh sometime ago. It is at some distance from the district headquarters. The army and police are all concentrated in the district headquarters. In the villages there is no police, no army. The Maoists are still continuing with their activities. All the people I spoke with said they only follow the Maoists to survive. UML and Congress activists, all are in the same situation. Is there a way out after the army is mobilised? Can we hope the Maoists will be controlled in this way?

Army action is only temporary. For a long-term solution, all political parties must display their political commitment and find a way out. That is the only way out. Absolute rule is not possible in the present context. A single-party system cannot be put into place. Everyone supports the democratic framework, from the monarch to the common man. But everyone is also complaining that today's leaders give democracy a bad name. If the people

had been given their rights, there would have been no Maoists.

Mobilising the army is a short-term solution. The political parties and the system will have to provide a long-term solution.

## Mission Ghorahi

Janadharana, 6 December

जानदहारा

The people of Ghorahi say the Maoists came from Nepalgunj, Salyan, Rolpa and Pyuthan along the highway. They came in buses, trucks and minibuses, dropping their cadre all through Ghorahi—Tulsipur Chowk, the bus park, Sewar Khola, the water tank, the playground of the Gorkha International School, which is very close to the traffic police station. They came fully armed and started surrounding the town from these places.

At exactly at 11PM that night they began attacking. They simultaneously attacked the office of the district administration, the Chief District Officer's residence, the District Police Office, the residence of the commanding officer, the traffic police station, the army barracks, branches of the Nepal Bank and the Agricultural Development Bank and the land revenue office. They came in, firing guns and setting off bombs. One Maoist was requesting residents over a public address system not to venture out of their homes. The police reported the next day that the encounter in the compound of the district administration office continued for almost 45 minutes, after which the CDO surrendered. The Maoists took him away and then destroyed the office and burnt a motorcycle and two vehicles. They also took 11 policemen and the CDO's wife to a nearby house and locked them up, telling the owner they should only be released at 10AM the following day.

The attack on the house of the commanding police officer also lasted close to an hour. Four policemen were killed and 14 injured. The police finally surrendered and the Maoists looted the station, carrying away all the weapons, clothes and communication equipment they found. They burnt

down the district police headquarters and abducted the Superintendent of Police. The Maoists loaded their loot onto trucks they brought inside the compound. Finally, they destroyed the local jail and set free 37 inmates.

The attack on the army barracks went something like this: The Maoists first attacked the barracks with bombs, killing the two sentries on duty. The army couldn't get to their ammunition store and had to fight with Self-loading Rifles. Fourteen army men, including commanding officer Major Naresh Upreti, were killed. Some 25 were injured and the rest were captured.

This done, the Maoists started systematically looting the barracks and loading their booty onto two army trucks in the barracks compound, and a few other trucks they had brought with them. As they were leaving, they destroyed the barracks with bombs.

Witnesses say that after all this the Maoists exploded a bomb, shouted slogans and departed in a convoy of some 20 buses, trucks and mini buses. The kidnapped CDO was put in a vehicle captured from the Department of Forestry, which left for Holleri in Rolpa. The looted money and weapons were unloaded in Dahwan, Rolpa at 11AM the next day.

## Talk for peace

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 12 December

घटना र बिचार

Excerpts from an interview with Ban Dev Gautam, Nepal Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist  
You have said that even Prime Minister Sber Bahadur Deuba has helped the Maoists. What is the basis for that remark? Did he not help them in the guise of conducting a dialogue? He released a lot of Maoist activists from prison, saying this would help build an atmosphere conducive to dialogue. Isn't this helping them? Did he not withdraw the very policies implemented to control them? The people in general and we ourselves only help the Maoists when they aim their guns at us. We do it out of fear, while they happily agreed to help the Maoists.

These are the examples I have. If innocents are going to be killed, the prime minister should be the first person to face the bullets.

Your analysis of the prime minister is different from that of others, who say he is a staunch, open and honest democrat. So what exactly is he like?

I do not know what others have to say. Deuba's biggest achievement was bringing the Maoists to the negotiating table peacefully, which Girija Prasad Koirala could not do earlier, when he was prime minister. Former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was not capable of doing that earlier, either, and no one else tried. Even I could not do this when I was deputy prime minister, nor could my government. But we must analyse this seemingly positive step taken by Deuba. There is no doubt he did something positive, he made the Maoists stop their illegal activities and come to the negotiating table. He believed them to an extent that other people did not. A person hurt badly will take revenge, whatever the fallout. The nation will suffer because of this. On the issue of how democratic he is, he is as democratic as we are, so it is not necessary to sing his praises on that count.

Is there any way the Maoists can enter the political mainstream other than through violence?

