







## 2002: A YEAR TO LIVE DECISIVELY

What a year it has been. 2001 was the kind of year you would not even wish on your enemy. It started with irrational street riots, the deranged selfishness of shameless politicians, the senseless slaughter of policemen. Midway through the year, the unspeakable horror of a royal massacre happened and we had three kings in just four days. The year ended with our nation in a state of emergency, and Nepal joining an international list of countries in conflict.

We carry in this issue a capsule of 2001 from the pages of the Nepali Times (p. 1,4,5). As journalists we should have been glad: bad news is good news for the news business. But for our country's sake we wish 2002 will be less newsy. We would like to have weeks in the coming year in which we don't have to once more bemoan the state of the nation, remind everyone that the country is in a rut and we need to pull ourselves out. Weeks in which we can actually congratulate politicians for showing far-sightedness, accountability and a sense of priorities. But the way we are headed, it looks like things will have to get a lot worse before they get better.

It's the stupid economy. Tourism has collapsed, exports of garments, carpets and pashmina are in crisis, revenue and tax collection have plummeted. (see p. 9). A cash-strapped exchequer now has the additional burden of paying for a costly war, initial price tag: Rs 4 billion. All ministries are required to slash their development budgets by 25 percent.

War is costly business. Peace is going to be expensive. Money is already being diverted from development, and this, in turn, is going to make peace less sustainable. Nepal's economy is caught in a vicious spiral: we need to be at peace so tourism and investment can jumpstart the economy, but a pre-requisite to peace is economic revival.

Peace with development may still have been possible if there was a civilian authority seized with the enormity of the crisis at hand. But having declared a state of emergency and let the army loose to chase the rebels, the government appears to have let go. This should have been the time to launch an economic and social reform package, used emergency powers to crack down on corruption (not just a few politically-motivated showcase exposes) and improve the efficiency of government. This would be the time for a Marshall Plan to re-energise tourism and investment for the coming year, and to unleash a campaign-style delivery of basic services throughout the country.

The government is making half-hearted attempts at damage control, but it doesn't seem to see this as an economic emergency. And the ruling party is back to its familiar squabbling. While a medium-intensity war simmers across the country, here in Kathmandu the politicians are up to old tricks. Most don't even seem to want to know what is really going on because they don't want to worry needlessly.

When the peace talks were going on two months ago, optimistic as ever, we had said negotiations were not the be-all and end-all. Talks had to go hand-in-hand with measures to assure the Nepali public that the government machinery was functioning, basic services were still being provided and the administration still worked. We could now say the same about the war.

The army is trying to fix things, but while that is going on the civilian authority has to show not only that it exists, but actually prove that it cares for the people's well-being.

In the end, it all boils down to a crisis of leadership. Be it peace or war, a nation needs visionary leaders to steer it towards its

chosen destiny. The year 2001 was full of challenges, but we failed to produce a single leader who could seize the opportunity inherent in every crisis. That is one way to look at the year gone by—a year not just of misfortune, but of our collective failures. Let's hope 2002 will be less tragic, and a time for a fresh start. A year, perhaps, of living decisively.

## ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE

Most of Kathmandu's urbanisation woes are management problems. Given the political will and sound administration they can be solved overnight. Just look at how quickly an entire city block can be demolished, street lights fixed, or roads widened. The same goes for air pollution. All it took was the citizens of a Kathmandu suburb to rise up against illegal brick kilns, and the Bull Trenches have been hounded out. Others are still around, especially along the southern fringes of the valley, spewing the acrid smoke of burning tyres. But these too can be exiled. Now, after ignoring local activists and environmentalists for 25 years, the government has finally decided to close down the Chobhar cement factory, which gave Kathmandu the dubious distinction of being only capital in the world with a cement plant in full scale production three km outside city limits. Moral of the story: where there is political will, there is a way.

### STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# The paradox of power

With the emergency, Sher Bahadur Deuba should be the most powerful prime minister we've ever had. So how come he is the most powerless?

We seem to have lost the capacity to feel pain. State radio announces the mounting death toll of terrorists and the martyrdom of security personnel with tragic regularity. But we can't even hear, let alone shed tears. The deadpan tone of newscasters seems to close all doors for comprehension.

Society seems anaesthetised. The current operation perhaps justifies such a state to a certain extent. But is there anyone monitoring the health of our society as it struggles for life under the surgeons' scalpels? It is the political authority that administers anaesthesia upon a state when an operation becomes absolutely necessary. That is why all democratic constitutions have provisions for a state of emergency. But such a provision is based on the assumption that civilian authority is powerful enough to exercise control over security organs that are under its command. Unfortunately, there seems to be no such authority.

That is ironic, because no head of government since the days of hereditary prime ministers of Ranas has been invested with as much formal authority as premier Sher Bahadur Deuba. The declaration of a state of emergency combined with the mobilisation of the army all over the country empowers him like no one else before. No prime minister under any democratic set up could ask for anything more. But it is a paradox of Nepali politics that despite all this, no prime minister since Tulsi Giri under King Mahendra has appeared to be as powerless as premier Deuba.

Enigma is perhaps an inalienable part of Sher Bahadur Deuba's political destiny. Despite his personal integrity remaining beyond reproach, his first stint at Baluwatar became notorious for institutionalising corruption by legalising it. The rise of Maoists during that period came to be attributed to the revulsion that such a degeneration of values in public life created. Now, even though Deuba's impeccable democratic credentials still remain largely intact, there are doubts that he may turn out to be a tool in the hands of wily manipulators that detest the hustle and bustle of popular politics. Is it such a fear that has prompted Deuba into sporting multiple rings in his fingers, perhaps on the advice of an astrologer?

The condition of Deuba's party is even more precarious. The president of the ruling Nepali Congress Party is talking about a 'National Government', without realising that what we have is the most national of all governments that we can have under the provisions of the present constitution. Any action aimed at undermining this constitution without first publicly debating the merit of such a step will prove to be detrimental to the development of democratic culture in the

country. Elementary is not it? But apparently not so for the coterie that surrounds the president of the ruling party.

The less said about the main opposition party the better. Nepal Communist Party (UML) is still struggling to get a handle on the situation. It doesn't seem to realise that it's not politics as usual any more. There is a *iwari* on, and nobody is going to serve them a victory on a silver platter without exacting a price for services rendered. Rather than pay a heavy price later, it makes sense to fight your own political war. It's sad, but true: no party other than NCP (UML) has the capacity to politically isolate Maoists, but none of the leaders of this party want to do it.

So that's where we are. Even if the military is to achieve its military objective and succeed in disarming the insurgents, there is a dearth of political force to fill the void. National consensus is just a slogan. We need more political competition on the ground to keep out armed suicidally-minded militants with utopian ambitions.

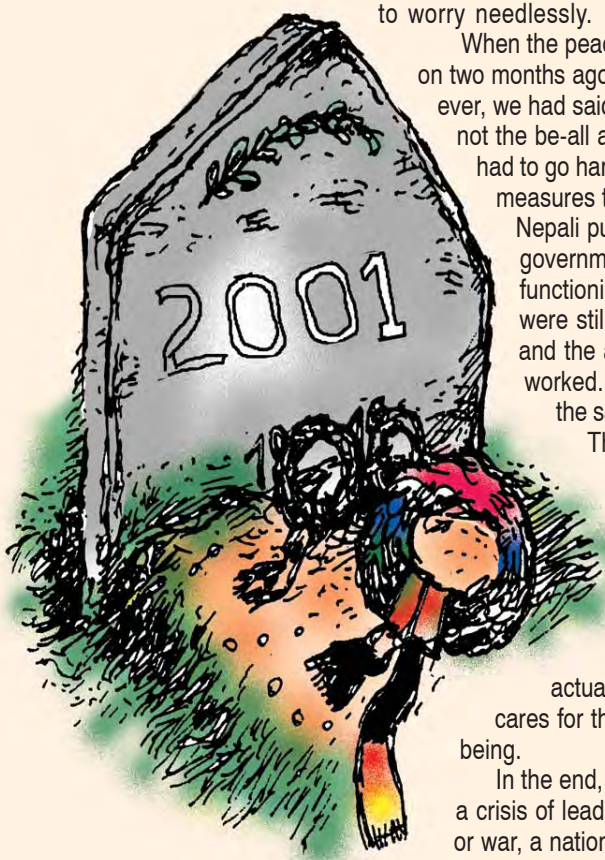
Nepali intellectuals have repeatedly failed to live up to society's expectations. But even by own the abominable standards, their failure in understanding the Maoist phenomenon has been spectacular. Like Lenin's useful idiots of the Russian elite who supported him in the hope that they will continue to have a place in the sun under a new dispensation, a large section of Nepali intelligentsia put its faith in the rise of armed rebellion and unwittingly helped invite an inevitable retaliation of the state. More appropriately, Nepali leftists behaved more or less like their ilk in Germany who went all out in undermining the Weimar Constitution in the mistaken belief that Hitler's socialism was more nationalistic and closer to their utopia than the democrats. Now that the boot is on the other foot, Nepali intellectuals most of them calling themselves leftists have suddenly become the most ardent apologists of the state of emergency. We cannot expect them to monitor the state of the state. Honourable exceptions apart, intellectuals in less evolved

societies often turn out to be willing collaborators of dictatorial regimes.

The press has its own can of worms. The tycoon press has so much at stake that it can't afford to oppose tyranny. Opposing a democratic government is relatively safe: there are courts, the society, and the world community to take resort to when the going gets tough. But when faced with threats from insurgents, mafia, market or the military, more often than not, the media barons buckle. This was their behaviour when insurgents had a free run. They failed to recognise the sickness in society and prevented the government from administering small doses of bitter medicine like the Internal Security Act in the name of a freedom that was held prisoner by the rebels. Now that the patient is under anaesthesia and being operated upon, it's unlikely that they will raise their voice for its life.

Where then is the light in the growing darkness all around? There are no clear rays, but the darker it gets, brighter glow the lamps of hope. Prof Krishna Khanal holds that it is the smaller political parties that will keep the flame burning even when bigger political forces seek convenient refuge to hide their dark pasts. There are old warriors even in the ranks of big political parties: people like Shailaja Acharya and Surendra Chaudhary in Nepali Congress or Pradeep Nepal in NCP (UML) and Ashok Rai in NCP (ML) that will not yield to the temptations of guided politics or dictatorship.

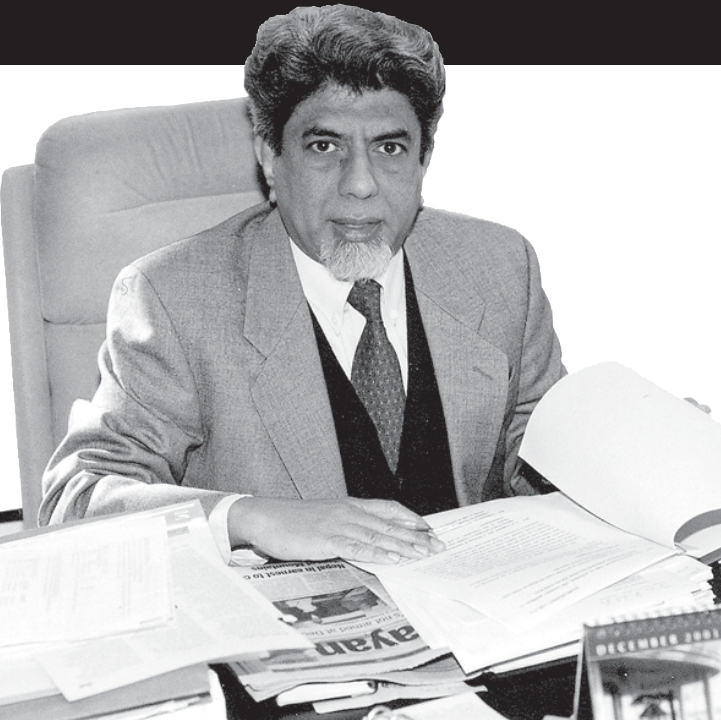
The tycoon press may turn around and do a tap dance as asked, but the small voices of *Bimarsha*, *Deshanter*, *Budhbar* or *Mulyankan* cannot be drowned out by either the state or the insurgents' propaganda. Then there are students' associations, trade unions and maverick thinkers who shine brighter, the darker it gets. When society starts to look for people like these, it means times are desperate. 8





# “The Summit is not just a photo-opportunity”

- SAARC Secretary General Nihal Rodrigo



MIN BAIRACHARYA

**Nihal Rodrigo is a seasoned Sri Lankan diplomat, but the byzantine world of South Asian politics may have been too much even for him. After an aborted summit two years ago, Rodrigo is finishing his stint as SAARC Secretary-general just when the summit is finally taking place in Kathmandu 4-6 January. While supervising preparations this week for the Summit, Nihal Rodrgio found time to tell us (diplomatically) what he thinks of South Asian politics, SAARC, Track Two and his creative urges.**

**Q. How difficult was it to get everyone to agree to come this time?**

A. The commitment to SAARC has not diminished although the official process tended to slacken in the last two years. Informal consultations were being held on convening the Eleventh Summit by Sri Lanka as Chairperson and by Nepal as the host country. I myself took every opportunity to urge all Member States to convene the Summit as early as possible. Confidence needed to be built through meetings of first the senior officials and then the standing committee which Sri Lanka hosted outside the regular schedule of meetings. The question of actual dates became a problem when other constraints were removed. It was difficult to find a set of dates which seven Heads of State all found convenient. In the last fortnight, I have had meetings with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the Prime Minister of India and the President of Pakistan in their capitals and they are fully committed to the dates that have now been finalized. Earlier Mr Mahat and Mr Acharya visited all the capitals formally handing over the invitation for the Summit.

**Q. Is it going to be just a photo opportunity?**

A. No. This Summit will be quite significant. Many of the administrative and financial matters have already been settled at the Special Session of the Standing Committee in Colombo. There is, therefore, more time for issues of substance. Poverty alleviation, for example. India and Pakistan call poverty the main enemy. And the social issue ñ women and children. A Social Charter for SAARC will set targets for the region on education, health, children, women, population stabilization and so on. Two regional conventions will be signed. One on children and the other against trafficking of women and children for prostitution. These would be major steps because member states sign on the dotted line, as it were.

**Q. But on the political level?**

A. As you know, SAARC concentrates on economic, social, technical and cultural issues. Political issues are taboo according to the Charter. However, at summits, there are informal bilateral talks outside the framework of the Conference. These are conducted in private and are entirely decided by the countries concerned. The SAARC Secretariat has nothing to do with these meetings which are at the discretion of the countries concerned.

**Q. Is terrorism going to eclipse the SAARC agenda this time?**

A. Naturally, terrorism has become a major issue particularly after the September mass terrorist attack in the US. Terrorism has, however, been a problem over many years for many countries in South Asia, particularly for Sri Lanka about which, being a Sri Lankan, I have no inhibitions to talk about. SAARC has a convention against terrorism but there are many legal and other impediments to its implementation. Frankly, as it stands, it is not very effective. I believe that the Sri Lanka delegation is proposing a meeting of legal experts to study the Convention in order to deal with whatever constraints there are. Questions of definition and so on pose major difficulties and even the UN Adhoc Committee has been hamstrung on this issue. What we need is a firm condemnation of terrorism in all its manifestations and practical action to encourage greater cooperation to deal with it.

**Q. Is SAARC going to get anywhere as long as the political will isn't there?**

A. Relations among member states within any regional grouping, whether it be ASEAN or EU or SAARC, tend to fluctuate. Naturally, when good relations are at their peak, much more can be achieved.

**Q. Isn't intra-South Asian trade and economic cooperation the place to start, why wait for the political will?**

A. I think you touched on an important aspect. There are two views: one states that unless there is political will, nothing significant, beyond technical exchange etc., is possible. The other states that if there is economic cooperation that would create a certain ambience and would have a healthy influence on political relations. One cannot separate the two processes and I believe it was President Bandaranaike who made the point at the Colombo Summit when she stated that both processes should be encouraged and advanced without holding one process up until there is progress in the other.

**Q. Was SAFTA too ambitious?**

A. Only about 4 per cent of South Asia's global trade is intra-regional trade. There is, of course, what is politely called informal trade as well as trade between SAARC countries contracted through third countries. The actual potential is immense. SAFTA was meant also as a process of confidence-building. SAARC was expected to complete drafting of a Treaty Framework for South Asia by the end of this year. This is obviously not possible. However, we have moved beyond rhetoric on the virtues of regional trade to the point where we have identified a series of problems that need to be resolved. The Secretariat has prepared a draft treaty framework using inputs from the corporate sector as well as examples of the European Union and American Free Trade Area. Although the situations are obviously not the same, there are parallels ñ for example, how did a country like Portugal fit into the European Community with powerful economies like the German? A number of issues have been identified in our draft Treaty such as rules of origin; non-tariff barriers; compensation for revenue that would be lost; fitting in existing bilateral FTAs (Nepal and India or Bhutan and India) into a regional framework; transit rights of land-locked states like Bhutan and Nepal; and schedules that would provide the smaller economies more time to open up their trade. The delay has been because all these issues require clearance at a higher policy level, say ministerial level. Unfortunately, as you know, we have not been able to have ministerial-level meetings for quite some time until agreement was reached for commerce ministers to meet in Delhi in August this year.

**Q. Is there a problem with South Asia that it will never really cooperate regionally because of the imbalances and India's gravitational pull?**

A. South Asia is a region of tremendous asymmetry, not merely in terms of size but obviously in terms of economic strength as well. In addition, India is the central state not only metaphorically but also because of its size, and geographically in that it borders all countries in the region. Again one has to look at the example of other free trade areas such as AFTA, for example, where Mexico has been able to fit in with two major economies such as the US and Canada. ASEAN has the same problem since the accession to membership by Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. They call it the 'development gap' which they are trying to reduce. The problem is not insurmountable but it will take time.

**Q. So we will never be like ASEAN, or the EU?**

A. Not being an astrologer, I cannot give you a firm answer. However, SAARC has only recently looked seriously at economic cooperation. Although SAARC was established in 1985, it was only in the early 90s that the Association felt confident enough to take on core economic issues. Tariff negotiations through SAPTA began only in 1995 with the coming into operation of the SAPTA Treaty. We are only now really grappling with the problems of establishing a free trade area ñ only after the Colombo Summit. ASEAN has been around for over 30 years.

**Q. Is the Track Two dead on the tracks?**

A. Actually, Track Two and the activities of civil society in South Asia have increased in the last two years ñ I am not sure whether this is 'because' or 'despite' the considerable slowing down of the policy level official meetings. I believe on the eve of the Summit that a number of Track Two initiatives have been launched which include former prime ministers, foreign ministers, SAARC secretaries general; academics and so on. My only concern is that parallel tracks never meet. Unless there is some direct interaction between the governmental process and the parallel Track Two approaches, they will go into infinity without meeting. During my three years, I have tried to bring the two together. Conclusions and recommendations of civil society have been made available to the official SAARC process and some of these have been taken in account.

