A year of living dangerously

A look back at 2001 through the pages of Nepali Times.

It is just two weeks ago, but it seems like ages have passed. In this Kingdom of Amnesia, we are good at pushing aside bad memories and not learning lessons. So, we are back to where we started. Our leaders in the ruling party are still snarling at each other and the fight is about distributing the power to plunder. No one has any illusions about it anymore: this has never been an ideological battle over the best and quickest path to development and social justice; it is a Darwinian struggle involving the political survival of the last survivor. The Nepali Congress Kumbh Mela in Pokhara this weekend promises some pyrotechnics, but nothing major just another nodding boating between Girija Koirala and the mentors of Sher Bahadur Deuba. (Editorial)

#29, 15 February 2001

Talks are a mirage

It has become fashionable to say that the Maoist People’s War should be resolved through dialogue. But those who advocate talks should realize that good intentions alone are not enough for talks to take place. The only way it will be possible is if the present general discontent is recognised and comprehensive reforms implemented, of determined military strength. Driven by burning ambition and buoyed by their minor military victories and discarding an attempt to create a united front of like-minded forces, the only option the Maoists have is the path of armed struggle. (Commentary, Hari Rocha)

#30, 22 February 2001


As with geology, political pressure welling up within Nepal tend to be released in a ten-year cycle of social seismicity. In the past ten years the political leadership of all parties have had a chance to rule. But all they have shown is fickleness, callous immorality, and a fatal deficiency in the art of governance. They have squandered their mandates on petty infighting, self-enrichment and self-centredness, radicalising a weary citizenry and bringing the country to its present state. Today, 50 years after our first taste of democracy and 10 years after its restoration, the moral of the story is: democracy doesn’t come with indefinite guarantees. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application. (Editorial)

#32, 8 March 2001

Prachandais shining path

A 25 February statement signed by Chairman Prachanda advocates a combination of armed mass revolt and the People’s War. The decisions were taken at a recent conference which decided on: 1. Revolutionary models from elsewhere would work, hence the People’s Path with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. 2. Atnce of all political forces to decide on an interim government to frame a peace constitution 1 A Great Leap Forward to expand secure base areas, strengthening people’s local governments and forming a people’s central government (News item)

#33, 15 March 2001

What the Left can right

The issue is not whether the Maoists will prevail, it is whether questions and social justice can continue to be ignored. The Maoist People’s War has fundamentally questioned the credibility of Nepal’s mainstream Left. It is doubtful whether a dialogue devoid of an economic and political agenda would really contribute much to the resolution of the Maoist insurrection, and it would be up to the Left political parties to make a singular contribution by negotiating such an agenda, and bringing the nation back from the brink of a civil war in which there would be no winners. (Viewpoint, Narayan Sthapit)

#35, 20 March 2001

In memory of hope

In this all-pervasive gloom, it is getting increasingly difficult to keep the memory of March 1990 alive. But we must remember the Kathmandu Spring. It was a season of hope, an extraordinary time when Nepalis rose up spontaneously to bring the nation back from the brink of a civil war which there would be no winners. (Viewpoint, Prabhat Sharma)

#38, 20 March 2001

Where are you, the doctors, engineers, artists and authors of the 1990 Kathmandu Spring? Where are you when the country needs you again? (State of the State, CK Lal)
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 unacceptable 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 countrymen sake, it was a year we would like to forget. We were bracing ourselves for the coming year in which we dont have to once more bemoan the state of the nation. But instead, we found ourselves staring at a wall, with no way 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.

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. The year 2001 was full of challenges, but we failed to pro-

Peace is costly. Peace is going to be expensive. Money is already being diverted from development, and this, in turn, is going to make peace less sustainable. Nepalis economy is caught in a vicious spiral: we need to be at ground zero to keep out armed suicidally-minded Insurgents. Now that the patient is under anaesthesia and being operated upon, its unlikely that they will raise their voice for its life.

We seem to have lost the capacity to feel pain. State radio announcers mention the mounting death toll of terrorists and the martyrdom of security personnel with tragic regularity. But we can no longer even let alone think of it. The deadpan tone of state radio seems to have lost the capacity to make us feel pain. The deadpan tone of state radio shreds our last traditions. The deadpan tone of state radio seems to close all doors for comprehension.

On a More Positive Note

M ost of Kathmandus urbanisation woes are management problems. Given the political will and sound administration they can be solved overnight. However, look at how quickly an entire city can be demolished, street lights fixed, or roads widened. The same goes for air pollution. All it took was the citizens of Kathmandu to rise up against illegal block sticks, and the Bull Trenches have been cleared. Others are still around, especially along the southern fringes of the valley, spewing the acid smoke of burning tires. But these too can be ended. Now, after ignoring local activities and environmentists for 25 years, the govern ment has finally decided to close down the Chobar cement factory, which gave Kathmandu its elusive designation of being only one 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.
**INTERVIEW**

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

- **SAARC Secretary General Nidal Rodriqo**

**Q.** How difficult was it to get everyone to agree to convene 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 took every opportunity to urge all Member States to convene the Summit as early as possible. Confidence needed to be built through preparations of the meetings of the senior officials and the following summit 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 could confirm. In the last fortnight, I 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 finalised. Earlier Mr Mahat and Mr Advaya 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, in fact, more than issues for substance. Protocol, for example, India and Pakistan are no longer using the same initials. At the same time, we have the opportunity to discuss economic cooperation between SAARC countries. This is a major initiative. It has to be the first step towards the establishment of the SAFTA treaty.