I still think there is a way for them to enter the mainstream. I believe that they cannot be controlled through the use of force—even in ten years. We must not forget that what they have raised are political issues, and the problem has to be solved through political means. Sometimes their military forces increase and sometimes decrease, that is another matter. We must tell the Maoists using force will not get them anywhere. They have to come to the negotiating table and find a political solution. The government must immediately start bringing about political, social and economic changes in the country. Only on the basis of such changes will we be able to convince the Maoists to return to the negotiating table...

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

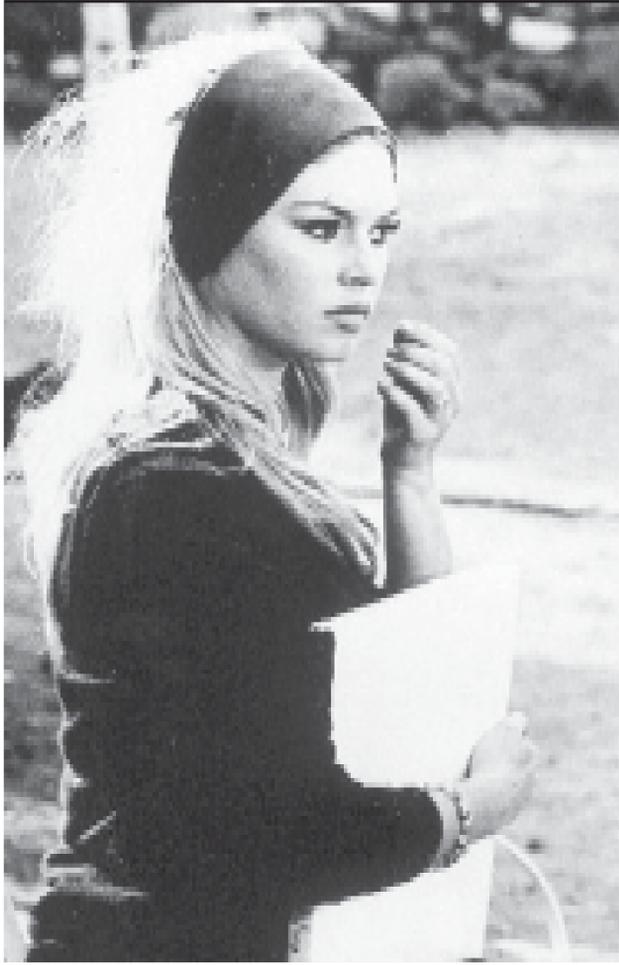
In an emergency there (must be) five ministers not 40, citizens are alert and behind the army, and the Prime Minister's Office (must be) converted into Churchill's War Room.

—Editorial in *Naya Sadak*, 14 December 2001



On elephant's back: Emergency

नयाँ सडक *Naya Sadak*, 16 December



# Cats and dogs

## Korean World Cup organiser bites back in Bardot row.

SEOUL - In a bid to stifle criticism over Korea's dog eating culture, a South Korean football official plans to send an animal-friendly video to French actress Brigitte Bardot. Chung Mong-joon, co-chairman of the Korea World Cup Organising Committee hopes the video, titled *Take Care of My Cat*, will show that South Koreans do care for their animals. Bardot, a vocal critic of dog-eating, renewed her criticism ahead of next year's World Cup finals, which South Korea will co-host with Japan. Her comments angered many Koreans who saw them as a slight to their food culture.

In an interview published in Seoul's *Daily Sports* newspaper, Chung said he would send Bardot the film to show the more caring side of Koreans. "I plan to see the film and send it to Bardot as the

film touches on the subject of loving animals," Chung was quoted as saying. The film is a local movie about five young women who take turns looking after a stray kitten.

South Korea has been under international pressure from other animal rights activists as well over its culinary habits ahead of the 2002 World Cup. FIFA, world football's governing body, last month called on South Korean authorities to put a stop to animal cruelty. It said it had received thousands of letters of protest over the mistreatment of dogs and cats in Korea.

Bardot angered Koreans by hanging up the phone during an interview this month with South Korea's MBC radio, after the anchor asked her whether she was fondly described the experience of eating dog meat during visits to the country. Bardot said she couldn't continue an interview with "liars" and said the consumption of dog meat was a savage custom.

Countering criticism, Chung said Korea has a long tradition of loving animals, reflected in Buddhism, which bans killing even the smallest insects. Chung also said that Koreans designated a breed of dogs, called Jindo, as a national treasure.

The sale and consumption of dog meat was banned in the run up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics by officials worried at the unfavourable light that would be cast on South Korea's reputation. However, although officially illegal, dog meat is still widely available in the country.