**Q. How frustrating is to be Secretary-General? Have you left any survival tips for your successor?**

A. Yes, the last two years have been difficult and required tremendous patience. However, I still remain a firm believer in the need for greater cooperation in South Asia at all levels. SAARC as an institution has its own drawbacks but it is the only framework endorsed by all seven Member States and their leaders. I have also made several suggestions about the institutional mechanisms of SAARC and its decision-making process. These reviews, as you might call them, are proceeding and some of them will be taken up in Kathmandu, hopefully for decision. My successor is an old friend and a SAARC-wallah. He has been a Director in the Secretariat and knows it well from inside. I came from the outside but with several years dealing with South Asian countries at the bilateral levels as well as in the SAARC context at a number of Summits and other meetings I was involved in. I was, therefore, more impatient as things worked faster in the bilateral context but I do not regret having taken on the job.

**Q. How busy is the job of Secretary-General? Was there enough time for your painting?**

A. I was certainly kept busy but often for matters which would in other times not have taken that much time. Fixing of dates of meetings, for example, was much more tortuous a process. Too much mini and micro... I did not have much time for painting but the experience of Nepal is very much with me and I hope to return sometime to pour it all out ñ painting, a novel, I don't really know. A book on South Asia (non-fiction) is of course in production stage.

## LETTERS

**4+36**  
Thank you for providing the full text of the interview with Chief of Army Staff, Prajwalla SJB Rana (#73). However, the frequent reference by our leaders to a 'garden of four castes and 36 ethnicities' is a testament to the prevalence of the caste system, if not completely in practice, then at least in the national psyche. By alluding to 4-36, our leaders seem to be accepting the caste division as a positive character of the Nepali nationhood. Our

leaders need to preach democratic values, promote a sense of equality and enthuse the citizens on a road to progress. Let us not dwell on the anachronistic, unproductive and rigid caste-cultural values of our forefathers. Similarly, while celebrating the ethnic diversity of Nepal, the fixed '36' count is yet another reminder of the rigidity, immutability and docility of Nepali society imagined by our forefathers. We are a vibrant society and should be defined by our cultural harmony, fluidity, invigoration and acceptance of ethnic identities.

The fatalistic tendencies embedded in our culture need to give away to a sense of the individual and society's inherent power to generate change and direct the future. Let us believe in the strength and insight of our own citizens to achieve unity and prosperity in Nepal.

**Nuru Lama  
New York**

The interview with Gen Prajwalla SJB Rana showed the professionalism of the Royal Nepal Army as an institution.

**iSumani  
by email**

**PRAMOD KHAKUREL**  
CK Lal's 'Worrying about Nepal in Paris' (#73) was excellent. I was honoured to meet him in Paris, and was impressed by the man's simplicity, sincerity, good humour and his distinctive way of presenting reality. As Mr Lal explains, Nepali expatriates are not satisfied only to live in

comfort. Material well-being is not sufficient for happiness. We want to do something for Nepal and return to our motherland. But can we really contribute? Often, we gather and talk about our nation's problems, but we find no solutions. Our only conclusion is 'ike garne'? Small correction: Mr Lal got my name wrong, I am Pramod, not Mahesh Khakurel.

**Pramod Khakurel  
Paris**

Aside from calling Pramod Khakurel Mahesh, CK Lal has committed certain mistakes in his otherwise good article on CNRS. The Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) is actually doing excellent work considering the constraints under it has to operate as part of Tribhuvan University. CK Lal's charge that there has been no substantial work on Maoists is not true. There is at least one book on the Maoist movement in

Nepal, for which Mr. Lal himself has contributed a chapter.

**Bimal Kumar  
Khakurel  
Swayambhu**

**MEDIA**  
Although you were trying to draw lessons for Nepal during the emergency, I was intrigued by your comparison of western media coverage of the Gulf war and the current Afghan campaign, 'Animated suspension' (#73). In fact, the international coverage, especially on CNN, Fox or the BBC, isn't much better than during the Gulf War. It is only now emerging that the international networks totally under-reported the civilian casualties during US bombings, often knowingly because reporting it would have cut their access to the frontlines.

**Philippe Benoit  
by email**

**DENIAL**  
Re: 'Sex in the Valley' (#61), I hope we all are honest enough to face the realities presented by the pre-marital sex bar graph (men 45%, women five percent active pre-marriage respectively). Given a 50-50 gender population split and honest reports from the men, either the men are having sex with the same tiny minority of women, having sex with married women, having sex with each other, or a significant number of women sexually active before marriage aren't talking to researchers. As the old saying goes: 'Denial isn't a river in Egypt!'

**Lozang Sherpa  
Solu Khumbu**

**CORRECTION**  
The artist in Dabyaman is Neelabh Bannerjee and not as it appeared in #71.





# 2001 Flashback

from ➡ p1



#37, 12 April 2001  
**Rukum Kot Massacre**  
A little Nepal died on Sunday night. Newars, Magars, Chhetris, Bahuns, highlanders and madhesis from different parts of Nepal were among the 31 policemen dead on that remote hilltop outpost in Rukum. Some of the policemen were apparently butchered execution style, after they had surrendered. Nepal's political history does not have a recorded parallel to the death toll this week. Only the infamous Kot Massacre of 1846 saw more deaths on a single night. (Binod Bhattarai)

#38, 19 April 2001  
**Nepal Police was not set up to fight terrorism**  
Frankly, the Nepal police is not set up to fight such a conventional war and is not trained for that purpose. Now that the terrorists have started using sophisticated weapons and high power improvised explosive devices, it is increasingly becoming difficult for the police to fight them with obsolete and traditional weapons. However, we will keep on fighting with high spirits in the name of the people till an alternative is available. (Interview with Inspector General of Police, Pradeep SJB Rana)

#38, 19 April 2001  
**We, the people**  
*What is the best way to solve the Maoist problem?*  
Talks between Maoists and government (76.38%)  
Formation of all-party government (15.71%)  
Don't know, can't say (14.26%)  
Amendment to constitution (13.16%)  
Mobilisation of the army (4.96%)  
Mobilisation of armed police (4.09%)  
Declaring a state of emergency (2.43%)  
Others (15.32%)  
(Public opinion poll, *Himal Khabarpatrika*-ORG Marg)

#40, 3 May 2001  
**What the Chief Saib said**  
While the country is going through unrest and confusion, there have been comments on the role of the army and its duties. The rank and file needs to be clear on the Royal Nepal Army's position on these issues. For there to be peace, security and development in the country, it is important to have political stability established. The Royal Nepal Army is not a party-affiliated mechanism, but a national institution. This is a non-political institution whose proud history is associated with the history of the making of the Nepali nation, its continuity and national unity. Thus the army has to be used only in situations that would benefit the entire country. It is very necessary that these areas of interest be identified. (Chief of Army Staff, Gen Prajwala SJB Rana in a convocation speech to army cadets at Tokha)

#42, 17 May 2001  
**Janjatis want to be counted**  
Indigenous groups in Nepal are teaching their communities how to correctly fill out questionnaires in the 2001 Nepal Census next month on mother tongue, second language, religion and ethnicity. The result may give us a more realistic (and different) picture of Nepal's true diversity. (Hemlata Rai)

#46, 14 June 2001  
**Between grief and anger**  
As if the catastrophic curse that befell Nepal on 1 June was not bad enough, the information blackout that followed it made matters worse. Deprived of accurate information, Nepalis from all strata of society began to construct and believe their own wildest theories about what happened at the royal palace on the gruesome night of 1 June. Numerous royal family and army sources have confirmed to us the original account of the tragic calamity. There are slight discrepancies in the exact sequence of events: where precisely were the members of the royal family during the first and second bursts of automatic weapon fire, where were the wounds on the bodies, where were the ADCs, where exactly was Queen Aishwarya, did Paras leave the room? But on the question of who was involved, what emerges from extensive interviews is confirmation of a family quarrel gone horribly wrong. (Binod Bhattarai)

The kings are dead, long live the king  
This was an unimaginable tragedy in our country's history. Nepal has had to

live through a series of sorrows. But we must bear with it and we must behave responsibly. We must prevent people from taking undue advantage of this crisis to threaten our sovereignty, democracy



and constitutional monarchy. (King Gyanendra after his crowning at the Nasal Chowk on 4 June)

#47, 21 June 2001  
**Ke gardeko?**  
Those were the last words King Birendra spoke as he collapsed in the billiard room on Friday, 1 June. Shock, rather than pain, was writ large on his face. More than the shock of being shot, it was the shock of knowing who had just shot him. What have you done? he murmured as he slowly slumped to the floor. Nepalis will also want an answer to that haunting question as they agonise over what happened that night. As individual citizens and as a nation we will have to come to terms with this unspeakable slaughter and move on with our lives in the days ahead. (Editorial)

If truth be told  
Two weeks after the

ghastly slaughter at the Narayanhiti Palace, the findings of the probe panel have finally brought us closer to the truth. But, like a mirage, the truth keeps receding the closer we get to it, as an intrigue-obsessed public finds reality too hard to swallow. They are swayed by the government media's secretiveness, the private media's proclivity for either self-censorship or politically-inspired sensationalism, and the fixation of our Panchayat-era mandarins with information control. We are trapped by the lies. One day the truth will set us free. (Comment by Kunda Dixit)

#50, 12 July 2001  
**How many more bodies?**  
The royal massacre of 1 June has put the Maoist revolution on fast forward. It prompted the party to accelerate its preparations for a mass uprising which would prepare the ground for an interim people's government at the centre. Maoist leaders saw the street protests that followed the massacre and widespread public scepticism about the new king as an opportunity to cash in on the confusion. There are indications now that the party brass miscalculated. There just wasn't the critical mass in the protests. The Maoists have therefore gone back to Plan B which is to foment confusion in urban areas using banner bombs, boobies, traps, explosives hanging from banners denouncing the new king and the prime minister. (Sudheer Sharma)  
King Gyanendra's burden of living The throne was thrust upon him, and the only silver lining may be that exemplary leadership is often forged during testing times. Despite the enormity of his own family grief King Gyanendra may not, however, expect much sympathy from his personal situation or the task

he has at hand. He carried the burden of living, where death may be the only proof of innocence. (Opinion by Saubhagya Shah)

#51, 19 July 2001  
**The price of the people's war is worth it**  
Though it is anachronistic to attach a price tag to an epoch-making revolutionary process in terms of human casualties, we feel the price paid by the Nepalese masses so far in the six years of the people's war has been rather on the lower side. Such prices in genuine revolutions are paid in millions, and not in thousands. Considering the power and prestige gained by the poor and oppressed masses of the Nepalese countryside during the past six years, the price paid has been definitely worth it. (Interview with Baburam Bhattarai, Maoist politburo member)

The mid-west is red  
Does nothing shock us anymore? It was the highest casualty on a single night during this whole mad war: 41 policemen slaughtered, nine attacking Maoists killed and three non-combatants dead. It was the largest number of Nepalis killed by other Nepalis in a 24-hour period in our nation's entire history. How did we react? In Kathmandu our elected leaders were in the narrow corridors of power, bickering endlessly. The guardians of our human rights were busy ringing Tundikhel. The commander-in-chief was on a junket to Britain and saw no particular reason to hurry home. Some argued cautiously that getting the army to fight the insurgency would invite civil war, but many asked: aren't we already in the midst of a civil war? There is no military solution to this insurgency, the only solution is political. The government knows it, and deep down in

## HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK

# The more things remain the same



The Americans are fond of telling us that the world is different after 11 September, that nothing will be the same again. I wonder. The evidence points to the contrary, that things are much the same as they were before that horrific day but, as self-deceiving hypocrites, we just say that it's a whole new world. A recent episode springs to mind as evidence of this.

In the airport in Bangkok, amid the bustle of departure, a young Sri Lankan boy bounces into view, six, perhaps seven years old, the apple of his father's eye. My daughter tugs on my sleeve and the only word I can hear above the clamour is iyucki. She's pointing at his T-shirt so I take a good look, then a second one. The words 'Crash into World Trade Centre, 11 Sept 2001' are emblazoned on top of a photograph of the event itself. That unimaginable moment of the second plane's impact, flame and debris hurtling outward from six floors of the South Tower. Who knows how many lives were snuffed out in that instant? And it's on a child's T-shirt!

The boy, who I'd classify as not unusually pampered and spoiled for a South Asian male child of the upper middle classes, was doing what boys do: whining about the time wasted standing in line, annoying patient older sisters and tugging at his mother's sleeve. I sidled over and greeted the parents. They were boarding a flight to Colombo, so I assume they were wealthy citizens of the Sri Lankan capital, doctors or other professionals. Er, where did you get this shirt? I asked, fingering the material as the youngster huddled by. Bangkok, replied Mum, from a street vendor.

I enquired gently, politely whether she was at all worried about the question of taste. There was no intention to rush into judgement here. Bad taste, she admitted ruefully, but he wanted it so I bought it. She looked as if she'd had no real choice in the matter. I'll admit to a smattering of

**I wish we were doing more to help the poor and less privileged. I wish I could tell my children that the future is bright.**



rudeness in my next observation. I asked if she'd been in Colombo in 1996 when that city's own World Trade Centre twin towers near the waterfront as it happened were badly damaged by a car bomb, presumably planted by the Tamil Tigers. As I recall, about 80 people died. She said she was indeed in the city then, and she seemed to get the point. Later the boy bounced through the departure lounge in a plain white T-shirt, the offending item stowed away, forever, I hope.

I felt guilty about this, given my own mixed feelings about September 11th. I'm wary of righteousness of all sorts, including the anti-terrorist frenzy gripping parts of America these days. But lives were lost in an event of horrible violence. T-Shirts are inappropriate, I dare say. Yet President

George W is urging normalcy as a way to fight terrorism, and what's more normal than cashing in on a big event in whatever one can? Those who made the T-shirt, designed the decal, and did the stitching, pressing and selling, they got jobs and income from the act of exploitation. The provider of capital saw a return, presumably, on his investment. All very normal, especially from the point of view of Bush and his ilk.

So from this and many other indicators, I'm forced to the uncomfortable conclusion that September 11th changed nothing. Except for the bereaved families and shocked survivors, life goes on much as before. There's the distant thrill of and I'm afraid there's no other word for it of having been around for an event of earth-shattering proportions. Where were you on the 11th? Well, I was just sitting at the bar when we all looked up and saw the second plane hit. Oooh. And so on. That, as we see from the T-shirt episode, is just another bit of grist for the modern myth machine. Convulsions, culture, catastrophe go in one end, myth and money emerge. Especially money.

I wish things were different now. I wish that Afghanistan were truly on the road to peace and development. I wish that Al Qaeda and every group that kills innocent people for a cause were truly on the run, smoked out and brought to justice. I wish that all of us were kinder, gentler, more generous towards our neighbours or even to people of Middle Eastern appearance, the bogeymen of the moment. I wish we were doing more to help the poor and less privileged. I wish that politicians were climbing out of the pockets of big business and special interest groups and working only for the voters. I wish that I could tell my children that the future is bright.

But I don't think any of these things have changed so I can't. At least we can boycott those T-shirts. 8





their heart of hearts, the Maoist leaders must know it too.î (Editorial)

#52, July 26 2001  
**Exit**  
After vacillating for months and after surviving one crisis after another, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala finally decided to step down 19 July. It took the combined effort of powerful dissidents within his own party, the opposition led by the UML, and the Maoists to bring him down after more than six months of trying. The reason they wanted him out: Koirala was getting just too powerful. To be sure, Koirala failed in all three tasks he gave himself: in March 2000: streamline governance, control corruption and resolve the Maoist insurgency. (News item)

#53, 2 August 2001  
**No honeymoon for Deuba**  
This being his second time in Baluwatar, Sher Bahadur Deuba does not need a political honeymoon period. Nor should he expect one. But he could take a pointer or two from the fate of other second-time prime ministers in our region: how they came to grief because they never learnt from the mistakes of their first term in office. There is a glimmer of hope, the temporary truce announced by Deuba and Prachanda appears to be the result of behind-the-scene contacts. The question now is: are both sides sincere about it, or is this a tactic to buy time and regroup? (Editorial)

Womenís property rights  
The iwomenis billi is one step closer to being made into law and people on all sides of the debate want to know how it will be implemented. The 11<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Muluki Ain bill, being given final shape by the Parliamentís Law and Justice Committee, is a major step in the Nepali womenís movement. The bill addresses a mix of womenís issues, in large part concentrating on property and inheritance laws. (Ramyata Limbu)

#55, 16 August 2001  
**High and dry**  
Despite the truce, the Maoists are going for the stateís economic jugular. The method is psychological warfare: intimidation, threats and panic. The Maoistsí ban on alcohol sales and consumption

nationwide from 18 August is a move that will cost the already cash-strapped government Rs10 billion a year in revenue alone. More than 500,000 people directly and indirectly dependent on the brewery and distillery industries will be affected. Some 50,000 retailers and wholesalers across Nepal will be hit. (Binod Bhattarai)  
What to do when big brother knocks  
How exactly is foreign investment in media detrimental to our inational interests? The general consensus with which our editorial bosses have opposed FDI is a syndrome of the schizophrenia that characterises our dominant national culture, whereby the evocation of nationalism has been an effective strategy to prevent further debate and scrutiny of the concerned subject. Nepali society is not so weak that some media products supported by foreign investment will break its



back. What really is at work behind this bogey of nationalism is the fear that the mediocrity of those who rule the Nepali media world will be further exposed. (Commentary, Pratyoush Onta)

#57, 30 August 2001  
**Capital fright**  
Prime Minister Deuba announced a nationwide ban on land registration that will hold until a new law to set a ceiling on land holdings is passed. A chain reaction of panic swept the spooked business community. If it was land now, they reasoned, could cash and assets be far behind? Businessmen reportedly carted out hundreds of millions of rupees through unofficial transfer channels to India and elsewhere for safekeeping. There was a partial run on the banks, and the Rastra Bank governor had to go on national TV to assuage the public. Land redistribution, it seems, will only redistribute poverty. (Binod Bhattarai)

**Living goddess**  
On Saturday, a new Kumari receives a new King and the Hanuman Dhoka sees the enactment of a ritual that is as old as Nepal itself. Preeti Sakya is a precocious looking four-year-old girl who is adjusting to life as Kathmanduís newest living goddess. Taken away from her parents, she still has to get used to living with the staff at the Kumari

residence. She succeeded her predecessor on 10 July chosen from among hundreds of little girls according to an age-old criterion that stipulates a perfect and fearless girl to be the virgin goddess. (Salil Subedi)

**Samrat Upadhyay**  
îI am interested in the intimate moments of Nepali peoplesí lives, especially of middle-class Kathmandu, as thatís the world I know well, the world that lives with me even in my long sojourn abroad. At some level I suppose I am deconstructing some common stereotypes of what Nepali people are supposed to like, especially those in mainstream travel narratives. You know the ðhappily spiritualí people with that winning smile even in the face of intense poverty. My characters are spiritual all right, but their spiritual self reveals itself concretely in their everyday struggle with love and desire.î (Interviewed by Manjushree Thapa)

#59, 13 September 2001  
**Wait-and-see**  
The Maoists and their mentors now have a choice: come above ground, or fight to the finish. The talks have started, the truce is holding, and the Maoists are in deep huddle here in Rolpa this week to plan their future strategy. The party is at crossroads: after six years of insurgency. It is dazzled by the prospect of being a legitimate political force and is preparing to come out in the open. But its leadership cannot just abandon the ipeoplesí warí that it was fighting and winning. (Sudheer Sharma in Libang)

#64, 18 October 2001  
**Kathmandu and Kabul**  
Nepal cannot expect to remain untouched by the monumental reconfiguration of the international architecture post-11 September. We sure can learn a lesson or two for our good. Afghanistan, a multiethnic, multilingual, landlocked and mountainous country may be a good place to begin. With Mohammed Zahir Shah out of the throne and the country for more than three decades playing a prominent role in AFghan national reconciliation, we should know how to straighten out our national priorities. Nepal could find in an Afghan-style *loya jirga* a useful way of evolving a national consensus. (Somewhere in Nepal, Puskar Bhusal)

#70, 6 December 2001  
Letís get this over with  
Letís be perfectly clear about this, the Maoists brought this on themselves. They wilfully took the ipeoplesí warí to the next phase to bring down this



countryís constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. While there may have been a few other options, it is clear why the elected government decided to declare a state of national emergency. By breaking the truce and the talks to attack the Royal Nepal Army on 23 November, the Maoists knew exactly what they were getting into. They must have foreseen how the government would respond, they must have known it would plunge the country into civil war. And yet they went ahead and did it. Why? (Comment, Kunda Dixit)

**From Salleri**  
When the Maoists attacked Salleri late on 23 November, they stormed two places simultaneously. At one end of the village, the army fought back fiercely. At the other, government buildings and workers fell victim to the onslaught. Down a grassy slope from the bazar, two young girls were staring into a small ravine. At the bottom, dogs gnawed a camouflage-clad corpse of a Maoist. (Daniel Lak in Salleri)

#73, 27 December 2001  
**Death in Dang**  
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 of the resilience of poor Nepalís without the time or luxury to indulge in angst. Most of the women sifting through the wreckage were looking for one thingórice grains from this yearís 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. (Daniel Lak in Botulpur, Dang)



## Tourism vs terrorism

Just when things seemed to be getting from bad to worse for tourism, the government has taken damage control measures. It decided this week to open up 103 new Himalayan peaks to mountaineers from the spring 2002 season, which brings the total number of peaks now open for climbing to 263. There are still some which are out-of-bounds, Machapuchare (right) being one. For peaks of less than 6,500m elevation, the government has scrapped a rule requiring mountaineering expeditions to take liaison officers, paying their entire cost in addition to fees (and bribes). The Nepal Mountaineering Association says the decision will help inject more dynamism in the rural economy by creating more jobs needed to cater to tourist traffic. Nepalís adventure destinations are less affected by political turmoil than holiday tourism, and the decision could lure more tourists to Nepalís remote areas in large numbers in 2002, which is also the International Year of Mountains.



Private businesses are also teaming up with Royal Nepal Airlines to lure tourists to Nepal and fill hotels rooms that have largely remained empty throughout 2001. The new packageóstill in the works at time of going to pressówould aim to sell cheaper packages on destinations served by Royal Nepal Airlines. One idea being discussed is a three-day package for travelers from Bombay or Bangalore at Rs 28,160, which is almost what a normal roundtrip fare would be.

Other plans are to waive visa fees for short time visitors and reduce it for multiple entries. This has been the second consecutive bad year for tourism: arrivals in 2000 dropped by about six percent compared to 1999 numbers and the drop this year is expected to be still higher. Early estimates of the Nepal Tourism Board suggest that tourism numbers this year could drop by over 13 percent compared to 2000. (See interview with Yogendra Shakya on p 8)

## SAARC refugees

The roughly 100,000 Bhutanese who have lived for the past 12 years as refugees in Nepal are hoping that next weekís summit of South Asian leaders will draw attention to their plight. SB Subba, chairman of the Bhutanese Refugee Repatriation Committee based on Jhapa, Nepal has written to leaders of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives asking them to talk to Bhutan about a speedy repatriation. Nepal and Bhutan have been holding bilateral talks to settle the refugee issue since 1993 and have made little headway. Earlier this year the two sides began verifying refugees have completed screening 12,071 individuals from one camp. The process had begun on 26 March and at the present rate, it may take over five years only to get the verification completed. The two countries have also been unable to agree on how to proceed: start the repatriation process for those that have been screened as Nepal would want, or first complete the verification of remaining refugeesówhich could take over five yearsóas Bhutan has been insisting.

## Enrolment up

A mid-term review of Nepalís biggest education project, the Basic and Primary Education Project (II Phase), has revealed major gains in enrolment. There has been a 10 percent gain in the net enrolment ratio, from 70.5 to 80.4 percent between 1998 and 2000. BPEP is a multi-donor-supported project, run by the Ministry of Education and plans to spend Rs29 billion over five years (1999/00-2003/04) to improve the access to and retain students in primary school, improve learning achievement and strengthen the capacity of local governance units by involving them in school management. The 7<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Education Act 2028 by parliament earlier this year, officials say, will help take a more decentralised approach to education management, which has been one of the major drawbacks for the education project. The same law is also expected to put in more checks to weed out unqualified teachers, most of whom have been appointed to teaching jobs on the basis of fake academic credentials. Investigation of fake academic certificates has already triggered a mass resignation of teachers across the country, and the qualifications of most who quit are said to be suspect.



# The Nepali art of war

A former Maoist commander assesses the war so far, and predicts future rebel strategy.

*When the enemy attacks, withdraw from the battlefield. Attack the enemy to fight you on your terrain. Attack and then disperse like bees.*

These battle tactics perfected by Mao Zedong were behind recent Maoist attacks in Dang, Syangja and Solu. And from the looks of it, the tactics worked well. It brought out the Royal Nepal Army, which is now pursuing the Maoists into the hinterland in a classic guerrilla engagement.

Maoist movements across the world learn military organisation from Clausewitz and war strategy from Mao, who himself borrowed from Sun Tzu. But our Maoists have also learnt from the experiences of their comrades in similar Third World settings from the Peruvian Shining Path, India's Maoists and the Sri Lankan JVP uprising. All of these provide some insight into their current strategy.

Rolpa is the centre of Maoist influence in the mid-west, but the rebels do not have a similar stronghold in the east. This is why the attack on Salleri assumes significance. Solu has strategic importance mainly due to difficult terrain, the region's ethnic diversity and the fact that government presence on the

ground is relatively thin. The attack could be part of a larger plan to draw the army out east, relieve some of the pressure from the mid-west and ultimately encircle them from the surrounding districts of Okhaldhunga, Khotang and Dolakha. That would be similar to the purpose of the raid on the army base in Dang on 23 November, hoping that the army would follow them to Rolpa and Rukum, which they did.

If that is the ultimate strategy, a scenario can be envisaged in which the Maoist centres in Solu and Rolpa would be cordoned off by the army. This army cordon would be surrounded by a weaker Maoist encirclement, which itself would be guarded by an outer military periphery. Soon enough, holes will emerge in these concentric circles, and as each side tries to break the other's cordon these areas will become the focus of future battles. The Maoists will be fighting from the inside, from territory they are familiar with and where they have popular support, while the security forces will be fighting from the outside in, and relying on air support and logistical flexibility.

The Maoists are on the

defensive, so they will try to trap the army, block its supply lines and drinking water, all to wear them down and force them to make mistakes. The army for its part will play a cat and mouse game with the Maoists, chasing them and keeping them on the move. This movement will be an important factor it can help force the enemy to surrender or divide, possibilities Mao also wrote about. The army will move to spread the dragnet nationwide. In such a situation, the Maoists would have two options: either break the net and escape, or just lie low. What follows will also be determined by how capable the army is and the security situation along and across the border in India.

Due to considerations of topography, the Maoists have made the Mahabharat midhills their horizontal battle line or sphere of influence. Government security forces, on the other hand, have delineated the battle zones based on vertical lines that mark development regions. At the points these lines intersect is where there is the possibility of fierce fighting in the offing. The Maoists will try to incite the army into killing large numbers of people at these points which will help sow dissent among opposition parties in Kathmandu and the war itself unpopular among Nepalis. This strategy could work.

The Maoists are employing three types of guerrilla actions: surprise attacks, mass attacks and mobile battles. They are now organising for mass attacks, dispersing soon after to defend their fixed positions. They suffered huge losses in Salleri because they failed in the defensive part of the strategy.

ROLPA

SOLU

Now, they are trying to keep the army confined to the district capitals while they organise and regroup in the villages. Mao said: 'Attack and then disperse like bees.' That is the present Maoist game-plan and because they are in a defensive mode they will follow a defend-attack-defend pattern.

Ultimately, when the army launches its major offensives in the villages, the Maoists will retaliate by striking urban targets, including the capital: destroying bridges, perhaps aiming at airports. That is what is called 'great destruction' in their scheme of things, and such battles could determine their overall defeat or victory.

The army would like this war to be clean and quick. The emergency and the deployment of the army are detrimental to those who believe in democracy, but it is in the Maoists' interest to extend the emergency. The longer it lasts, the more chances are that it will bring about changes in the national situation, which will be good for their overall political goals. A long war will be expensive and a drain on the government's already



strained budget. The army therefore wants a decisive confrontational battle while it is in the Maoists' interests to delay confrontation and tire the soldiers out.

Then there is the psy-war aspect. On one side are possible atrocities by the state and on the other, the terror spread by Maoists. Information management and propaganda therefore become key in winning and keeping the hearts and minds of the people. The government will use available media during the emergency to spread its side of the story, while the Maoists could aim at destroying media institutions or even threaten families of servicemen and the police. On this front, they may not be as effective.

The battle strategy boils down to the well-known sword-and-shield formula. If the army seems to be depending on air strikes, the Maoists will focus on ambushing ground advances as happened this week in Lamjung. Aerial attacks from bullet-proof helicopters could cause heavy Maoist casualties, and they have only two ways to tackle that: using human shields and being highly mobile. The army will be expected to use its air power for maximum advantage, especially in areas where roads

are vulnerable to ambush and booby traps.

The army is now in a cordon and destroy mode, to which the Maoists are responding by trying to penetrate the encirclement. And as the army goes for guerrilla warfare, the Maoists will necessarily melt into the population and attack disguised as civilians. The Maoists had effectively defeated the Nepal Police in the past six years. By attacking the army in Dang, the Maoists flung their gauntlet. Many battles lie ahead, and a lot will depend on the effectiveness of the army's response. 8 (Pushkar Gautam is a former Maoist area commander for Okhaldhunga and left the movement three years ago due to internal conflict with the leadership. A version of this article first appeared in *Himal Khabarpatrika*.)

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# Consensus charade

## Can you really blame Deuba for going ballistic in Butwal?

project his latest call for national consensus as a solemn undertaking towards solving the nation's problems, he can't make it sound like anything better than a third-rate scheme to undermine his successor.

Just when you were about to give up on Deuba's determination to take on his detractors, the prime minister launched his counteroffensive last week. Affable he may be, but Deuba, too, has to factor in a tolerance level that has its limits. When the prime minister has to learn of his deepening differences with the palace on the emergency from remarks by party rivals who are clearly on a fishing expedition, can you blame him for going ballistic in Butwal? When his administration detains editors and publishers for printing what would be considered specimens of sloppy speculation even in normal times, can you expect Deuba to accept charges of muzzling the press by the same politicians he believes sponsored those stories? If the premier has hardened his resolve, maybe it's because his critics are crossing too many red lines at once.

This is not to suggest that Koirala's consensus call lacks merit. Ever since Rastriya Prajatantra Party president

Surya Bahadur Thapa made that plea in Pokhara two years ago, most mainstream politicians have come out with their own versions. Koirala, who had announced a 14-point agenda during his last weeks as prime minister, was in the process of reconciling it with the main opposition UML's 22 points before he decided to skip a morning meeting to record his resignation speech. What makes Koirala's fresh call disquieting, though, is its timing and almost exclusive focus on sharing power. What is disgusting is the easy acceptance the proposal received among the same leaders who not very long ago were boycotting public functions Koirala attended as part of their effort to bully him out of Baluwatar.

Deuba realises how endemic political instability amid growing public scepticism creates the conditions for wider discord. He probably didn't draft the final report of the blue-ribbon panel on resolving the Maoist insurgency he headed. But he has read enough of it not to expect Nepalis to maintain a long-term perspective while they are struggling to survive. Deuba is compelled to find enough cash to keep the country quiet while hanging on to whatever credibility he can.

Koirala knows better than anyone else how delicate this balancing act can be because he's been in the driver's seat the longest during these 12 uneasy years. But he can afford to pretend he doesn't. It's Deuba who has to go cap in hand around donors who lecture him on the cancerous spread of corruption before giving him a fair hearing.

Since the mobilisation of the military and the promulgation of anti-terrorism legislation have curtailed constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, they have raised legitimate concerns about the future of Nepal's democracy. Narayanhi and Singha Darbars have called the state of emergency a compulsion because that's what the constitution envisages it as. Perhaps it becomes tempting to provide Machiavellian twists to transparent assertions when you can't torch tyres on the streets or dislocate sewer slabs. During extraordinary times likes these, even the masters of mendacity must spell out how they expect the military to accomplish its mission while the emergency remains a political football. Discussing a sensible exit strategy is quite different from setting arbitrary deadlines.

To be sure, a successful military campaign alone cannot address the corruption, criminality and cynicism that have gripped mainstream politics and galvanised the Maoists. However, the people

don't need politicians for such platitudes. They expect their leaders to come out with specifics on tackling the root causes of the insurgency, not to scramble for power in a way that only complicates the crisis.

Deuba must have expected something like this to happen. Remember how he walked his retinue of Kangresis to the party's office in parliament to register a no-confidence motion against Koirala on a Valley bandh exactly a year ago today, while the rest of the nation was trying to make sense of the anti-Hrithik Roshan riots? But make no mistake, the prime minister sees a monumental challenge here. He feels his opponents want him to trim his jumbo cabinet to make room for them. If Deuba's rivals in the ruling and opposition parties were to get into a government of national unity, he would have to learn to refine his coalition-building skills with each cabinet session. With Pajeros thoroughly discredited and the security budget absorbing much of the outlays, Deuba doesn't have much room for manoeuvre. Besides, who knows what kind of early-detection skills advocates of probity in our burgeoning civil society have acquired since his last stint in Singha Darbar?

Deuba's opponents continue to challenge him to justify why his government needs emergency powers to fight terrorism. Doesn't it look like they're doing that job for him? 8

### FOLLOW-UP

## Polymer rupees

The next batch of crisp new Rs 10 notes coming into circulation next Dasai could be different that the paper notes Nepalis are used to. Nepal Rastra Bank has decided to try out polymer to replace paper money, because it is more durable and cost effective even though it is more expensive to print.

“We're ready to try using plastic notes,” Upendra Keshari Poudel, executive director, at the central bank told us this week. “Actual tendering will begin after the plan is cleared by government.”

One legal obstacle that had prevented the bank from making up its mind earlier was a clause in the law that categorically said money had to be made from paper. This clause has now been amended in the Rastra Bank rules earlier this year.

The polymer notes don't crumple or rip, they are water and sweat resistant and therefore last longer. And because they don't get soiled easily, they are also germ free. The notes are already in use in countries like Bangladesh, China, Thailand and Indonesia, and in Australia which is the world leader in polymer bank note printing. Australia cash is 100 percent polymer, while the 10 Taka in Bangladesh, 50 Baht in Thailand and the 100-Yuan in China which are the notes in widest circulation.

The most used

denominations in Nepal are the ones, tens, hundreds and thousands. The NRB has decided not to print more of the ones and go for coins instead. Polymer is being discussed as an option for the tenner. Because the volumes of the 100s and 1000s are not

as high, they may continue using good

old paper. On average a 10-rupee note lasts 3-6 months and the life span of the polymer (about four years) is what has made it an



### “Cash or plastic?” may have a new meaning in Nepal soon.

attractive option. Every year, Nepal prints about 20m pieces of new Rs 10 notes.

Note Printing Australia (NPA), a subsidiary of the Australian Reserve Bank, had been trying to convince NRB officials to switch to plastic (see: NT #54 left). NPA claims the polymer notes are not just durable and wear-proof (the average life span of a polymer Australian \$10 bill is 32 months, compared to its paper life of eight months) but also of enhanced security featuresó generally used for notes of higher denominations, in addition to all security features paper printing allows.

But polymer money has a flip side: they don't fold easily and counting by handóas is the practice at the central bankóis not easy. The Nepali practice of stapling notes could be where the Achilles' heel for plastic money because the holes would make it tear. The cost of printing new notes is the other short-term disadvantageóit costs two to three times more than paper printing. But Rastra Bank is convinced polymer money is a good investment. It spends about Rs100 million on note printing every year and introduction of plastic would also mean spending less on printing other notes, and displacing established printers. There could be much haggling to that end because notes not printed would also mean someone somewhere would earn less, both legally and underhand. 8



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### ADB portfolio 2001

2001 was perhaps a terrible year for Nepal's economy, but it was not as bad for the Asian Development Bank in Nepal, as we were told at a year-end press conference last week. The bank approved loans worth \$95.6 million to Nepal in 2001, in line with its spending plan in a low-growth scenario. The loans are to be used for teacher training (\$19.6 million), governance reform (\$30 million), and road maintenance, highways, feeder and district roads (\$46 million). The roads project shall be co-financed by the Department for International Development (DfID), which is giving over \$10 million, and the government, which is putting in \$13.9 million. The governance reform loan will be used to help government make the civil service more result-oriented, and also bring about greater gender balance in the bureaucracy by supporting affirmative action amendments in the Civil Service Act. The bank also provided \$4 million as technical assistance. All this takes the bank's cumulative assistance to Nepal since it started doing business here in 1968 to about \$1.9 billion. Disbursements, however, have not been fast enough, of which the Rural Electrification, Distribution and Transmission Project (RETDP), approved in late 1999, is a classic example, though that might be moving on. We've reached agreement on four activity conditions and only a subsidiary loan agreement between the government and the Nepal Electricity Authority remains to be finalised, said Richard Vokes, resident AsDB representative. Two other programs—the Upper Sagarmatha Agriculture Development and the Rural Infrastructure Development projects—remain suspended for poor quality of work, supervision and management.