Animal rights groups say dogs destined for the pot are often subject to unimaginable levels of

cruelty—kept in tiny, filthy cages, with cases reported of dogs being blow-torched to death.

Pain is traditionally said to improve the flavour.

Although it is expensive, the

meat is usually served up in a soup or a spicy stew and is particularly popular with old men in the belief that it boosts virility. Advocates of the dog trade say it is an important domestic tradition and that Korean dog meat lovers consume canines bred for eating, not as pets. About three million of South Korea's 47 million people are believed to eat dog meat as a delicacy. Dog meat is also eaten in some other Asian countries, including China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Laos. 8

## Pay raise

ZURICH - All 32 finalists taking part in next year's World Cup will benefit from a 51 percent increase in the FIFA payoffs, compared with the 1998 World Cup finals in France. Michel Zen-Ruffinen, the general secretary of the world organising body, said after an extraordinary meeting of the FIFA Executive Committee. The increase, sought by many finalists, would also include the introduction of an incentive for the teams that are successful as the rate of match fees increases through the tournament.

In the past it has been a flat rate fee for each team for each match played, a situation that caused fears among many of the finalists for the 2002 finals, to be co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, that the fees would be inadequate to cover their costs. Zen-Ruffinen also explained that each finalist would fly to Korea on business class, a move approved at Tuesday's meeting.

The executive committee also agreed to allocate 13 million Swiss francs for increased security measures. The overall budget for the World Cup has increased by 68 million Swiss francs. Much of the increase is made up of increased payments to the teams with those playing in the first round now guaranteed 1.5 million Swiss francs per match. These fees paid to the participants increase on a sliding scale up to 2.5 million Swiss francs for the winners and 2.25 million for the losing finalists. For the World Cup winners, the total money to be gained is 12.4 million Swiss francs, a 70 percent increase over France's 98 million, as FIFA explained, a great incentive to make progress in the tournament.

A payment to each of the World Cup finalists of one million Swiss francs was approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting in Busan, Korea, on 30 November. In effect, the new plan approved on Tuesday means that a team's progress in the tournament will see it earn 1.5 million Swiss francs for each first round game, 1.6 million Swiss francs for each second round game, 1.8 million for the quarterfinals, two million Swiss francs for the semi-finals and the third-fourth playoff and 2.25 and 2.5 million for the losing finalists and the winners respectively.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said that they had faced a problem because of the high costs of staging a tournament that, he said, was equivalent to two normal World Cup finals with 20 stadiums, two international media centres and two international broadcasting centres to double the requirements and costs of France's 98 million.

The 32 teams are the actors and they make available the funds for the progress of all the associations in FIFA, said Blatter, outlining the background to the committee's World Cup decisions taken during a four-and-a-half hour meeting which also considered several other more controversial topics. These touched on a proposal to create a code of conduct for all Executive Committee members following controversies in the Caribbean, in relation to Jack Warner and the allocation of the television rights and other allegations of conflicts of interest involving Chuck Blazer of the United States. The meeting also resolved that the Executive Committee should be far more hands on with the FIFA Finance Committee and would move towards that by holding a special one-day consideration of a financial report at a meeting to be organised early next year.

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# THE ESSENCE OF NEPALI WOMANHOOD: Susmita Nepal

Feminist thinkers are divided over whether or not men and women are essentially different. The physical differences between them are obvious, as are the differences in culturally constructed gender identities. But are their experiences so divergent as to make them unlike each other at the most basic level?

Susmita Nepal's poems might answer

both yes and no. Her poems suggest that though suffering is universal, the texture of women's suffering is uniquely feminine. And the feel of a Nepali woman's suffering is unique unto Nepal. In the first poem translated below, Nepal explores the sacrifice of women's identities to the demands of household chores.

## RICE GRAINS OF WORDS

Picking stones out of rice grains of words she prepares a meal of experience

Time peers from the gas stove  
Setting pots of emotion on the stove  
stirring word rice with a pen  
she prepares a meal of experience

Each morning spills onto her face  
Each evening squeezes her expression  
Placing these sights onto the plates of  
her eyes  
she serves a meal of experience

The bangles of torment tinkle and chime  
Hungry stomachs rumble  
She continues serving meals of experience  
and as she serves, she serves up herself

In this second poem, below, Nepal sharpens her fine metaphorical language to express the hopes and disappointments of a rural mother.

## MOTHER

Mother cuts each morning  
with the edge of a sickle  
With all her strength she bundles life

into a heap of grass  
then lays it down  
before the hunger of cattle

While milking cows,  
in each stream she sees  
the white teeth of laughing children  
She is puzzled by the way pots and plates  
stare at herself, ablaze at the stove

Sorrows appear before her  
and dance rhythmically  
She just gazes at them  
Unspoken words she gathers  
for her unmarried daughter  
She wants to hide the rising moon  
in the folds of her clothes ñ  
a snack to erase her hunger  
sharpened by loneliness

Memories of her son gone abroad  
become a thousand days and vanish  
Each time, Mother plants seeds of hope  
in the folds of forty year-old scarcity

But these seeds never grow  
It can't be said when he'll return  
to fix the broken dam in her heart ñ  
her son gone abroad

The third poem is focused on widowhood as experienced by a young Hindu woman.

## THE TEEJ FESTIVAL

The Teej festival  
is crying  
from the fork in the branches  
of sorrow's tree  
Adorned red in every object, this festival

is now encased in widow's whites  
The festival which shares parcels of affection  
has now lost itself  
in the loose black tresses of widowhood  
It is seeking the company of loved ones  
It is forced to remain by itself

Sighs are gathering into a muddy flood  
The mind is seeking selfhood  
asking for my lover's eyelashes  
to take rest on those lashes  
to fall sleep on those lashes  
where wrathful dreams won't chase after me

Watching me now, the Teej festival  
sits quietly  
becoming sorrowful at my sorrow  
staring silently at my helplessness  
It can neither say  
deck yourself in red  
nor can it make  
widow's whites accept me

From the tree standing tall at this divide  
the Teej festival  
is hurting  
in each root  
branch  
leaf

In these and other poems focusing on women's experience, Susmita Nepal examines, with great care and compassion, the kinds of joys and sorrows that comprise Nepali womanhood. Nepal is also a prose writer, and the author of two novels.



STEVE MCCURRY

## ART REVIEW

by MIKU DIXIT

# Undying serenity

A multi-artist exhibition draws lessons from the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

An image of the Bamiyan Buddhas is placed in a low mound of gravel, surrounded by 2,500 little bottles containing fine brown sand in a spiral. Artist Ashmina Ranjit carries a handheld video recorder and films the people who participate in her installation. "Ashmina's True Buddha Mandala... Bottled Buddha for the taking," says a sign next to the mound. Several bottles have already been carried away and leave small finger sized grooves in the sand. This installation is one of many in the Siddhartha Art Gallery's Bamiyan Buddha: Icon of Peace, Hope and Renewal show that is on until 10 January next year.

Red, yellow, white, blue and green—the colours of the five elements float on pots filled with water in Sunita Rana's piece. The visitor is encouraged to step in and out of the water. The symbolic destruction of the water's



tranquillity is only temporary—footprints dry up sooner or later and the water slowly grows still. "[S]hould there be a ripple in the peaceful valley like in calm water... the waves shall slowly calm in time and restore the serenity of the valley." The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas of Afghanistan, suggests Rana, is temporary in the grand scale of things. The essence of the Buddha was never really destroyed—it was temporarily, physically disturbed, and will settle again into its inexorable calmness.

The notion that the Buddha and the spirit of rightness he symbolises will live on regardless of acts of hatefulness and destruction permeates the whole show. Inside another gallery, the visitor is greeted by a crude piece of jute and black paper on the floor. The entire construction is a long strip anchored on one end to the corner of an empty picture frame and stretching down the gallery, along the stairs down, and then tapering off. Time goes on, it suggests, punctuated, but never stopped, by small events like the bell hanging from over a pile of shattered debris—disembodied clay statues of the Buddha.

Kalapremi Shrestha's seven terracotta sculptures feature brown organic forms containing brutally shattered fragments of Buddhist statues. The themes of destruction and desolation are ever present, but these ideas are balanced by the tranquillity and scale of Prakaash Chanduadkar's paintings. In the courtyard five six-ft-high portraits by Prakaash

Chanduwadkar stand side by side, depicting the face of the Buddha in brown, yellow, cream, gold and blue. The paints have a sheen that glows across the courtyard. The Buddhas serene expression and the scale of the paintings stand like a silent challenge to the physical destruction inflicted on the Bamiyan Buddhas.

The main gallery displays more of Chanduwadkar's paintings, often a photograph of a statue surrounded by colours and light. In addition, there is a video playing on a screen nestled among strips of coloured cloth pouring out of the belly of a large painting of a Bamiyan Buddha. The video, which features Chanduwadkar painted in the five colours of work, was made with help from a team of Korean filmmakers.