### Tightfisted no more

The Nepal Rastra Bank has lowered the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) requirement of commercial banks to release additional funds for lending and has also lowered refinancing rates, in a broader attempt to lower interest rates. The CRR has been reduced by one percentage point on average while one to two percentage points have slashed from the refinancing rates. The bank said its measures were aimed at energising the economy by kick-starting investments. The lower CRR limits would free up roughly Rs 2 billion for investment by commercial banks. But the bank's lowered refinancing rates will not have much effect even on short-term growth prospects. After all, banks have rarely had to borrow from the central bank, mainly because they were until recently awash with liquidity and in any case investment is falling due to the security situation. The recent decisions will have both indicative and operational level impacts, says Tula Raj Basyal, NRB spokesman. Even though banks may say the impact of the refinancing rate will not make immediate accounting differences, it may over the long run, when the banks could have to borrow from the central bank.

### Chinese tourists handlers

The government has begun a process of selecting 100-150 travel agents to handle the Chinese tourists expected to start arriving next year. The operators, who have to be at least a year old, will be selected on the basis of the size of their business—transactions must exceed \$15,000 annually—as well as their tax compliance record and registration at the VAT office. The selected companies will be asked to make a security deposit of Rs 500,000.

### Apple of Nepal's eye

It has been another average year for Mustang apples: only half of the roughly 1,500 metric tons produced in 2000-2001 could find markets. The government's Rs 40 per carton subsidy for packaging and Rs 7 per kg for transportation was of some help, but farmers say they could do better with better access and transportation. Fourteen of Mustang's 16 Village Development Committees grow apples on about 193 hectares of land.



## INTERVIEW

# “When problems come, they come in swarms...”



**Yogendra Shakya is a hotel entrepreneur and a member of the Nepal Tourism Board. He spoke to Nepali Times on the crisis in the tourism sector and how it is affecting the rest of the economy.**

**Nepali Times:** So, how bad is it?  
**Yogendra Shakya:** Very bad. The year 2000 saw a decline of almost about 11 percent compared to 1999. This year (2001) June was 56 percent less than last June, November was 42 percent less, December is even worse than November, and we already had surplus rooms compared with arrivals. Nepali hotels can cater to 1,200,000 tourists a year (the average stay in hotels is three nights) and we have less than 400,000 tourist arrivals. Hence, all year round, average occupancy is about 30 percent.

**Is there a silver lining at all for 2002?**  
I am desperately looking for one, but the lining is very slim—especially because of over supply of hotel rooms, security, and the Maoist problem. More air seats are needed to balance the internal growth of tourism. A strong national carrier is necessary to support the tourism industry.

**Shouldn't we be planning new strategies now for next year and beyond? What are you doing in the Nepal Tourism Board?**  
I agree that the mood in the tourism sector is at its lowest ebb. We have had one nasty incident after another within the country as well as outside. As the saying goes, when problems come, they come in swarms. When the going is bad in any business, income shrinks, because income shrinks, you cut down on expenses, because you cut down on expenses, you compromise on your product, and that in turn shrinks your business further. You get caught in a Catch-22 situation. The NTB's annual budget of Rs 100 million may not be too big for national tourism promotion, but it is definitely much more than what the Department of Tourism was operating with. As a co-ordinator of the promotion department, my first effort was to have better participation of the private sector, who are the real experts, in their respective countries. We narrowed our promotion to 12 countries only, rather than going everywhere with limited funds: Primary markets: USA, UK, India, Japan, Germany. Secondary markets: Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy. Potential markets: China, Middle East. The new managers have been given a free hand to come up with more vibrant gimmicks.

**Are there new non-traditional tourist markets we are now looking at?**  
When tourism was recognised as a business in the early 60s and 70s, tourists were referred either as "Americans" or "hippies" or "goras"—denoting that tourists are all white. It was only after the 80s that non-westerners were also recognised as tourists. In fact till date, Nepali law still defines tourists as non-Nepalis. Domestic tourism is really a new non-traditional market. The NTB's classification of "potential markets" all fall into the non-traditional markets. China and the Middle East are our two new potential markets.

Personally I think there is a huge potential in one non-traditional

# Shareholder scare

## How should shareholders really behave? How should markets be regulated? Will we ever know?



One of the more interesting news items last week was the probable de-listing of 25 companies by the Nepal Stock Exchange (NSE). The share certificates of such companies will be worth less than monopoly money—they can't be sold or used for any financial transactions, such as getting a mortgage. But what the exact fate of the shareholders will be, nobody knows.

When Nepali companies' shares began to be traded in 1994, it was welcome news. Finally, there was desperately needed pluralism in the market. New opportunities for investment were created and smaller investors did benefit. However, the lack of proper monitoring and regulations turned a globally acclaimed system of channelling investment into little more than a farce. Larger, more reputed companies stayed away from the market, fearing trouble-mongering shareholders, while opportunist promoters made a good killing, taking advantage of a dormant regulator and a slew of wannabe shareholders with barely any knowledge of how markets work. Which is why it isn't surprising that the exercise didn't work too well—our economy is saddled with liquidity of over Rs 25 billion and an estimated annual remittance of over Rs 50 billion begging to be invested.

What makes matters worse in Nepal is that what is, after all, a capitalist, corporate concept has

been infected with a pathetic sort of quasi-socialism. Just attend a shareholder's meeting, if for no reason other than to have some cheap entertainment. Shareholders are busy engaged in coaxing the company they supposedly own either to give them dividends that make no financial sense, or to give them some other incentive. The matter of lunch is not such a big deal any more—many hours of dedicated agitation have made it the norm. Now shareholders spend the meetings demanding everything from gift bags to reimbursement of their transport expenses. There are many opportunities for happy sociological observation. Perhaps business schools should make attending and writing up shareholder meetings as case studies a required part of the curriculum.

The other, slightly more serious issue that dominates these meetings is the relentless demand for bonus shares. Bonus shares are primitive system of capitalising the reserves of a company and distributing them as free shares. This system remains in only a few countries, including in South Asia, where adjustments in the account books result in changes in the market value of shares. Yet our shareholders believe bonus shares enhance the value of their investments. Our laws need to work in

accordance with international norms of valuation and pricing. Finally, we turn our attention to the matter of the so-called "public shareholders" on company boards. This is a great opportunity to watch democracy in action. Shareholders turn voters, and sit happily, awaiting ardent wooing by people who want to be directors of the company. Sure, minority shareholders' stakes need to be protected, but the way these elections proceed, with everyone making sweet to get a nomination and campaigning frenetically, one wonders whether the proportions of the exercise are not somewhat exaggerated. And why these people don't display similar ardour in real political life.

So, dear readers, this new year let us not forget that companies float their shares to the public to raise funds, not management capability. Let us shareholders ask only for accurate documents and work on those, rather than get embroiled in the day-to-day affairs of the firm. It would help, the Beed agrees, if our laws recognised non-voting shares that would provide a higher rate of return. It would also help if regulatory bodies realised that the inefficiency in the Nepali stock market does do anyone any good. 8

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

market: retired or "silver age" people who want to migrate and live the rest of their lives in an affordable and beautiful country. But this requires revolutionary thinking on the part of the government and our laws. Spiritual and MICE (meetings, incentive holidays, meeting & exhibitions) tourism are also other new markets for Nepal.

**How do we revive Indian arrivals?**  
First, Indians must feel that they are welcome, and that Nepalis do not have anti-Indian sentiment. All frontier formalities should be eased, such as the ID requirement. Indian vehicles should be able to enter with ease, and there should be no currency restrictions. After the fall in Indian arrivals, I made a very informal study: 30 percent of the fall was really the MICE (meetings, incentive holidays, meeting & exhibitions) component of the Indian market. This was not all our fault, but had as much to do with the cost control measures of the Indian corporate market in the year 2000/2001. We must focus on the MICE market for bigger volume from India.

**You want the government to help rescheduled tourism industry loans. Is that fair to the rest of the economy? After all, everyone is suffering.**  
In the US and all over the world, there were job cuts, layoffs, even shut downs in all segments of tourism—hotels, airlines, travel agencies, etc. Here the industry is only asking for rescheduling loans. I think that is not really asking for too much. Other industries are also suffering, they should be offered similar schemes. If the situation gets worse, it is better that they be allowed to shut down, so at least the remaining may survive.

I may have built my hotel, but the hotel is built on Nepali soil and ultimately belongs to the country. I am only the present caretaker. If we can think from that perspective, then we can understand why we may need help in bad times. After all, these industries provide employment and pay taxes in good times.

**How crucial is Royal Nepal Airlines to a tourism revival?**  
A strong national carrier is the backbone of the country's tourism. Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, all have strong tourism because of their national carrier. RNAC is plagued by politicking. It is a lost cause, but as I don't see another national carrier being born, our only choice is to revitalise RNAC. But having said that, we should encourage foreign carriers to fly in and have a friendly civil aviation policy.



# Economic emergency

## The Maoist war has exposed the government's most vulnerable flank: the economy.

Ministries have already been instructed to slash development budgets by as much as 25 percent. They have been asked to spare counterpart funding for donor-supported projects, an exercise expected to free about Rs 3 billion—an amount which officials say would be only enough to keep the army moving. Another Rs 350 million is likely to be freed from savings on recurrent expenditures excluding of course the cost of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's jumbo cabinet, which he has kept intact. New expenses like the cost of the SAARC Summit have also neutralised some of the savings. Some donors have used Nepal's new security situation to peddle hardware, and new plans are afoot to purchase telecom equipment and quick-fix Bailey bridges using commercial loans.

Deuba's only consolation is that today's economic woes are not entirely his making, and most donors are sympathetic to his government's needs. But any external support will depend on his ability to prove that the civil authorities are aware of the seriousness of the development challenge.

Two weeks ago the Central

Bureau of Statistics revised the country's economic growth estimates downwards, slashing the projection from six percent to three percent. Also last week the central bank loosened monetary policy aiming to restore business confidence. The lower cash reserve ratios held by commercial banks has freed about Rs 2 billion for investment, but that is unlikely to happen as long as the security situation remains unchanged. Now that the NRB is issuing bonds worth Rs 1.5 billion, that is where the freed cash may end up, effectively crowding out private investment over time.

Even if that were not to happen, it generally takes time for lower cost of the capital in banks to result in

interest rates being lowered, and to increase both borrowing by investors and production, an economist explained. The treasury managers face a difficult choice, because the low revenues have forced them to hold back on fiscal incentives (tax rebates, etc.), even though such stimuli tend to work faster.

Even more worrying is that there is no sign that anyone is planning a recovery. The private sector and Royal Nepal Airlines have announced a package to stimulate tourist arrivals, but the plan will take time to yield results. In any case, an aggressive tourism promotion may depend on a swift end to the fighting.

Businessmen are worried because distribution channels

BINOD BHATTARAI

Even without the war against the Maoists, the economy was in tatters. Now, it needs to be rushed into intensive care. The medium term prognosis looks critical. Trade was already in turmoil early this year, as exports and imports both tumbled to their lowest levels. Political instability, domestic disturbances and international terrorism destroyed tourism.

Future foreign investment, already hit by Maoist threats and government ineptitude, hinges on peace being restored.

Uncertainty over the duration of the emergency and the outcome

of the insurgency mean no positive trends in tourism, investment, trade or development. The war is also costing the exchequer dearly. The government has already overdrawn Rs 3 billion from the Rastra Bank and if present trends hold, it may overshoot its budgetary target of borrowing Rs 9 billion.

While expenses have soared, revenue collection is expected to plummet by Rs 3.5 billion this year. Improvement in collection is tied with a boom in economic activity, and that is again tied up with a restoration of peace.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat has the unenviable task of trying to work a miracle. He told us:

It is very difficult to foot the bills. The war has already cost Rs 4 billion, and Mahat says the government has approached international donors to bail it out. The government is asking for money to fund priority programmes like rural roads, drinking water, education, health and bridges, and rechanneling money already earmarked for those projects to security.

The donors say they have passed on the requests to their capitals, but admit they are frustrated by the government's lack of focus on poverty-alleviation and corruption control. Increasingly desperate, the government says it will now take any help it can get.

# "We have a real problem."

— Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat



The Finance Minister spoke to us about the economic emergency. Excerpts:

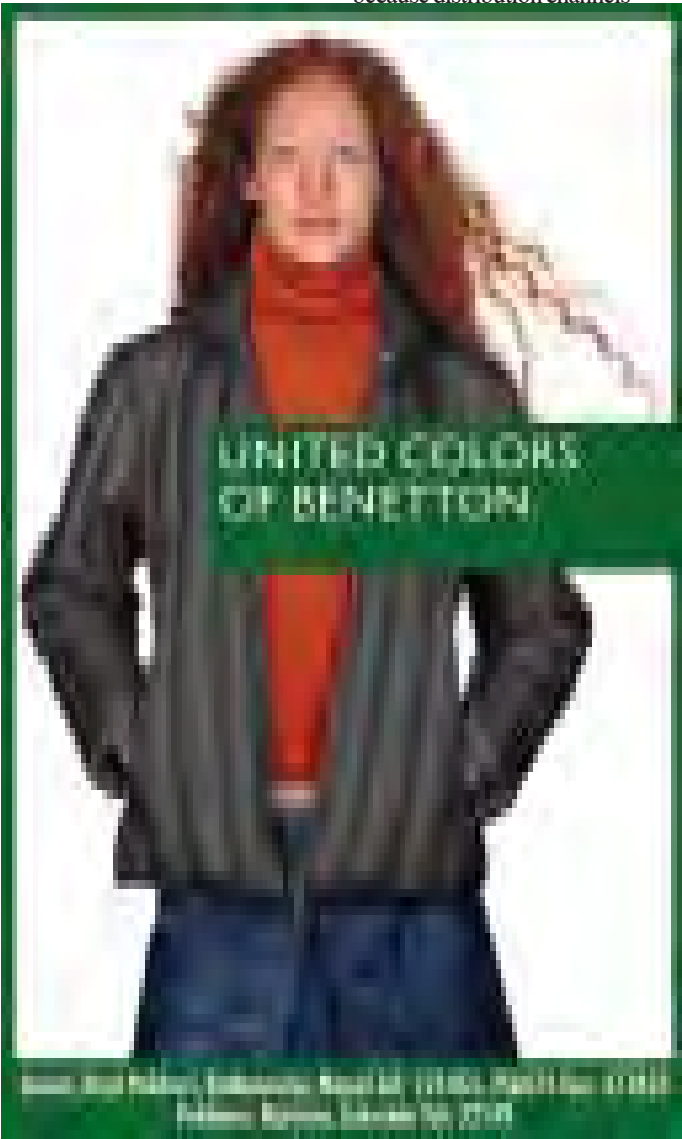
### The price of war:

The security expense won't be just Rs 3 billion, it will be more. Three billion is just the requirement of the army. There will be other expenses. It's going to be difficult to find the money. Our revenues are down because economic activities have slowed. Tourism and exports are down, imports are down. The revenue is largely import-based and so that has been affected. Tax

collection is slow, and the revenue shortfall will run into several billion rupees. We have a real problem.

**Economic management:** Private sector activity has come down. If government spending in development activity drops then there will be a further slowdown in the economy, possibly a bigger recession. We are thinking of several ways to meet the shortfall, we are asking the international community to give us extra money this year to help us maintain our ongoing priority development. Some of our resources would have to be diverted from development programs and we need extra support from donors to make sure that development is not affected.

**The need:** We are telling donors we may need \$70-80 million. Some donors have indicated they are willing. We have said if you want to provide money for security that is also welcome, money for new programs are also welcome.



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MIN. BAURACHARYA



# Zhangmou's capitalist paradise

**It is nine in the morning, but across the bridge in Khasa it is already noon. Everything is ahead of its time in this Patpong on the Bhote Kosi.**



*Fake designer goods and fake orgasms across the bridge just 65 m away from Nepal.*

SANGEETALAMA AND  
RAJENDRA KHADKA  
IN ZHANGMU . . . . .

**O**ne cool October morning this year, eight of us rented a Toyota SUV and headed off on the Arniko Highway for Zhangmu. Known in Nepali as Khasa, the border town is 124 km away. It took Newari artisan Arniko himself much longer to make this journey in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when he went to China building pagodas along the way.

Shortly after noon, we arrived at Tatopani on the Nepali side where we went through the formalities of obtaining an official document from the Nepali customs and immigration department. Although normally you must have a passport with Chinese visa to enter the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the governments of China and Nepal have agreed to allow people living within 30 km on either side of the border to travel back and forth with only an official *echiti* from a government official. Ostensibly, this is to allow traders to continue their traditional barter economy.

At Tatopani, as we crossed the Friendship Bridge into

Liping in Tibet, we could already see tall concrete buildings glittering in the sun along Zhangmu's ridgeline. Looking back toward Tatopani and Nepal, all we saw were a few huts and shops, and naked hills, a none-too-subtle image of impoverishment and underdevelopment. For the 15-km stretch to Liping, we got a taxi, our progress considerably slowed by trucks laden with goods heading to Kathmandu along the narrow, winding, rather dilapidated road.

Awaiting our turn at the Chinese immigration post in Zhangmu, we tried not to look nervous. We'd been warned by friends that if any of us were denied entry, we should quietly disappear and rejoin the line an hour later. Some people tried three times in the same day before they were let in. One of us, Sampurna, was stopped and asked to step aside by a rather angry Chinese official who, shortly thereafter and without further ado, asked him to go right on. Rather than sit around contemplating the supposedly mercurial nature of the

border guards, we scurried in before the official could change his mind again.

We had been told to return to Nepal by 5PM Nepali time, which meant we only had three hours to get back. But in Tibet, which runs to Beijing time, it was already six in the evening! Our Nepali merchant friends then told us the Chinese didn't really mind if people like us stayed the night in Zhangmu.

We got two rooms in one of China's ubiquitous and sometimes misnamed Friendship Lodges, again recommended by friends, because it was run by a Nepali-speaking Tibetan woman. Each of us paid Rs 80 for the rooms and use of the common bath. Happily, we discovered that Nepali currency is accepted everywhere in Zhangmu because the Tibetan and Chinese traders use it to buy noodles, butter, flour and other goods from Nepal.