The gallery also contains work by Finnish artist Juha Holopainen and Ragini Upadhyay-Grela. Most of this show deals with ideas about spirituality and timelessness, loss and continuity. Holopainen's Ignorance is more direct, depicting blank outlines where the Buddhas ought to be with wild dogs running about on the desert plains of Afghanistan. Upadhyay-Grela's Buddha, Truth and Sun, if less conspicuous than Chanduwadkar's large portraits, are also significant pieces. "In my artwork, I have tried to display the Buddha in all his shining wisdom," she says. "It is there, and will stay with us, in our hearts and souls, despite the fact that we will miss forever the beauty and harmony of the Bamiyan Buddha statues." 8

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION

❖ **Bamiyan Buddha: Icon of Hope, Peace and Renewal** Prints, installation, paintings, and video. Until 10 January 2002, Sidhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal. A part of the proceeds from the sale of paintings go towards the renovation of the Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Korean Market for Welfare** 21 December, 11AM-7PM, Summit Hotel. 521810
- ❖ **Chaats, chapaties, chutneys** Children's fair, with food, games, coupons. Rs 200 per child, accompanying adult free. 22 December, 11AM-4PM, Hotel Shangri La. 412999
- ❖ **Kids Karnival** Children's fair including Santa Claus, poolside buffet, games, face-painting, clowns, music and dance, food and surprise gift for every child. Rs 600 per head. 22 December. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Fulbari Cup Boat Regatta** Short-course race on Phewa Tal with four-member teams. Prizes for best team costume, best decorated boat and top all-woman team. 11AM, 30 December. Ring Adventure Centre Asia, Pokhara 61-23240 or Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel 437437.
- ❖ **Shangri-La Village Dash for Cash** Two-person teams run and ride over one-and-a-half km along Pokhara Lakeside to win Rs 15,000. Bike supplied. 1PM, 30 December. Ring Adventure Centre Asia, Pokhara 61-23240 or Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel 437437.



MUSIC

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- ❖ **Christmas and Eve dinners** Five courses at Chimney, buffet at the Sunrise Caf , 24 December. X-Mas brunch, 25 December. For details ring Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999.
- ❖ **Summit Special Christmas Dinner** plus tax. 24-26 December, Summit Hotel. 521810
- ❖ **Christmas bazaar and meals** Market and sekuwa 21 December, 6PM-9PM. Free entry to bazaar. Christmas dinner and lunch. For details ring Dwarika's Hotel, 479488.
- ❖ **Creamy delights** Cookies, home-baked breads, cakes, pastries, stollen, plum cake, ginger bread, fruit tarts, log cake and gift hampers. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234
- ❖ **Christmas Eve buffet dinner** with roast turkey, exotic dessert, glass of mulled wine. Christmas brunch with live folk music. For details ring Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 412999

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION

- ❖ **LaiSoon and 1974 AD** Live music, food, 7PM onwards, 31 December. Tickets Rs 1,000 per head available at LaiSoon Restaurant and Vinotheque, Pulchowk. 535290
- ❖ **New Year Eve Gala** in a heated thatched tent. Unlimited drinks, dinner, games, dance with live band, DJ, prizes. 31 December, 7PM on. For details, ring Hotel de liAnnapurna, 221711.

EATING OUT

- ❖ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean and dried meat specialties, including brunch porridge and pancakes, all raw materials from Tukche village. Darbar Marg
- ❖ **Le Cafe des trekkers** Crepes of Brittany, raclette, cheese and meat fondue. 15 percent discount until 15 January 2002. Jyatha, opposite Blue Diamond Hotel. 225777
- ❖ **Children's Saturday** Games, prizes and food every Saturday, 12 noon onwards. Bakery Caf  Baneswor and Teku.
- ❖ **Spa and Swiss Food** Spa Rejuvenation Cuisine Special brunch with use of health club and swimming pool. Sundays, 11.30AM-5PM. Rs 750. Daily dinner fondue, Rs 1,200 for two and raclettes, Rs 900 per head. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999.
- ❖ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant. 425510
- ❖ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays and Sundays at the Godavari Village Resort. 560675



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Fresh air and tranquillity in Kathmandu Valley** Stay at Triple A Organic Farm Guesthouse in Gamcha, south of Thimi. Rs. 1,500 per person per night, all-inclusive. Email aaa@wlink.com.np. 631766
- ❖ **Silent Night Package** Return airfare, breakfast, three nights accommodation. Rs 9,000 for Nepali nationals, \$270 for expats. Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 412999
- ❖ **Escape to Jomsom** Two nights, three days, B&B package with tours and Pokhara-Jomsom return airfare. Expats \$250 per head. Valid until New Year. Jomsom Mountain Resort. 492009
- ❖ **Short Christmas and New Year breaks** Starting from \$155 per couple for two nights at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