Shops, banks, impressive office buildings line the 1 km-long paved road that snakes through downtown Zhangmu. Strangely enough, Chinese taxi drivers are legion. Who, I wondered,

hires them to go down such a short strip. Around a small town like this in Nepal there would be terraced fields of corn or paddy, but the *ecropi* surrounding Zhangmu are tall concrete structures. The architecture of these buildings is such that you immediately think you're in a miniature Chinese city, instead of Tibet.

For the past 12 years, Zhangmu has been the central exit point for Chinese goods entering Nepal. The town was full of Nepalis buying and selling, eating in restaurants, unloading trucks and strolling about chatting and laughing with their Chinese counterparts. Many Chinese spoke a smattering of Nepali, and Nepalis spoke broken Mandarin. But what impressed and puzzled us was the predominance of young and beautiful Chinese girls, all fashionably dressed in short skirts and tight T-shirts, with the most up-to-date hairdos. All of us, the men in particular, thought the slim and slick women looked like ramp models, but we also wondered how and why such visions of loveliness had landed in this remote outpost of civilisation. We would soon realise that there was much more to

Zhangmu than just *iKhasa*.

With time on our hands, we rested a while and then freshened up to look our best for a night out. Stepping out was a revelation. The good citizens of Zhangmu were bustling about with renewed vigour and purpose. Once again, we were attracted to, apparently, was every male in town to the women we had christened the Angels of Zhangmu. It was a surreal scene. Inside the numerous beauty parlours, they were putting on make-up and getting their hair done. There were more women on the streets, some with stylish hats on, others clutching cigarettes as if they were oxygen masks on a turbulent flight. Had we stumbled onto the annual carnival? From the windows of the buildings lining the street, we saw more lovely ladies gazing down at the pedestrians. Looking carefully, we concluded that these were not the wives, daughters or daughters-in-law of those homes. Past the women, through the windows, we saw walls adorned with posters of naked women.

At the street-level shopfronts, we saw groups of women chatting and knitting,

and we wondered why they would knit sweaters standing at the entrance rather than inside in their rooms. Our little promenade reached the end of the paved street, which was also the end of the town. It had become dark and we turned around, and on the way back noticed that at the entrances where women were standing, apparently engaged in the rather domestic activity of knitting and purling, were garlands of red lights. The rooms inside were also illuminated with a soft, red light. Peering beyond one of the knitting women, we saw a large, softly-lit room partitioned into smaller cabins, just large enough to accommodate a bed. And as men walked by, the knitting women would invite them in with a wave or a smile.

So it is not just Lhasa or Xigatse, but even Zhangmu, just beyond our own scruffy, poor border, that had become mini-Patpongs. There was a dazzling array of consumer goods, discos, bars, nightclubs, restaurants, shops and brothels. Kathmandu has perhaps half-a-dozen discos, tiny Zhangmu has close to ten. The fashionable Chinese women



*The Friendship Bridge across the Bhote Kosi at Kodari with the buildings of Zhangmou on a distant hill. Welcome to the Peoples' Republic of China.*





As Nepali shoppers flock to Tibet, Tibetan sheep and mountain goats flock into Nepal along the Arniko highway.



Bargain hunting in a Khasa shop.



Cool dudes playing pool.

we saw came from the mainland, and most of their clients were Nepali merchants and traders.

We returned to our lodge for dinner and then came out to really explore the irresistible and colourful red-light district of Zhangmu. It was now after 9 PM Nepal Timeópast midnight in Zhangmu. We didn't have to go far. In the shop attached to our lodge, we saw the glow of a red bulb. The women inside beckoned to the men among us, but we moved on. The next time, two of our friends went in and returned a few minutes later smiling. The women had asked them to drink beer and hang out.

Walking on, we entered a place that advertised itself as a Night Club. On the second floor of this rather large but ancient-looking building was a disco. The ìbouncersî, the bartenders and waitstaff were all women. It looked as if the place was run entirely by women, but worldly-wise as we all were, we suspected that the real operators were men, lurking behind the scenes. Two women guided us to a sofa to listen to a man with a microphone lip-synching a slow, probably romantic, Chinese song on a òvideokeí. A few couples were dancing languidly. A Chinese woman asked us in Nepali what we would like to order. We asked for beer. As if on cue, the music changed to a fast-paced English song. We all got up and danced, and perhaps because of that the music continued to be western. After dancing some more, we sat down to rest and have another beer. The music switched back to dreamy, croony Chinese.

A svelte girl in a short skirt asked one of our friends, sixty-year old Ganesh Man, to dance with her. The music was slow, and the angel put her hands on Ganesh Man's waist, teaching him to step and sway in time to the music. Despite his years, Ganesh Man was a quick learner and was soon dancing effortlessly. Very soon, the two were the only people left on the dance floor, as the rest of us watched indulgently. Ganesh Man is a simple farmer on the outskirts of Kathmandu, and we agreed among ourselves that this was perhaps the best fun he'd had in his life. When we left an hour later, Ganesh Man

tipped the woman Rs 100.

As we were leaving, we discovered that the floor below was a brothel. A passage, perhaps three feet wide, led away from the stairs. There were Chinese women milling about. Our men friends wondered what was going on, so they went in, and I followed. On the right was a large room, once again curtained off into several smaller rooms with a bed each. Father down the passage, there were more women knitting sweaters and gossiping at the entrance of each cabin. In a single, large parlour, fashionably dressed women were playing mah-jong. I tried to strike up a conversation. Some appeared taken aback, others were simply angry. I got the distinct impression that they did not like women approaching them. When our male companions showed up, they were all smiles.

Some distance away from here, we saw another disco with a lot of Nepali men inside. It was dark, but crowded, the dance floor packed with Nepali men.

Others were seated at tables, drinking and chatting with Chinese girls. Soon, a woman in a cheongsam made an announcement. The couples on the dance floor melted away, and on came young couples wearing a variety of traditional Chinese dresses. A fashion show! Keeping in mind the predominance of Nepali patrons, some models appeared in daura-suruwal and Nepali topi, and saris. It was so lively that it was easy to miss a crowd of local Tibetan women outside, tired from a hard day's work of loading and unloading trucks, watching people like us eating, drinking and enjoying ourselves.

In fact, it doesn't take long to realise in whose hands all the trade and commerce in Zhangmu is. In their ragged bakkhus and wispy braided hair, the Tibetans look less well off. Some Tibetan women use a single conch shell as a braceletóthe hand is inserted through the openings in the shelló

women from the Amdo region of Tibet. The Amdo work in groups in cities as far away as Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou. In Zhangmu, they work loading and unloading the hundreds of trucks that arrive every day from various parts of China. These women seem a lot stronger than their men when it comes to lifting and carrying loads. Not long ago, the Amdo were all over Zhangmu, running businesses and doing all sorts of work, but their numbers are slowly dropping.

As we staggered back to our lodge around 1AM, Beijing/Zhangmu time (four in the morning across the river in Nepal) it came to me that if Kathmandu consumers or wholesalers wanted to buy fake Head & Shoulders shampoo or fake orgasms, they no longer had to travel to exoticóand expensiveóBangkok or Hong



Women selling blankets on no-man's land.

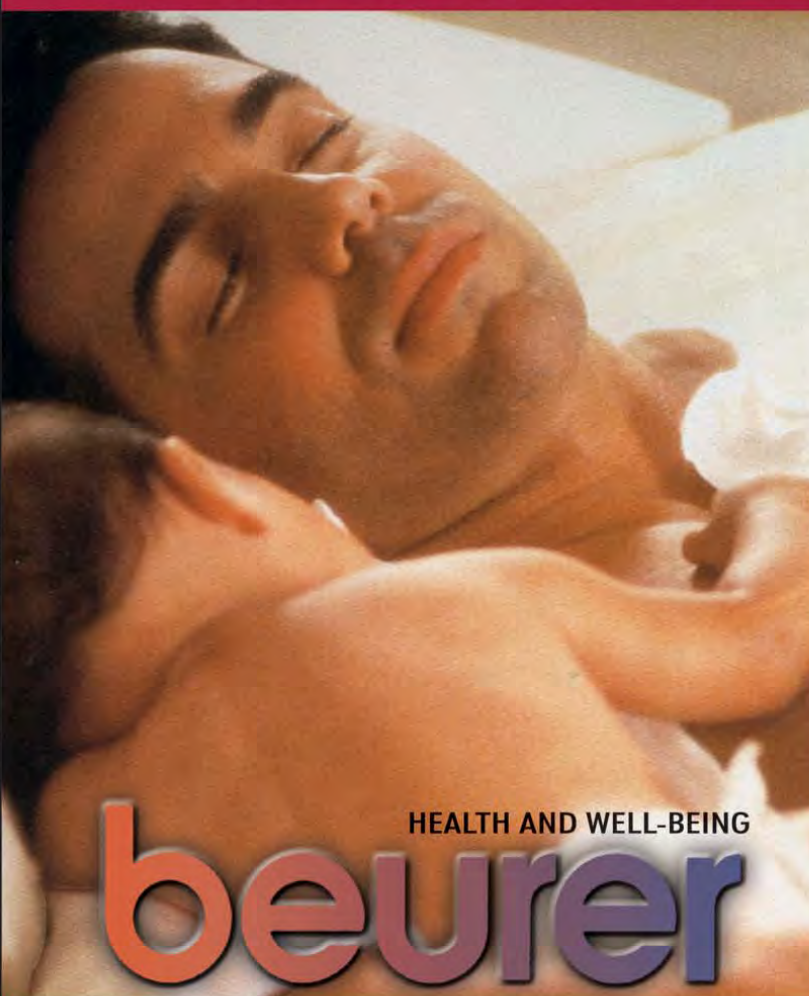


Tourists take pictures on the bridge.

Kong, but that a capitalist paradise of cheaper consumption and ownership was

right next door in Mao Zedong's Zhangmu. In Khasa, getting rich is glorious again. 8

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# Cannabis and the brain

**There is growing evidence that "blowing your mind" might be exactly what marijuana-use does.**

SUSAN GREENFIELD

Across Europe and America, there is a groundswell of debate concerning the legalisation of cannabis for personal use. Indeed, Britain has, to all intents and purposes, practically decriminalised marijuana usage. As a neuroscientist, I am concerned about this debate.

One common justification for legalisation or decriminalisation of cannabis centres around the idea that it does not involve a victim. But at least four reports in major medical journals (Ramstrom, 1998; Moskowitz, 1985; Chesher, 1995; and Ashton, 2001), show the contrary. In a study of pilots smoking only a single moderate joint, there was a difference between a placebo control group and those taking

cannabis, up to 50 hours after taking the drug. Other costs to the community are accidents at work or at home, educational under-attainment, impaired work performance and health budget costs.

Another argument for relaxing our attitude to cannabis is that it is non-addictive. Of course, defining addiction is hard, but if one regards it as an inability to give up, then there is strong evidence that cannabis incites dependence. Recent papers report many users in the US, UK and New Zealand now seek treatment for dependence. Other papers show that 10 percent of users want to stop or cut down, but have difficulties doing so, whilst a paper in 1998 reported that 10-15 percent of users become dependants.

Recently, it was shown that withdrawal symptoms were experienced after only three days of light use. Heavy users confront a worse situation. Dr Bryan Wells, a rehabilitation expert, comments, if for the first time I'm beginning to see something that resembles the withdrawal symptoms produced by hard drugs in heavy cannabis users.

Another argument in favour of relaxed laws on cannabis are its supposed beneficial effects on pain. So far, that evidence is anecdotal; it is hard to exclude placebo effects. The results from clinical trials are awaited. But distinctions should be drawn between recreational drugs and medicines, as they are for opiates. If cannabis is a painkiller, then it must have a huge impact on the physical brain.

Indeed, widespread reports exist of the impact of cannabis on the brain, in particular areas concerned with memory (hippocampus), emotion (mesolimbic system), and movement (basal ganglia). Cannabis affects a variety of chemical systems and it works

via its own receptor, that is, it is its own molecular target. The fact that there is a naturally occurring analogue of cannabis in the body, as there is for morphine, provides a basic reason to differentiate it from alcohol.

For an agent that affects a variety of transmitter systems, is as though it were a transmitter itself. Perhaps, not surprisingly, for cannabis has a clear effect on psychology: not only is there euphoria, but often-overlooked effects of anxiety, panic and paranoia. Disorders in psychological performance, attention impairments, and memory deficits are well known.

More disturbing and less acknowledged is the fact that these effects can be long-term. In one recent paper, a comparison of ex-users who used for nine years and abstained from three months to six years, were compared with long-term users of 10 years, and short-term users of three years. In all cases the frequency of use was 10-19 days per month. In all cases, all users, irrespective of whether they had given up or not, had attention impairments compared to controls.

Although those who stopped using cannabis partially improved over those continued using cannabis, they were below the level of controls, and this impairment was related to the duration of use. Most disturbing was the fact that no improvement in performance occurred with increasing abstinence.

No surprise, then, that because these long-term effects seem to be irreversible, there is an effect on brain pathology. Because much of this data comes from work with isolated systems, and therefore on all brains, an obvious criticism is that you can't extrapolate from such data. Yet, the evidence suggests that the long-term effects must have a physical basis.

A counter-argument to such thinking is to challenge whoever thinks that there is a safe dose of cannabis, with no effect on the brain, to say what that dose might be. Even a dose comparable to one joint, and analogous levels of the active THC ingredient to that in plasma, can kill 50 percent of neurons in the hippocampus (an area related to memory) within six days.

People, moreover, are unaware that the THC in cannabis remains in the body for over five days. For someone using cannabis routinely, the dose carried in the body is higher than imagined. It is also easy to underestimate the dose being taken, because there is a wide variety in the strength of cannabis. Individual variations in body fat and, worryingly, disposition to psychosis, means that you cannot predict how much will affect any person at any time.

Cannabis could well be having a serious effect on the mind, which I define as the personalisation of brain circuits that reflect an individual's experiences. A transmitter-like substance, with such powerful effects, must affect those circuits.

So blowing your mind might be exactly what marijuana users do. **8**  
(Project Syndicate)

Susan A Greenfield is Fullerton Professor of Physiology at Oxford University and (the first female) Director of the Royal Institution of Great Britain.

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# No illusions

Argentina was last month plunged into its deepest political and financial crisis in decades. President Fernando de la R'a was brought down by riots that left 29 dead. Citizens, facing unpaid salaries, frozen bank accounts and unemployment of 20 percent, are paying the price for two illusions.

The first concerns the supposed restorative powers of a currency boardóthe *magic wand* illusion. When in 1991 Argentina tied the peso to the dollar and prevented its central bank from printing pesos freely, there was reason to applaud. The new policy ended decades of high inflation and currency debauchery. But the currency board was also a reform strategy, an overreach that began Argentina's undoing. The country had not reformed previously, supposedly, because it did not need to. If unions bid up wages too high, devaluation could fix it, if provincial governments spent too much, a quick round of peso printing would save the day. Inflation kept the wheels of Argentine politics going. But without an inflationary cushion peso wages would fall so the country could compete internationally. Fiscal policy would be straightened out and with the central bank no longer the lender of last resort, local banks and corporations would never overborrow.

Initially the currency board did the trick. In the early-to-mid 1990s budget deficits turned into surpluses, financial supervision tightened and labour market reform was repeatedly attempted. Argentina was briefly Wall Street's darling. Then came



Buenos Aires police on the lookout for rioters.

## Argentines must save themselves.

Mexico's crisis, and Russia's, and Asia's. The world economy turned sour for emerging markets. Then Argentina fell victim to the second false promise, the *golden child* illusion. The world economy will help you as long as you help yourself, Argentina's politicians were told. If you need to borrow for liquidity, the world market will supply funds at reasonable interest. Just don't touch the currency board. President de la R'a countered the terms of trade and interest rate shocks from abroad with domestic tax increases, even as the economy contracted. Argentina didn't spend its way out of the slump, and non-interest expenditure remained roughly constant. In 2000 the nation ran a surplus of 1 percent of domestic output, which became a total deficit of 2.4 percent with interest payments. Public debt stood at a moderate 45

percent of output.

World capital markets did not reciprocate. Spreads on loans to Argentina went from huge to obscene. Interest payments drove up the deficit, spooking investors, who demanded even higher spreads, further enlarging the deficit. Forced to pay 40 percent a year or more on dollar loans, Argentina eventually ran out of money. The temporary discipline imposed by the currency board had masked the absence of reforms. The weakest link was the fiscal regime joining the federal government and the rest of the country, which remained discretionary. As the budget situation deteriorated, transfers from Buenos Aires to provincial governments became a matter for day-to-day political bargaining. The lack of a fiscal framework hindered credibility. Cut off from credit, Argentina

entered a deflationary spiral, though it remained committed a zero-deficit policy. Budget cuts reduced demand and output, revenue collapsed, making additional budget cuts inevitable. The lesson would be obvious to Keynes: with monetary policy immobilised by the currency board, and with fiscal policy immobilised by lack of financing, the economy could only go down. The shock absorbers deemed unnecessary for a golden child were crucial. In defending the currency board and trying to avoid a default vis-à-vis those who hold pesos, Argentina defaulted against everyone elseóits public employees, whose salaries were either never paid or arbitrarily cut, its provinces, who have not received the transfers accorded them by law, its depositors, who can no longer withdraw their funds freely from the bank, and, crucially, its democracy, with the mandate of a popularly elected president cut short by rioting and looting.

No one will save Argentina, Argentines must save themselves. It is necessary to abandon convertibility and let the peso float, while transforming outstanding obligations to pesos. The moratorium on foreign debt payments announced by incoming President Rodríguez Saá will cushion the blow. With the currency at a level that makes Argentina competitive, reconstruction can begin. With no currency board to instil a false sense of discipline, real institutional reform will have to be tried, provincial finances will have to be cleaned up. 8

(Project Syndicate)

(Andres Velasco is professor of economics at Harvard.)

## Purse strings and apron strings

WASHINGTON- The US Congress has approved next year's foreign aid bill, providing large increases in spending on population and health programs but withholding an increase counter-narcotics spending in Latin America. Overall, the \$15.4 billion aid bill represents an increase of about \$400 million over the 2001 level and about \$200 million over President George W Bush's request. Despite the increases, the United States will again be the least generous of the major developed nations, devoting only 0.1 percent of its GDP to foreign aid, less than half the average percentage given by most other donor nations. Non-governmental groups voiced worry that US aid for Afghanistan will be taken from the 2002 foreign aid bill. A bill introduced recently in Congress calls for Washington to shoulder some \$1.7 billion dollars of the UN's \$6.5 billion reconstruction estimate.