CLASSIFIED

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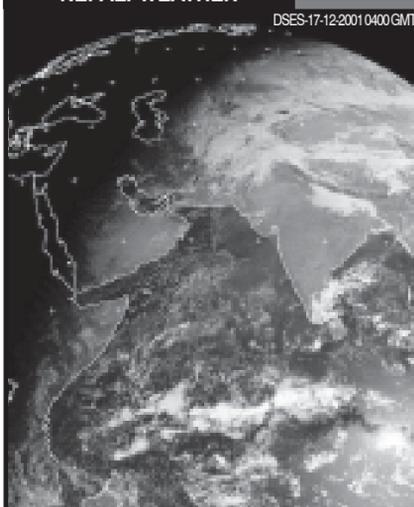
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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The most prominent weather feature in this satellite picture of the subcontinent taken on Wednesday morning is the huge mass of surface fog over the Ganges plains. The thick fog laps at the slopes of the Siwaliks and has blanketed the tarai towns for a week now. Very little sunshine gets through, and this in turn prevents surface heating and perpetuates the inversion that keeps the fog intact.

Then there is a northwesterly front stacked up over the Pamir, but its effect over Nepal will be kept at bay by an entrenched high pressure system over Tibet. Next week, some high and fast-moving clouds but mainly sunny. Chilly nights.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 19-03	Sat 20-03	Sun 20-02	Mon 19-03	Tue 18-04
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SALIL SUBEDI

For the first time in 14 years, Sur Sudha was missing Bijaya Vaidya. A few weeks ago, when the superstar classical music trio played at the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, fans were surprised to see them without the sitar virtuoso. There has been speculation that a split in the band was imminent, but none of them were talking. Until, that is, we chanced upon Vaidya outside the Kumari house in Kathmandu Darbar Square.

The maestro was carrying a gift—a CD player and a music disc for the living goddess. “I always make an offering to the goddess when I am starting something serious,” he said. It will come as no surprise to anyone who’s heard Vaidya play, that when the little Kumari heard his latest—solo—venture, she smiled gleefully. Vaidya seemed

relieved, and content. “She liked it,” he smiled at, “so I know many others will, too.”

It is now official, the trio that introduced to the world at large their classical take on Nepali folk music have broken up. Sur Sudha is no more, but the passion they brought to their music lives on. Each member will now go down their own road. Vaidya has already begun his new journey with the release of his first solo album, Sitar Sudha. “Everything changes doesn’t it?” he asks. “Time has changed people’s taste in music. And if you are a serious musician and willing to devote your life to producing good music, you also have to develop, become more intense. That’s what I’m doing,” says Vaidya.

Vaidya’s imagination travels across the globe. Two of the most haunting and melodious tracks,

# Sitar Sudha

Sur Sudha is not around any more, but the solo career of Bijaya Vaidya is.

Marhaba, which was inspired by the Arabian desert, and Oriental Cradle, which draws on the puppet shows of mainland China, are the result of Vaidya’s tours around the world with Sur Sudha. And yet he remains grounded in his love for Nepali roots music and skilled at classical renditions. There are tracks both upbeat and calming like Birabani, inspired by the music of the Rais, Jatra, that recalls Kathmandu festivities and the jubilant Mithila dholak beats in Janakpur.

Although the album although focuses on the sitar, Vaidya’s art is strongly supported by a beautiful mix of eastern and western classical guitar played by guitarist Sasindra Rajbhandari. Present on almost all the tracks, this unexpected touch helps give the album its distinctive sound. The closing track *The Rain God* is different, though. Vaidya says the sounds of water plopping into a pool stands for peace. “Drop by drop, let that peaceful feeling gather a pool,” he smiles.

There are other goodies in this polar-encased CD—the cover is by renowned Poubba artist Lok Chitrakar, and such as sounds taken from the new Kumari’s first big Indra Jatra earlier this year. It was difficult for Vaidya and his colleagues to record the sounds in the rain and crowd the day when the young Kumari was taken out in her chariot for the first time, but

they have managed to capture something of the excitement and reverence of the procession.

The production values of the album come as a bit of a surprise. To hear that the sitarist recorded, engineered and arranged all the tracks on the new album in his small mud house called *Mokshya Ghar*, at the Balaju edge of the Nagarjun forest, one would not expect too much by way of world-class digital sound quality. And yet Vaidya has managed to produce a splendid album, surpassing the efforts of many a sound engineer. Always modest, he says, “But for friends like Louis Betignac, who introduced me to this recording software, I would have had a hard time bringing the sounds I wanted in formal recording studios.”

The moods and textures that Vaidya has managed to create are completely different and more experimental than those in his albums with Sur Sudha, although they clearly draw on the same expertise showcased there. Sitar Sudha also includes a wider range of sounds—traditional percussion like the khi and the dholak, and many other little acoustic effects.

Vaidya is enthused about his new creative identity. In fact, he has three more albums in the pipeline. “Energise your efforts,” he says. “With skills, meditation and sincerity, things will turn out well.” 8

HAPPENINGS



TIGER FOR BREAKFAST: Victor Klenov and Inge Lissanevitch, the wife of Boris Lissanevitch admire a photo and art exhibition of the life and times of Boris and Desmond Doig at the Shangrila Hotel this week.

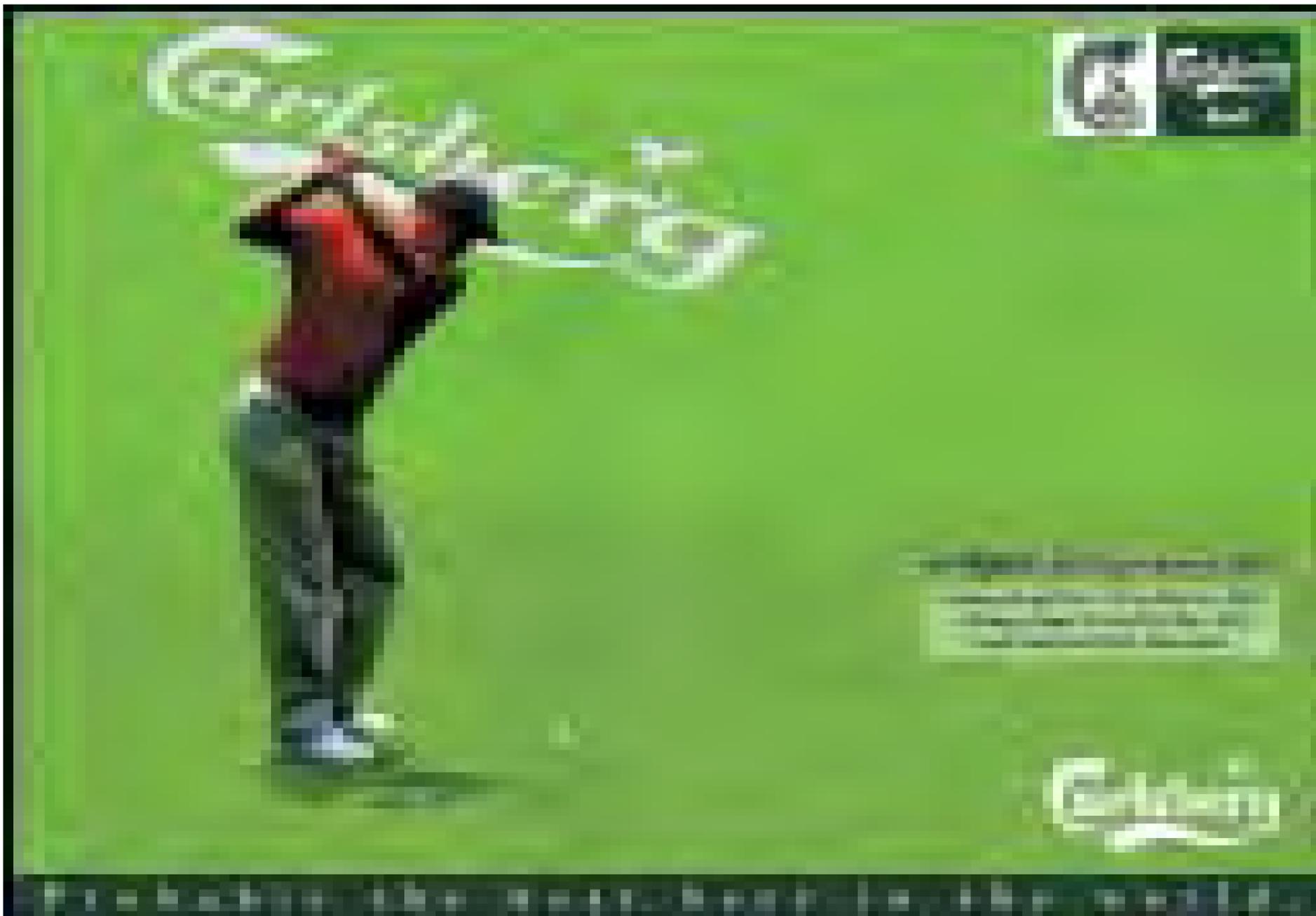


EMERGENCY MEETING: Himal Khabarpatrika publisher Kanak Mani Dixit and editor, Rajendra Dahal, at a panel discussion on the emergency Kathmandu, 18 December. (See report p. 1)



DECONSTRUCTION AT TINKUNE: Houses being demolished at the airport triangle at Tinkune in preparation for the SAARC Summit (see Follow-up, p. 7)