As in previous years, by far the biggest aid recipients will be Israel and Egypt, which together will receive almost \$5 billion dollars, most of it in military aid and training. Multilateral economic aid programs come to about \$1.3 billion, most of which is earmarked for US contributions to the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) and other multilateral soft-loan facilities. The bill also provides the balance of what Washington owesósome \$229 millionóto reduce the debt service of the world's poorest nations. About \$2.2 billion will go to the Economic Support Fund (ESF), a facility to provide balance-of-payments support to countries of strategic value to US foreign and defence policy. As in the past, some of the aid, especially military assistance, comes with conditions. For Colombia to continue receiving military aid, for example, the secretary of state must certify that the nation's army is severing its links to right-wing paramilitaries and is handing over soldiers suspected of rights abuses to civilian courts for prosecution. Congress also added significantly to administration requests for child survival and health



programmes, for which it approved a total of \$1.43 billion, \$371 million more than 2001 spending and \$443 million more than Bush asked for. It also increased spending for international HIV/AIDS programmes by \$160 million to \$475 million. The only major account substantially below the president's request was for counter-drug operations in Latin America, particularly the Andean region. Of the \$731 million requested, Congress approved only \$625 million.

The aid bill was passed after weeks of backdoor wrangling over contributions to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). A last-minute compromise between anti-abortion and pro-choice forces provides up to \$34 million to UNFPA, an increase of \$9 million over 2001, making this the only multilateral organisation to receive a hefty increase in US funding. Congress will drop a long-standing condition on aid to UNFPA where each dollar spent by the agency in China would be deducted from the US contribution, because anti-abortion forces insisted the UNFPA supports coercive abortions in China, a charge the agency has long denied. Almost \$450 million was earmarked for family planning and reproductive health programs, an increase of \$21.5 million. In exchange for these concessions, anti-abortion forces insisted that the Gag Rule, which bans US population aid for overseas groups that perform or advocate abortions, not be repealed. (IPS)

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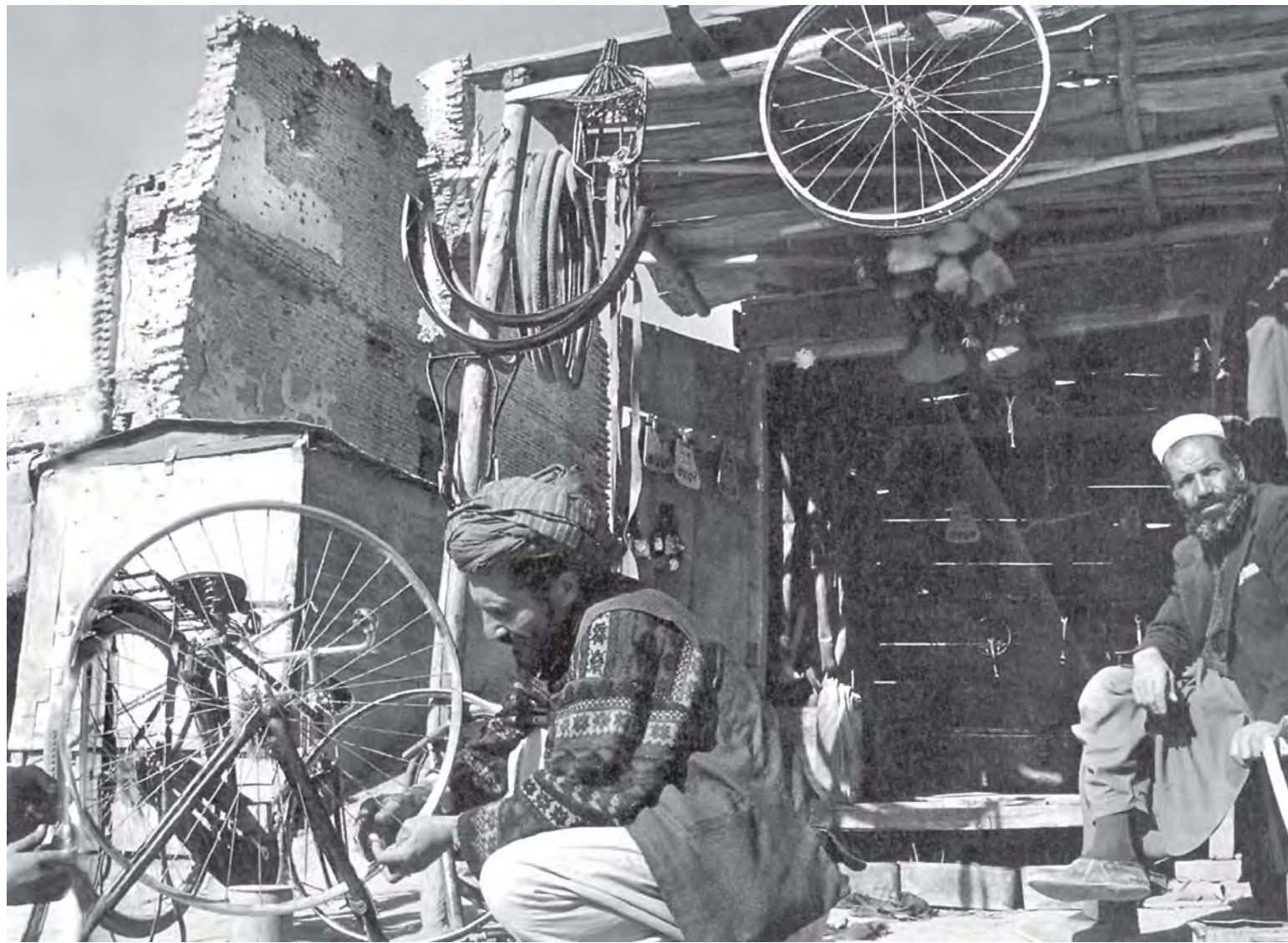
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# Proceed with caution



**There are grand plans for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. But will the interim premier be able to juggle the demands of history, culture and donors?**

NADEEM IQBAL  
IN ISLAMABAD

The assumption of the UN-sponsored Afghanistan government by Hamid Karzai on 22 December was the first time since 1973 that a change of administration there was independent of its neighbours' influence. People hope the interim government will promote liberalism and economic revival in a region that hosts extremist religious movements, drug trade and a proliferation of small arms. I promise I will fulfil my mission to bring peace to Afghanistan, that we do not again see the cycle of fighting and shooting, 44-year-old Karzai vowed during the swearing-in ceremony. His 13-point plan includes respect for Islamic rules, preserving the integrity and independence of the country, upholding the rule of national and international laws, ensuring the right of speech and belief, respect for women, universal education, transparent and good governance, the return of refugees to rebuild Afghanistan and friendly relations with neighbours.

Karzai's success will depend largely on the support he gets from the US-led international coalition. According to the 5 December Bonn agreement, the interim administration would remain in power for at least six months. A Loya Jirga, or national conference of tribal leaders, will then be opened by former king Mohammed Zaher Shah to decide on a transitional

authority until a representative government is elected after two years. The other limbs of the interim authority will be the Special Independent Commission (SIC), and a Supreme Court. The interim administration will establish a Central Bank and a Civil Service Commission to prepare shortlists of candidates for key administrative posts.

But the process of rebuilding proceeds under the shadow of Afghan ethnic groups and leaders wanting a piece of the post-Taliban political cake. This jockeying could potentially be equalised by Karzai's representation of the king, and he is from the Pashtun majority and also the powerful Durani tribe. His 29-member Cabinet has 11 Pashtuns, eight Tajiks, five Shia Hazaras, three Uzbeks and three other minorities. But with three important portfolios of foreign affairs (Abdullah Abdullah), defence (Gen Fahim) and interior (Younis Qunooni), Tajiks are conspicuously strong. Veteran Afghan warlords like outgoing President Burhannudin Rabbani, Pashtun Pir Sayed Ahmad Gillani, Uzbek Gen Rashid Dostum, Ismail Khan and Rasul Sayyaf, believe their share in the interim setup is less than it should be, although they were part of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. They might be named in the Supreme Court and the SIC, or their nominees

might get administrative posts.

But the immediate task confronting Karzai is extending the writ of his central government to at least six city-states that have emerged over the last decade. Kabul and the north-east region is Tajik-dominated, Mazar-I-Sharif in the north west is Uzbek-dominated and the Pashtun majority Persianised region of Herat is controlled by Tajik commander Ismail Khan. Likewise, the Hazara Bamian-Bugdis region is backed by the Shia Hazbe Wahdat, the southern Kandahar region is ruled by Karzai-nominated Pashtun commanders and the eastern provinces are being governed through commanders of the Nangarhar Shura (assembly of elders).

The International Security Force, led by Britain as authorised by last week's UN Security Council resolution, could be of help, but observers argue that it needs to be about 20,000-strong to demilitarise the country and keep law and order. The force is currently set to number between 3,000 to 5,000 troops. Another tricky issue is that the interim administration, with UN assistance, will establish an independent Human Rights Commission to monitor rights, investigate violations, and develop domestic human rights institutions of all urgent measures to help Afghan society heal from decades of

war, poverty and marginalisation. Irene Khan, secretary-general of Amnesty International who visited Kabul in early December, explained that, in a post-conflict situation, there is always a dilemma between reconciliation and immunity for rights violators. In Afghanistan, this is different. Ignoring past violations for political pragmatism and not acknowledging past crimes against humanity would only create hurdles in the peace process. Karzai said last week that a commission to investigate war crimes, is not a bad idea, but could not give a timetable for any proposed commission, and did not elaborate on what it would investigate.

Similarly, although the international community and donor agencies are ready to help, many are awaiting greater political stability before putting in more resources. The UNDP has established an Afghanistan Interim Authority Fund of \$20 million to support the country's administrative and structural recovery. This is in addition to another \$3 billion fund to be set up by the UNDP, World Bank and Asian Development Bank for the initial reconstruction to be completed before elections are held. Foreign governments and donors are expected to put in some \$25 billion. 8 (IPS)

## One strike and out?

DHAKA - The Bangladeshi government and principal opposition Awami League are locked in a verbal battle over the justifiability of resorting to a *hartal* or general strike to press for demands, despite its debilitating effects on the economy. The argument was prompted by a recent announcement in parliament by Local Government Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiya that a law would be enacted to



*Just another shutdown in Dhaka.*

ban strikes in the country. Awami League chief and previous prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, argues *hartal* is an appropriate weapon to put political opponents in a tight corner on any issue. A leader of the dominant Bangladesh National Party in the ruling coalition clarified to IPS that we are not thinking of doing away with the right of trade unions to call strikes in support of their legitimate demands. But even Shah ASM Kibria, finance minister in Sheikh Hasina's administration, says the country loses as much as \$60 million a day during a countrywide strike. Over two million self-employed and their families in Dhaka alone are forced to go hungry during strikes because they cannot sell their goods. Moreover, authorities estimate that on average about 40 people—mostly vendors, rickshaw pullers and daily wage earners—are killed across the country in violence on strike days. Ironically, during her tenure as prime minister from 1996 to mid-2001, Sheikh Hasina pledged that her party would not call for strikes if it were in the opposition again. Earlier this month, though, she issued a statement in all major Bangladeshi dailies that the Awami League is calling for a strike to force the perpetrators to stop atrocities against the opposition and religious minorities. (IPS)

## Dam update

NEW DELHI - Environmental activists opposed to the controversial Tehri Dam being built in a known seismic zone in the high Himalaya have found an unlikely ally in right-wing fundamentalists sworn to protect the sacred Ganges. But even this may not succeed in stopping the government from going ahead with the 2,400 mW project, with one of the world's highest dams. It will displace 100,000 people, submerge Tehri town and some 112 surrounding villages in Uttaranchal state, and be prone to earthquakes and frequent rockslides. When the dam's builders temporarily blocked the Bhagirathi, one of the Ganges' two main tributaries, to construct a stilling basin below the spillway, they inserted a two-inch pipe into the gates to ensure continued flow of water and satisfy the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Ashok Singhal, leader of the VHP, which is closely allied to the ruling BJP, had earlier threatened to forcibly stop the dam's construction if the Bhagirathi was blocked.

In another development, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder approved \$32 million worth of credit for the project before he visited India late October, reversing an earlier rejection of a credit application by electrical giant Siemens. The German ministries of both foreign affairs and overseas development have objected, and environmental groups there point out that the credit violates Germany's Hermes export credit agency guidelines. But the project, which late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said would only benefit contractors, has survived worse objections, including from the Ministries of Environment and Forests, and Power. (IPS)



# ‘India should not interfere in Nepal’

—Mahendra Lama



*Himal Khabarpatrika* 16-30 December

“The Indian government has assured the Nepali government that every request of Nepal’s will be fulfilled. In a democracy, the government is formed for the benefit of the people and that is why we, the people, accept its decisions. Since only the government has access to complete information, we assume that whatever decision it takes must be the right one. During the tumultuous 50 years of the subcontinent the government has made many mistakes. Such mistakes have not only been bad for the nation’s image but have also affected democracy.

Nepal is under emergency rule at a time when its democracy is still very young and its parliament and government have been caught up in scampering for political gains. Only time will tell what effect the emergency will have on the nation and its people, and on democracy. We have examples that show how difficult it is for a country to return to normalcy after a spell of emergency. In the case of India, the emergency imposed in 1975 is like a dark scar in its history. It was the equivalent of a hydrogen bomb being dropped on democracy.

No matter what cries of help Nepal directs towards India, India should not interfere. Any interference will be harmful to both countries in the long run. Experience, time and history tell this. India’s involvement does not fit into the long friendship and special relation the two countries share, because the cornerstone of India-Nepal friendship is India’s respect for and acceptance of an independent and sovereign Nepal. Regardless of where India’s interest lies, and even if it lends a helping hand in good faith, when circumstances change in later years, succeeding governments may call this interference. And such thinking will only be detrimental to our relations.

Initially, the Indian Peace Keeping Force sent to Sri Lanka was welcomed by the Sri Lankan government. Later, when a new government came to power, it not only called the entire episode Indian interference in a neighbouring country but India was also accused of arming the LTTE (Tamil Tigers). It was a failure of Indian diplomacy.

Nepal has long-standing and good relations with China, too. But why is China staying neutral? There is no place for the Maoists in today’s China, now a WTO member. Or perhaps China is still paying the price for interfering in Tibet.

What all should India do in Nepal? China’s influence is growing stronger by the day. As for the ISI, it has not yet been destroyed, anti-democratic forces are still active and other anti-India forces are waiting on the sidelines for a chance to step into the limelight. And just imagine what will happen if, on top of all this, India has to fight the Maoists too. That is why India should not interfere at all. Till date, India has stayed out of the Nepal-Bhutan refugee dispute saying it is a bilateral matter. Thus India must not interfere in Nepal’s internal affairs even if Nepal calls for help. “This is a very serious matter and the Nepali government must assess the odds carefully. (Mahendra Lama teaches at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.)

Graftprobe? . . . . .  
*Ghatana ra Bichar*, 19 December

Army sources say the emergency was imposed to bring the Maoists under control. The main reason the Maoists became active was the misrule and corruption that had spread to all sectors. The army is said to be preparing to take action against such elements as well. All eyes are on those who have amassed enormous wealth after democracy and the army is also said to be preparing to bring the corrupt to justice. The army is said to have a list of suspects (big political names) and is on the lookout for ways to bring them to justice. As soon as Girija Prasad Koirala got wind of this, he put forward the idea of forming a Democratic Alliance. All major political parties are now giving this serious thought. Koirala has said that to form this alliance and make it work he is even willing to put aside his party’s majority in parliament. He has been in touch with the leader of the main opposition UML, Madhav Nepal, and the two, who were sworn enemies not so long ago, have agreed on the issue.

On whose side? . . . . .  
*Jana Aastha*, 18 December

Lok Bahadur Khattri was the Chief District Officer (CDO) in Dang, when the Maoists attacked last month. He has since been transferred to the Immigration Department in Kathmandu. It is natural for people to ask what could be happening to the police chief of the district, Gopal Bhandari. ASP Bhandari, we are told, is being kept in the barracks, under watch. Officials suspect he aided the Maoists and so, besides his family, no other person has been allowed to meet him. As soon as the Maoists attacked Dang and killed four policemen on duty, Bhandari is said to have thrown down his walkie-talkie and pistol and surrendered. After that, he is said to have rung up the army barracks and asked them to keep the doors open, as he was headed that way. Sometime after that, the Maoists, using Bhandari’s official vehicle drove into the army compound, sirens blaring. The CDO and police chief used to visit the barracks before the attack. On the day of the attack, after Bhandari called to say he was coming over, the army left the gates open. Thousands of Maoists had gathered in Tulsiapur and had come to Dang on buses and trucks. Bhandari did not inform the army about their movements, although there are police posts along key entry points.

Surrender . . . . .  
*Budhabar*, 19 December

Government sources say that since the emergency was imposed on 26 November, 1,689 Maoists have surrendered. Since 185 of them didn’t know how to surrender, they simply issued statements. Among those who have surrendered are 364 who held office in the Maoist ‘people’s governments’. The number of people surrendering or resigning from their posts in people’s governments has been increasing everyday. At that rate, some estimate that as many as 5,000 Maoists may have already surrendered. Those who surrender are not held in secure jails, nor has the government said anything about special holding places, which means that they could be unsafe, not guarded against possible Maoist retaliation. There seems to be some sort of upheaval in the Maoist ranks—there have been long queues at offices of Chief District Officers of people wanting to surrender.

Back from custody . . . . .  
*Sanghu*, 24 December

“In our case, we (the author Gopal Budathoki and Bandhu Thapa, publisher of *Deshanter*) were locked up in an icy room and not allowed to bring any clothes from home. We weren’t even given permission to call home and ask for blankets. Food and water were out of the question. Even permission to use the bathroom was difficult to obtain. When we asked to go, the police shot back, ‘Is this your in-laws house, what makes you think you can use the toilet when you want?’ We spent 13 hours in such a manner. The next 12 hours were spent in another room, under torture. They blindfolded us and laid us down flat on concrete slabs. “I could not figure out where I was. Later (upon release) I realised that we were held at the Chhauni barrack. In there I felt I was some foreign war prisoner getting what is due to them. “I am associated with the press. “Why did the Deuba government arrest me and release me after some time, without presenting any papers—no charge sheet, no warrant?”

Follow the money . . . . .  
*Rajdhani*, 25 December

Ninety percent of the money supposedly being spent in the health sector never ever reaches the people it is meant for. Most of it is spent on the bureaucracy at the Ministry of Health and to please people in donor agencies.

More than Rs 5 billion is invested in the health sector every year by agencies like the Norwegian NORAD, Japanese JICA, German GTZ and American USAID. Almost 90 percent of that is spent on expensive cars, sophisticated equipment and travel expenses, paying foreign consultants, administrative costs and daily allowances.

Professor Ritu P Gadgola says almost 90 percent of the aid meant for health does not reach the people it is meant for, but as there is no transparency, we are unable to do a complete study of the problem. Public health expert Anandaballav Joshi says most of the health budget is spent on paying the salaries of over 37,000 employees at the health ministry and on

seminars, workshops and publicity. Two years ago, a government committee recommend immediate downsizing, but nothing has come of it. The health ministry has more employees than any other ministry.

Most district hospitals are in a very bad state, the central support they receive barely lasts three months. There is no use even talking about the state of the health posts. The state provides them barely any support, while the number of people seeking their services is increasing daily. The health ministry has made no effort to reform this sector. A high-ranking health ministry official said only a third of the health budget should be spent on administrative costs, while the remaining two-thirds should be spent on the targeted people.

Donor agencies are also accused of not following these recommendations. Less than 10 percent of their total expenditure ever reaches the people it is meant for. They bring consultants from their own countries and pay them very high salaries, meaning most of the money goes back where it came from. The Norwegian Heart and Lung Association is said to have spent over Rs 10 million on just preparing human resources to battling tuberculosis. A foreign consultant could earn a basic salary of \$4,500 per month, while a local consultant is available for about Rs 70,000. Besides, foreign consultants get other facilities as well. Nepal gets the most aid in the health sector, compared with other South Asian countries. Successive governments have said that they would provide health for all by 2000. That date has now been pushed to 2015.

Leave press alone . . . . .  
*Budhabar*, 19 December

Raghuji Pant, UML MP, says he’s unable to understand the arrest of journalists by the government, which has been saying that the emergency is only aimed at the Maoists and their supporters. Pant told this paper, “The government is also arresting journalists who have always been critical of the Maoists. It shows that the emergency is affecting the journalists more than the Maoists.” He is worried that if journalists are unable to point out misuse of emergency powers critically, then the state machinery might start abusing the powers vested in it by the constitution. Fair criticism, he believes, would give the government



a chance to improve, correct its flaws and rectify wrong decisions. Pant demands that all reporters arrested in different parts of the country be released immediately.

Keep talking . . . . .  
*Budhabar*, 19 December

*Excerpts from an article by Shanker Pokhrel*  
“The country is in a very difficult

position because of the law and order situation. If such a situation persists for a long time, that will only mean more trouble and hardship. To change the status quo we must be prepared to bring about major improvements in the present conditions. The UML has realised this and has proposed a 22-point agenda for change which was approved by its Central Committee. The 22 points have to be pursued by government not only during peace time but even now, when it is fighting the Maoists.

However, the government seems bent only on following a policy of suppression. It has begun saying that it is impossible to sit and negotiate with the Maoists now. Government should keep the doors for negotiation open at all times if that is what can bring an end to the bloodshed. All forces in this country should work for long-lasting peace and prosperity. The government was forced to deploy the army to put an end to the bloodshed, mayhem and looting by the Maoists, but the government cannot completely forget the possibility of peaceful negotiation.

Why did the Maoists withdraw from negotiations all of a sudden? Did they have any idea of the political fallout of the sudden withdrawal? Why did they take such a suicidal decision? Many are asking these questions. It is said one of the main reasons the Maoists withdrew was the pressure of the cadres on the leaders. This line of reasoning is true to a degree—after all, after the dialogue process started, many Maoists had openly protested against their leaders’ actions and also the peace process. Another explanation is that they wanted to undertake military action nationwide to build pressure on the government to agree to their demands for a constituent assembly. But even if this were the object, there was no reason to attack the army. Could it be that the cadres attacked the army to break the negotiation process altogether, because the leaders had said they would not attack the army. Whatever the reason, this development will prove very detrimental to the Maoists in the long run. The position of those in favour of finding a peaceful solution to the problem have been weakened.

The Maoists may have expected that the army would be sent after them, but not that they would be declared terrorists, or than an emergency could be declared. They are probably shocked by the way the government is now moving against them. They never imagined that Sher Bahadur Deuba, who they used to refer to as a flower blooming in the dirt, would take to such repression. Neither side anticipated the present situation, and Deuba will continue to get the support of everyone for some time at least. But it won’t last forever. If this is not handled properly, there will be more problems for both the Maoists and Deuba. The Maoist leadership must admit its mistakes and return to the negotiating table with a more realistic agenda. The government must also not let the emergency last very long. Both sides must ensure that the emergency and the deployment of the army cause minimum damage. They need to realise that the only way out for the Maoists, the government and the country is a political solution, and should begin work in that direction.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

*Doesn’t democracy have a way to weed out rampant corruption in the country? Is democracy a profession to earn money? Our leaders have looted the treasury and brought the people to this state.*

—Shailendra K Upadhyaya in *Ason Bazaar*, 22 December

Picture title: The greater emergency  
The placard reads: National Government

Naya Sadak, 23 December  
नयाँ सडक





# Defying tradition

## Female sumo-wrestlers grapple to win acceptance to male convention, and hope to get the sport into the Olympics.

ELAINE LIES

TOKYO - Crouching at opposite sides of a clay-floored ring, muscles taut and bodies glistening with sweat, the two sumo wrestlers stare each other down. Then, grunting with effort, they lunge furiously, colliding with resounding thwacks, red-faced and panting. They grapple and flail until one falls to the floor with a painful-sounding thud.

It is a typical practice session for Japan's signature sport except the two wrestlers are women, defying more than 1,000 years of tradition that forbids women to even set foot in a sumo ring lest their presence pollute it.

The ultimate goal of this growing band of enthusiasts is to get women's sumo, which has competitors in at least 17 countries, into the Olympic Games.

I like sumo because it is a

real test of strength against strength, I said Satomi Ishigaya, a 20-year-old student at Tokyo's Nihon University and a veteran wrestler who came to sumo after several years in judo. Each bout takes place very quickly, so you know quite soon if you win or lose. Adds teammate Mina Saito: It is good because the outcome is quite clear-cut.

Sumo, at its simplest, is a sport in which two contestants enter a clay ring and meet head-on in a charge, then use their weight and skill to try to bring the other down or force each other out of the circle. For women, though, more than half the battle is outside the ring as they grapple for a chance to even take part in the tradition-proud sport, said to have begun some 1,300 years ago.

Women's sumo only started as

an official sport five years ago. It is strictly amateur, unlike the male version, which takes place at the amateur and professional grand sumo levels. But officials connected with women's sumo see it as key to the sport's future. It was decided to set up women's sumo because the number of men in amateur sumo is dropping, I said Tomoko Fukushima, an official at the New Sumo Federation, which oversees women's sumo. Also, we want to get sumo recognised as an Olympic sport, and to do that, both men and women must take part.

Such egalitarianism runs contrary to many of sumo's basic traditions, which have links to Japan's ancient Shinto religion, which places a heavy emphasis on purity. According to Shinto beliefs, a woman is made impure by her menstrual cycles, meaning she should not even touch the sumo ring, let alone fight in it, a rule that still exists in professional sumo. This was graphically shown last year when Fusae Ota, the first female governor of the western city of Osaka, asked to step into the ring to present a trophy to the winner of the annual Osaka sumo tournament, as her male predecessors had done. Her quest failed, though, with sumo mandarins citing tradition. A repeat attempt this year also came to nothing. The Nihon University wrestlers had mixed feelings about this. It is custom,

so it is unavoidable, I Tamami Iwai said. But it would be nice if they could eliminate this sort of discrimination so we could all do sumo equally.

Inevitably, though, there are differences. Noted sumo traditions include the fact that male grapplers wear nothing more than an intricately wound mawashi belt similar to a loincloth for their fights. While women also wear the mawashi, a belt some eight metres long wound tightly around the lower body, it goes over a leotard and, sometimes, Lycra shorts.

Otherwise, the five women on the Nihon University team lead a life much like that of their male counterparts at the school, an amateur sumo powerhouse that has produced several professional wrestlers. Each day after classes, they undergo a gruelling

regime of stretches and repetitions of sumo moves, then practice bouts and collision training, charging and pushing another wrestler across the ring until both parties are red-faced and sweating. Training is definitely the hardest part of sumo, Yumi Asai said. After training comes a dinner of chanko, a high-calorie stew typical of the sumo world made specially to help eaters gain weight with the male wrestlers. Even so, the women are almost laughably light compared with the men, ranging from 140 to 175 pounds. In professional sumo, the average wrestler tips the scales at 325 pounds, with some as high as 525 pounds or even more.

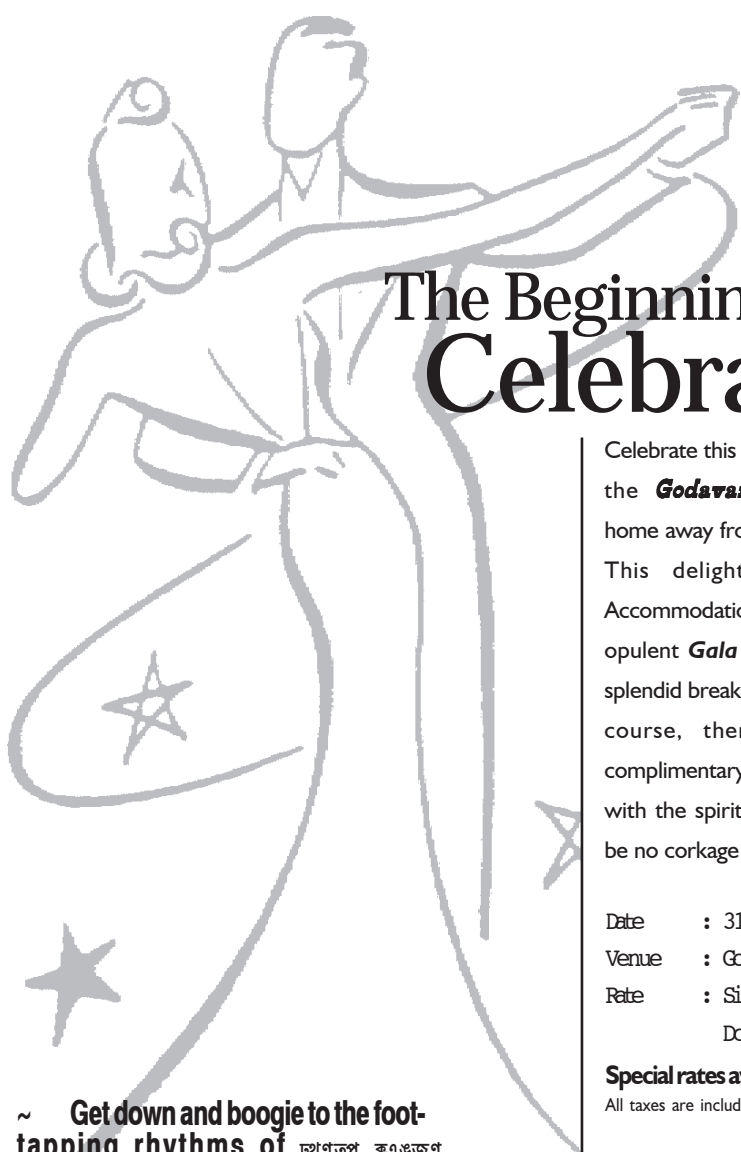
Despite the difficulties, women's sumo is gaining popularity both at home and abroad. According to the New Sumo Federation,

there are about 300 women sumo competitors in Japan, many of whom had backgrounds in judo before taking up the sport and at least 17 foreign countries have organisations as well.

At the October International Sumo Grand Championships held in northern Japan, men and women from 34 countries took part. It was the first time the competition included women. I said that women's sumo almost seems more popular overseas, I said Fukushima of the New Sumo Federation. In Japan, the traditional image is too strong, and women think they must be fat, or wear only the mawashi, in order to do it. At the competition, though, the Japanese women more than upheld national pride, winning a number of medals. Among them was Ishigaya, who fought off competitors from Norway and Russia to take a gold medal in her weight class. The best part of sumo, I Ishigaya said, is when I win.

(Toronto Globe and Mail)

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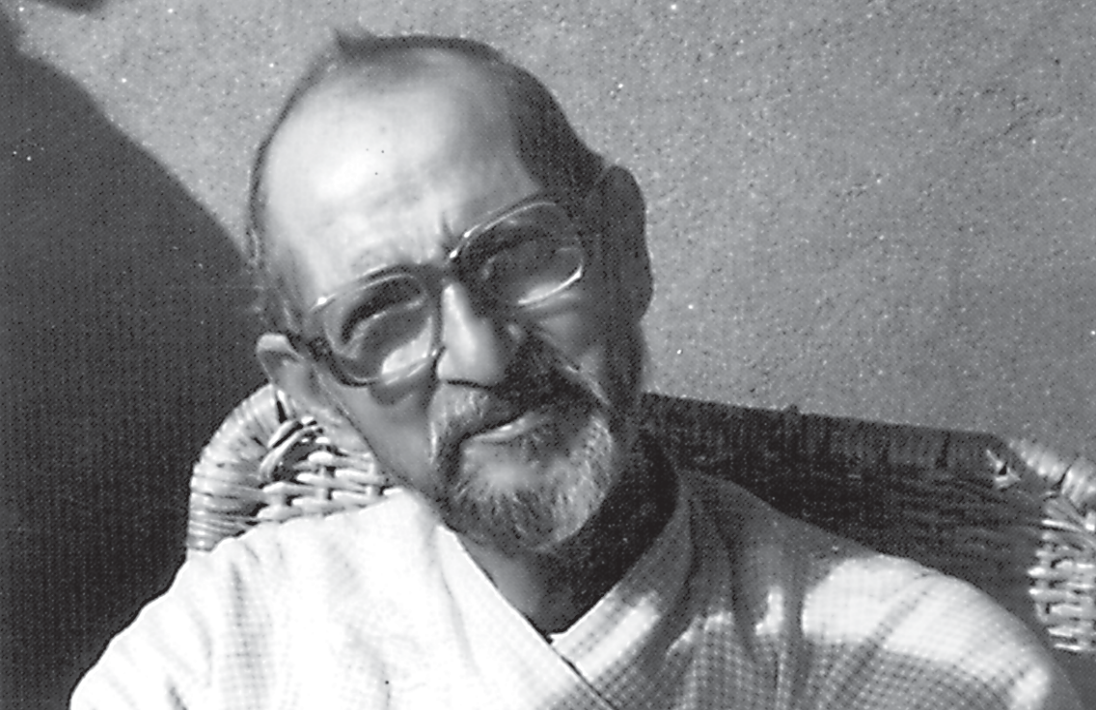
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# Back at Sundarijal



GANESH RAJ SHARMA

Starting this week, *Nepali Times* will serialise the previously unpublished diaries of BP Koirala from the period immediately following his return to Nepal with a call for “national reconciliation” between the monarchy and democratic forces. The entries begin exactly 25 years ago on 30 December 1976, the day BP arrived in Kathmandu after eight years of exile in India. At that time India itself was under Indira Gandhi’s emergency rule, and spearheading the movement against it was BP’s friend and well-wisher Jayaprakash Narayan. An earlier publication, *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections*, which is not a diary, does not cover the last six years of Koirala’s eventful life. These diaries fill that void. The diaries are available on microfilm at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, and were donated by senior advocate Ganesh Raj Sharma. A copy is also with the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum and Library at Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi. Transcription of this series was done by Subir Shrestha and Miku Dixit, and will appear every fortnight in this space.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
**Sushila:** Sushila Koirala, BP’s wife  
**GM:** Ganesh Man Singh, senior Congress party leader  
**Shriharsha:** BP’s son  
**Jayaprakashji:** Indian statesman Jayaprakash Narayan  
**Shailaja:** Shailaja Acharya, BP’s niece, deputy prime minister in 1998  
**Nilambar Panthi:** Nepali Congress worker  
**Rambabu:** Rambabu Prasai, who later became treasurer of the Nepali Congress party  
**Khumbahadur:** Khum Bahadur Khadka, present Home Minister  
**Anchaladish:** Zonal Commissioner, a position abolished after the end of the Panchayat era

**30/12/76 Sundarijal**  
Reached Kathmandu from Patna by RNAC plane. Members of my family and a large number of friends including Jayaprakashji came to the Patna airport to see us off. Most of us were in tears. I am deeply touched by the uncontrollable demonstration of love for me. Since my arrival at Patna day before, I have been receiving a stream of friends and well-wishers. They know that an uncertain and anxious future awaits me when I arrive at Kathmandu hence their concern. Sushila has been in desperate agony for the last so many days. She weeps too easily. I pray that she goes through the crisis without damage to her health. She has alarmingly high blood pressure which has caused some damage to her heart.

On arrival at Kathmandu airport our plane was taken to the far end of the runway, where weó(GM, Shailaja, Nilambar Panthi, Rambabu,

Khumbahadur and myself) were deplaned, and airport formalities were completed there in a tent set up for the people. At that point we were separated. Myself and GM were brought to the Sundarijal camp by a police jeep. Shailaja was taken away in another jeep. She waved a goodbye as she was being driven away. Others were taken away in another jeep. Back again at the Sundarijal detention camp. It has received a new coat of fresh paint and is whitewashed. Now the military takes charge of us. Back to the good old days. I feel relaxed in this surrounding and tell GM so. I am relaxed, alas, because I am free from Indiraís [Gandhiís] chicanery and double dealing and the atmosphere of confusion there. The relief is also due to the fact that the period of uncertainty about the course of action is now over by our return to Nepal. Die is cast.

Anchaladish with military and civilian officers came and asked some questions. The unusual part of the session was the inclusion of military and police officers in the government team headed by Anchaladish. Why were they associated? Another unusual thing was the tape recording of our statement (ie our reply to the questions).

The questions were about seven in number. Before I replied to them I gave the Anchaladish a copy of my statement which I had printed and circulated clandestinely stating the purpose of my return to Nepal. Questions pertained to our expressed apprehension about the danger to the very existence of Nepal and to the machination of India. One question referred to the King’s proposal of the Zone of Peace to be recognised by the world,

particularly by India and China. Another question was about Girija who had been left behind in Indiaówhether I indicated a strategy of alternative action. Still another was about hijacking and 300,000/- and action in Okhaldhunga. The seventh question wasówill my coming not jeopardise Nepal? I told him that we have come and are placing ourselves at the King’s hands to achieve political understanding in the interests of the nation. It is not the time to rake up the past and start accusing each other.