ALL PICS: MIN BAIRACHARYA





### Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Rivers run through it

**O**n a recent walking tour of various nooks and crannies in the Valley to inspect areas of archaeological significance, I had the distinct privilege of savouring the idyllic settings, the interesting aromas and the bucolic environs of the rivers, streams, brooks and creeks that flow through our great capital. Every ancient civilisation is known by the rivers that ran through them. No civilisation is complete without a river, a river is for a civilisation what a flush tank is for a WC. Take the Nile Civilisation, Euphrates Civilisation, Indus Valley Civilisation and, in our own neck of the woods, the Tukucha Open Sewer Civilisation.

There are no historical records of exactly why some of these cultures withered and died, but carbon-dating of ancient garbage piles on the outskirts of Moenjodaro seem to prove that they collapsed under the weight of their own trash. This is why it is important to look at the state of our own Kathmandu Valley rivers before it is too late, and we too are wiped out by the relentless march of history, geography and arithmetic.

After my brief inspection trip, I am glad to report that these fears of imminent civilisational collapse are totally unfounded. In fact, our Kathmandu Valley rivers are in fine shape. There is no danger of our civilisation withering and dying at all, at least not in the unforeseeable future. And, if I may say so myself, everything is hunky-dory in the boondocks. It is now becoming apparent that we have worked ourselves up into a needless frenzy of worry over the Bagmati and Bishnumati. These are mature rivers, and can take perfect care of themselves without us becoming unduly concerned.

Let us begin by looking at the aroma they emanate. Unlike sterile European rivers, the Bagmati is a biodiversity sanctuary.

The waters teem with microscopic organisms which have been rescued from the brink of extinction by the raw sewage that flows into the river, replenishing it with valuable nutrients. River sampling is an art, and is a unique individual experience making use of our senses in order to appreciate its strength and character.

The Bagmati on a recent morning had a brut non-vintage redolence. The light-golden straw-colour with its effervescent bubbles was very soft on the nose, rich and well-structured. The powerful aroma is a combination of digestive biscuits and radish gundruk.

Over at the Bishnumati, the water is deep green and has an attractive nose with intense notes of semi-digested momos in spice. It is supple on the palate, round, velvety but well-balanced, and very reminiscent of a 1997 Riesling Cuvée Sainte Catherine.

By afternoon, the anaerobic fermentation of the sludge along the bed of the Tukucha near the western wall of the Rastriya Samachar Samiti is releasing a lively elegance conveyed by citrus aromas, with a hint of roasted almonds and a bouquet of buffalo innards. This is a strong sample, and not for the faint-hearted.

Among the reds, the Hanumante is a deep crimson since it is situated downstream from a carpet dyeing unit. Against the light, the water looks full-blooded and is imbued with a racy nose with a hint of licorice, a touch of gameyness and the plethora of unidentified floating objects giving it a robust fruitiness and a rounded finish.

But for the premium brand among reds, there is nothing to beat the Bagmati at Chobhar which has a strong purply-red hue with a tangy floral aroma of over-ripe grape-fruit. There is slight froth due to incomplete enzyme activity, but the finish is rich and persistent. **8**



### NEPALI SOCIETY

# China Kumari's green thumb



Outstanding Female Highland Farmer by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and travelled to Bangkok to receive her award from Thailand's Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. (See picture, left)

FAO's Y.S. Rao Award went to four outstanding farmers from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand and Nepal this year.

FAO's citation for China Kumari said: 'She has overcome social, economic and geographical odds to become a successful farmer in one of the world's most difficult agro-ecological conditions.'

Hunger is as much a cause of poverty as its result. Better nutrition for the hungry in poor nations results in faster economic growth. China Kumari has certainly shown how one person with initiative, commitment, and knowhow can persevere over overwhelming odds. **8**

**C**hina Kumari KC is a farmer in Dunai in Nepal's rugged Dolpa district at the foot of Dhaulagiri. Raising seven children and managing a small homestead on a steep Himalayan slope at 3,000 m, China Kumari was barely making ends meet. Two years ago, she decided to start rotational cropping of vegetables with maize and wheat on her 0.1 hectare farm.

That was a bold decision, and a gamble. But it has paid off. Today, China Kumari grows high-yield potato, onion, radish,

coriander ensuring her family year-round food security and annual cash income of Rs 80,000 a year. And China Kumari is now helping 160 other farmers in Dolpa to follow her example—she is a role model for many women farmers in this district.

Her contribution to farming innovation had been recognised by the government in Kathmandu, and she has bagged numerous awards. Now, she has also got international recognition. China Kumari was recently chosen