They are treating us well. It is very cold. I had disturbed sleepóI went to bed at about eight pm. I hope Shailaja is also being treated well. She is alone in some jail. I asked Anchaladish about heróthey said that she was being nicely looked after and that I don’t have to worry. When we were settled in the camp and the Anchaladish had already left, a bulky fellow, who introduced himself to us as DSP in charge of the airport, came with about half

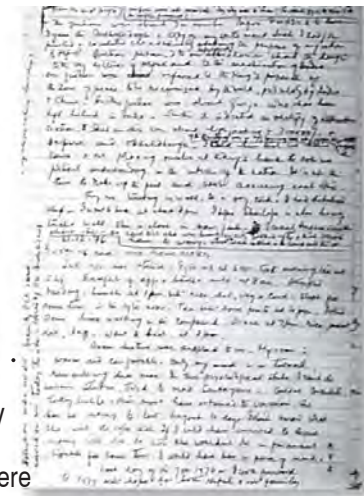
## The Diary

GANESH RAJ SHARMA

The pages of BP’s jail diary in English record the inner turmoil of a man under incarcerationóa man who shows extraordinary love for his wife, children and family. But it was his devotion to the country, and commitment to the cause of democracy that were even stronger. It was this that forced him to pay the price depicted in this diary. Future generations of Nepalis need to know about BP’s sacrifice, and the reason why this material is being serialised in the *Nepali Times*.

BP led the Revolution with success in 1951, led Nepal’s first democratically elected government in 1958, but was abruptly removed from power and put in jail for eight years in 1960. After his release, finding no constitutional alternative, he organised an insurrection while in exile in India. Contemporary events in South Asia alarmed him about the danger to Nepal’s independence. Having tried in vain to gauge the mind of the new King Birendra from exile, he returned to Nepal 25 years ago this week with a call of national reconciliation between the monarchy and the people. He maintained that the struggle for democracy would be futile if Nepal lost its independence.

The diary of the years after his release from Sundarijal, to seek treatment for cancer in the United States, remain incomplete. Being one of his lawyers, I was close to him during his trial for sedition and rebellion. I remained with him till his death in 1982. In failing health, and suffering acutely, he instructed his niece Shailaja to make available all his diaries which he had maintained since 1950. Unfortunately, Shailaja could only trace his jail journal, which has already been published, and this diary written in English. Keeping in view the relevance of the matter in Nepal’s present political context, I decided with an implied consent of BP’s successors to have this diary published. It is a coincidence that the beginning of this serialisation occurs on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BP’s return to Nepal and his re-imprisonment at Sudarijal Jail.



a dozen young toughies. DSP was tall and a little fat and his fingers were small and stout. He came to tell me that my gloves which I had lost at the airport were not available. But why with six men? To identify us to them?

**31/12/76 Sundarijal**

I woke up sad and homesick. Jail life has started. I got up at 5AM. Got morning tea at 5:45. Breakfast of eggs and toast and milk at 8AM. Attempted reading. Lunch at 1PM with rice, dal, veg, and curd. Slept for sometime in the afternoon. Tea with some fruits at 4PM. I did some brisk walking in the compound. Dinner at 7PM. Rice, meat, dal, sag. Went to bed at 8PM.

Soon heaters were supplied to us. My room is warm and comfortable. Only my mind is in turmoil remembering dear ones. In this psychological state, I can’t do serious studies. Tried to read Santayanaócouldn’t concentrate. Today Sushila and others must have returned to Varanasi. She has no money to last beyond 10 days. I don’t know what she will do after that. If I could have arranged to leave money with her so that she wouldn’t be in financial trouble for sometime, I would have been in peace of mind.

Last day of the year 1976óI look forward to 1977 with hope for both Nepal and our family. 8

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- ❖ **Textiles of Gujarat** Until 12 January, Indigo Gallery, Naxal. 413580



EVENTS

- ❖ **Fulbari Cup Boat Regatta** Short-course race on Phewa Tal with four-member teams. Prizes also 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
- ❖ **Book launch** Samrat Upadhyay's *Arresting God in Kathmandu*. 30 December, 6PM, Fulbari Hotel, Pokhara.
- ❖ **Friends of the Bagmati** Clean-up and heritage walk, plus workshop activities for children. Saturday, 29 December. Details at [dwarika@mos.com.np](mailto:dwarika@mos.com.np).

NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION

- ❖ **Upstairs Jazz Bazaar** Cadenza live and BBQ in open field, drop-off to nearest taxi rank, overnight accommodation in tents, Rs 600. For more info and directions 427257, 416983.
- ❖ **LaiSoon and 1974 AD** Party, dance, food, 7PM onwards, 31 December. Gyan Hall, behind North Korean Embassy. Tickets Rs 1,000 per head available at LaiSoon Restaurant and Vinothèque, Pulchowk. 535290.
- ❖ **New Year Eve Gala** in a heated thatched poolside tent with drinks, dinner, games, prizes, live band, DJ. First 50 Nepal residents get a double room for Rs 1,000 plus tax. For details, ring Hotel de liAnnapurna, 221711.
- ❖ **Dinner and Party** Live band, Hollywood theme, \$30 per person. For reservations, ring Dwarika's Hotel. 479488.
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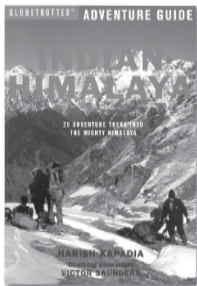
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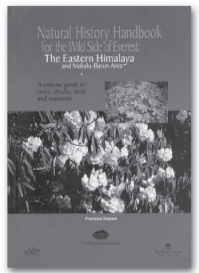
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**Trekking and climbing in the Indian Himalaya: 25 Adventure Treks into the Mighty Himalaya**  
*Harish Kapadia, climbing consultant Victor Saunders*  
*New Holland Publishers, London, 2001*  
*Rs 1,175*  
*An essential sourcebook for anyone contemplating a venture into the Indian Himalaya—Sikkim, Kumaun, Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Zaskar. There are 12 climbing peaks and 25 treks of varying levels of difficulty, including newly-charted expedition routes. The volume has top-class cartography, photographs, and information on trekking and climbing styles, ecological concerns and healthy and safety.*



**Natural History Handbook for the Wild Side of Everest: The Eastern Himalaya and Makalu-Barun Area**  
*Franzes Klatzel*  
*The Mountain Institute and Mera Publications, Kathmandu, 2001*  
*Rs 700*  
*A concise guide to the ecology, trees, birds and mammals in the eastern Himalaya, with an explanation of the range of conditions that allow such a diversity of life-forms. The Makalu-Barun National Park and Buffer Zone is the only protected area with an elevation gain of 8,000 m, up from 400 m, within 30 km. Due to this steep terrain, the area has almost every bio-climatic zone of the eastern Himalaya.*



**The Lhasa Atlas: Traditional Tibetan Architecture and Townscape**  
*Knud Larsen and Amund Sindig-Larsen*  
*Serindia Publications, London, 2001*  
*Rs 4,150*  
*Between 1995-2000, the authors, architects themselves, started a survey and database of nearly 300 buildings in old Lhasa, many of which have since been destroyed. The atlas focuses on the topography, environment, historical development, buildings and townscape of the old city, with 25 new maps, satellite pictures, historical maps and photographs, watercolours and new photographs.*

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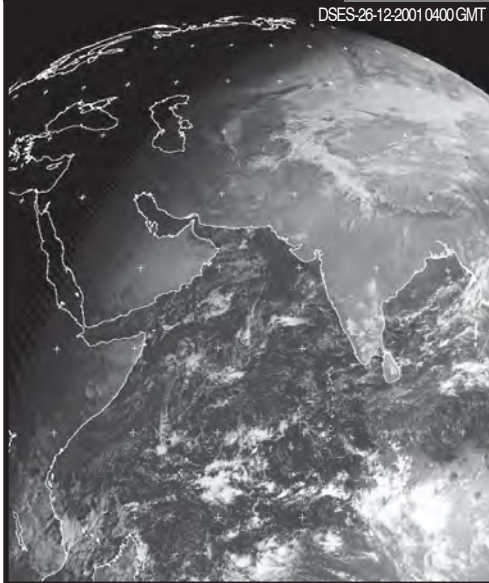


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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



DSES-26-12-2001 04:00 GMT

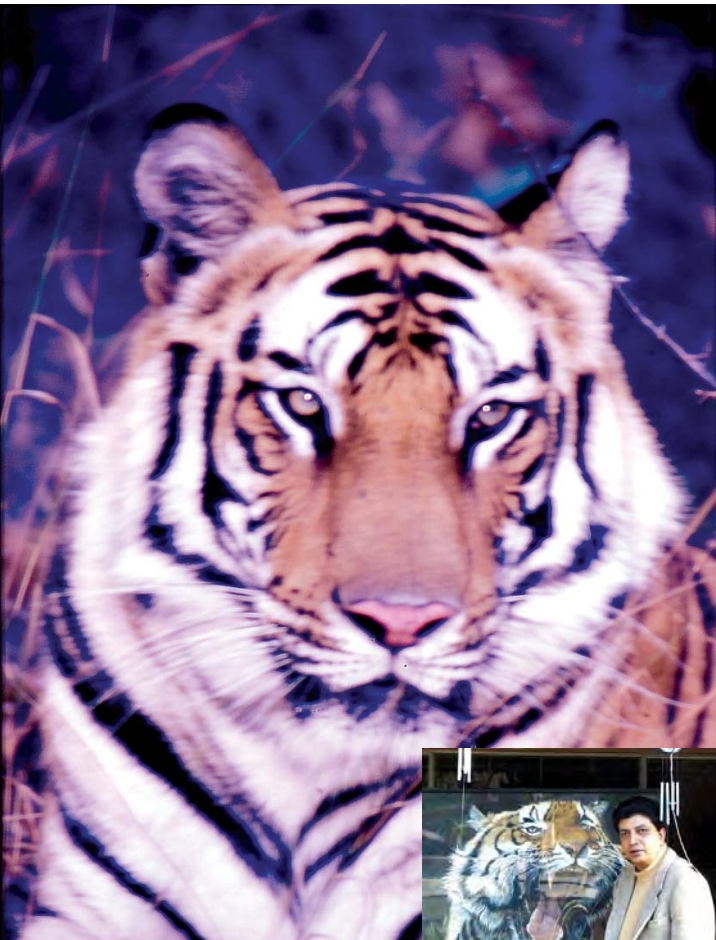
Sixty days without a drop of rain. The trend points towards the third year of winter drought, due to failed westerly fronts. The high pressure area over northeastern India washed away the effects of the Bay of Bengal cyclone last week, while deflecting the disturbances from the west. Wednesday morning's satellite picture shows some high and dry clouds moving in which will bring cloudy days over the weekend but no precipitation. That is not good news for farmers. Expect further drop in night temperatures and frost in Kathmandu Valley and balmy days as the sun returns next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
20-03	20-03	20-01	20-02	20-03



# Tigerwalla



**Hunters make the best conservationists. You can say that again about Nanda Rana.**

says the cat's best friend. But this is not a new-found adrenaline high for Rana. He has more or less grown up in the jungles.

Till ten years ago, Nanda was an enthusiastic hunter until he admits he got his first chance to shoot a tiger. "I looked at his eyes and just couldn't do it. He was too beautiful to be killed for sport," Nanda told us. Today, he shoots them with a different weapon, a zoom lens. Rana's room is littered with thousands of tiger slides. We asked him for a sample of his work. He points to the heap on the floor: "Take any. They're all tigers."

Nanda has been running the Bandhavgar Jungle Camp, the first privately operated jungle safari in India. Nanda still hunts whenever he gets the chance, but it is more usually a wild boar and other game that he needs to cull. "It is not that hunting is totally harmful. In Africa they have game reserves where enthusiasts can pay and hunt and this earns revenue that

supports the local economy and conservation. But it has to be controlled," he adds.

Conservation however is not a responsibility Nanda has taken lightly. His passion for wildlife and especially tigers has been noticed by groups like National Geographic Society which hired him for a special on the big cats, *The Eye of the Tiger*. Nanda has recently finished with another film on tigers, *The Tiger's Tale*, which follows three generations of tigers over a course of three and half years.

After schooling in Kathmandu and Simla, Nanda spend much of his younger days canvassing for his father, Bharat Shamsher, in elections of a bygone era. Later he went to India and raced motorcycles, raised partridges, and hunted. The jungle is also where he met his wife, Latika, who is a PhD on tiger ecology. Nanda is planning to settle down in Nepal, and work in conservation here. And a lot of his focus is on education. He says, "We are saving these cats for our children, and they need to know why it is important." 8



In Kathmandu's urban jungle, Nanda SJB Rana is restless again. But for a man who spends six to seven months a year tracking tigers and studying them at close range, this is understandable. It's been over two months that 46-year-

old Nepal-born wildlife enthusiast and tiger expert has been in Kathmandu and he longs to return to the jungles of Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh, India. "I go crazy if I stay in the city for more than a month,"

HAPPENINGS



*NO TYPOS: Overnight this week, soap and cigarette billboards were covered up by messages welcoming SAARC delegates to Kathmandu. This one in Thapathali, mercifully, doesn't have any typographical errors.*

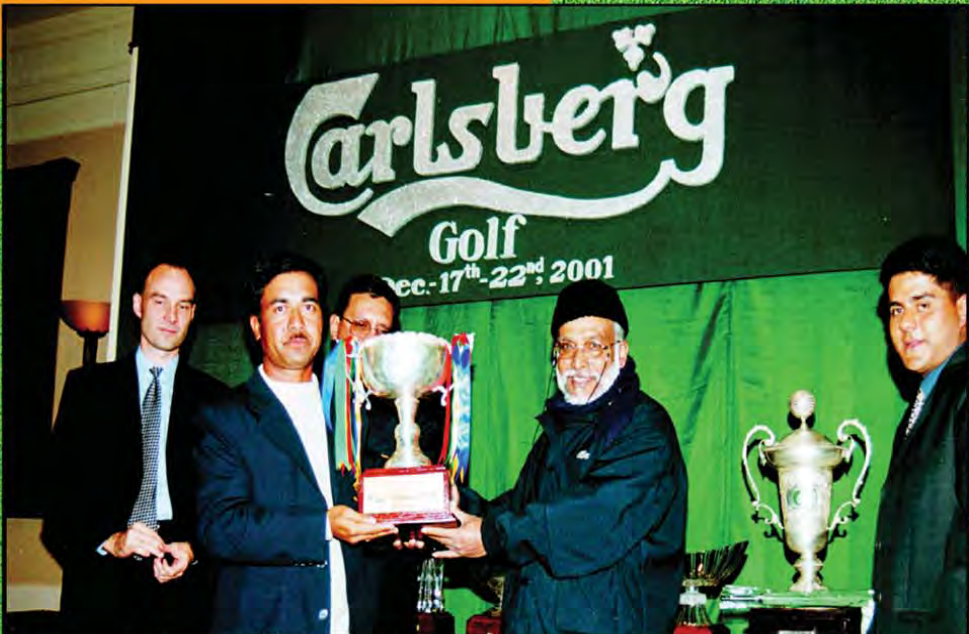


*SAARC EMERGENCY: The Summit and Emergency combined to create monstrous traffic jams like this one on Wednesday at the airport.*



*BULLDOZERS INTO PLOUGHSHARES: This is what remains of the Mairighar triangle, where a garden will bloom by next week.*

CONGRATULATIONS



Carlsberg Nepal PGA 2001 Winner : Deepak Thapa Magar being awarded by Mr. Mohan Gopal Khetan- Chairman, Gorkha Brewery Pvt. Ltd.



Carlsberg Open Golf Tournament 2001 Winner : Yelamber Singh Adhikari being awarded by Mr. Mohan Gopal Khetan- Chairman, Gorkha Brewery Pvt. Ltd.

To the Winners of  
4th Carlsberg Golf Tournament, 2001



Probably the best beer in the world.





## Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

# Legally binding new year resolutions

I have this sneaking suspicion that I may not be speaking just for myself when I make a public confession that the trouble with new year resolutions has always been that by January 5<sup>th</sup> of every year, since records started being kept, I have usually resumed snarling at my slightly better half, plucking my nostril hair in public, and am back to five packs of Yaks a day.

The main drawback of new year resolutions, as I see it, is that they are not legally binding. There is nothing there in writing. And in the absence of a Letter of Intent that will stand up in a court of law, such resolutions are easily broken.

That is why this year I have taken the unprecedented step of getting corporate lawyers at the Bhattarai, Bhattarai & Bhattarai Law Firm to draw up a memorandum of understanding with my unreformed self, and got the document duly notarised by the Chief District Officer and signed by two witnesses who are senior civil servants in His Majesty's Government that puts me under a contractual obligation to abide by any resolution I care to make during the course of new year's eve. A draft of this agreement is now in my hands, and I must admit that given the stiff penalties involved in breaking one or more of the terms and conditions therein, I will think twice before reaching for ciggies on 5 January.

## NEW YEAR RESOLUTION AGREEMENT BETWEEN I, ME AND MYSELF

### Preamble

WHEREAS all Nepalis great and small are entitled to earn karma points during their ongoing life so as to ensure reincarnation as higher primates (hereinafter referred to as imonkeys) in their next life;

AND WHEREAS we consider that it is the interest of every citizen to enjoy the fundamental human right to make an ass of himself and/or herself in the course of the forthcoming solar new year that is soon going to be upon us;

DETERMINED to get intoxicated during the traverse by Planet Earth in its trajectory around the Sun of the exact spot in its orbit that it (the Planet Earth) was at 365 days ago;

BEING DESIROUS of making a perfect ass (hereinafter referred to as idonkeyi) of myself at midnight of the thirty-first;

BEARING in mind that I have already celebrated four other new year parties earlier this year (viz.: Bikram Sambat 2057, Nepal Sambat 1022, Lhosar and the Inuit New Year);

NOTING that although there is a case to be made for a moratorium on said new year parties, and a cessation of hostilities for the time being;

NOTING FURTHER that this country, however, needs to keep partying on since we no longer live in a partyless system;

I HAVE resolved with myself during the Gregorian New Year to carry out the following reforms in my general behaviour:

1. That I will get up every morning at 5:30AM, jog to Bankali and be back in time for a breakfast of muesli, whole-wheat, and a warm frothy health drink which used to be the favourite of a certain ex-prime minister of a neighbouring country who shall remain nameless for the purpose of this document;

2. That I will stop picking my nose in public (or private) unless ordered to do so in the national interest by a higher up authority;

3. That I shall not cast aspersions during the whole of 2002 about the female relatives of motorcyclists who try to overtake me from the left while on the Pani Tanki uphill.

### APPENDICITIS - A

A Court of Arbitration shall be established pursuant to the Preamble above to resolve any disputes arising from the non-implementation of the above resolution, or if they are carried out in a manner that is not in consonance with the letter and spirit of this agreement.

### APPENDICITIS - B

This agreement shall be deemed to be null and void if the contractual party and/or his boss decide to terminate this column during the new year in the national interest.



## HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

Coming soon

January 2002

South Asia special issue