**Q.** Will SAARC remain an economic political organization?

A. Relations among member states within any regional grouping, whether or not are not going to be just a photo opportunity. The SAARC Assembly and Economic Cooperation are the two pillars of the SAARC. The SAARC is not a club as such where countries discuss their problems. The countries are discussing their problems and working out solutions that are mutually beneficial.

**Q.** About SAARC: strengthening its political willpower?

A. About SAARC: strengthening its political willpower? The SAARC is not a club as such where countries discuss their problems. The countries are discussing their problems and working out solutions that are mutually beneficial. We are working on the SAFTA treaty, which is the first step towards the establishment of the SAFTA treaty. The SAARC is not a club as such where countries discuss their problems. The countries are discussing their problems and working out solutions that are mutually beneficial.

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**Q.** What are the prospects for economic cooperation between SAARC countries?

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I wish we were doing more to help the poor and less privileged. I wish that politicians were climbing out of their appearance, the bogeymen of the moment. I wish we were doing more to fight terrorism, and what’s more, we are already in the midst of a civil war! Our elected leaders were in Tundikhel. The commander-in-chief was on a junket to Britain and saw no particular reason to hurry home. Some argued that the army to fight the insurgency would stay civil war, but many of us already in the midst of a civil war? There is no military solution to political insurgency, the only solution is political. The government knows it, and deep down in George W is urging normalcy as a way to fight terrorism, and what’s more, we are already in the midst of a civil war! Our elected leaders were in Tundikhel. The commander-in-chief was on a junket to Britain and saw no particular reason to hurry home. Some argued that the army to fight the insurgency would stay civil war, but many of us already in the midst of a civil war? There is no military solution to political insurgency, the only solution is political. The government knows it, and deep down.
The women’s bill is one or is this a tactic to buy time by Deuba and Prachanda temporary truce announced in office. There is a mistakes of their first term. But he could take a pointer in Baluwatar, Sher Bahadur Koirala failed in all three. To be sure, Koirala finally decided to crises after another, Prime Minister Deuba and Prachanda led the Maoists to bring him down. Exit.

High and dry

#55, 16 August 2001

No honeymoon for Deuba The government’s honeymoon in Baluwatar, Sher Bahadur Deuba does not need a prolonged period of grace. Nor should expect one. But he could take a pointer of how the second-time prime minister in our region: how that government is going to live because of the mistakes of their first term in office. There is a glimmer of hope, the temporary truce announced by him, but it appears to be the result of behind-the-scene contacts. It is sides which are both sides sincere about it, or is this a tactic to buy time and buy a honeymoon for his government?

Women’s property rights

The survey in this issue are 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 reader should visit the Mulai Ain bill, being given final shape by the Parliament Law and Justice Committee, is a major step in the Nepali women movement. The bill addresses a mix of women’s issues, in large part concentrating on property and inheritance laws. (Ramyata Limbu)

$5.15, 16 August 2001

High and dry

SAARC refugees

The roughly 100,000 Bhutanese who have lived for the past 12 years as refugees in Nepal are hoping that next week’s 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 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 carved statue-couple of a Maist. (Daniel Lak in Salleri)

$73, 27 December 2001

Death in Deng

Several flesh and torn papers from schoolbooks hung from trees around the crowds. Yet even amid the gloom-laden devastation a ray of hope shone brightly, a glimpse of the resilience of poor Nepal without the line or luxury to indulge in anger. Most of the women sitting through the wreckage were looking for one thingsigiques from this years harvest. They carefully carried baskets of rubble to a nearby farmland and tossed it on nangals, segregated a stick with bones and 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. In December 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-reach. Machapuchare (right) being one. For peaks of less than 6,500 metres the government has scrapped a rule requiring mountaineering expeditions to take their own doctors, paying their entire cost in addition to fees (and bribes). The Nepal Mountainineering Association says the decision will help inject new dynamism in the rural economy by creating more jobs needed to cater to tourist traffic. Nepalis adventure destinations are less affected by political instability, many tourists could lure more tourists to Nepal’s remote areas in large numbers in 2002, which is also the Interna- tional 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. It was about 2001. The new package itself in the works at time of going to press would allow to sell cheaper packages or on attractions served by Aran. The very idea of package tourism could be a three-day package for tourists from Bahrain 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 tourists numbers this year could drop by 13 percent compared to 2000. (See interview with Yogendra Shakya on p 8)

Enrollment up

A mid-term review of South Asia’s biggest educational project, the Basic and Primary Education Project (II Phase), has revealed major gains in enrollment. There has been a 10 percent gain in the net enrollment ratio, from 52.8 to 62.4 percent. BPEP is a multi-donor-supported project, run by the Ministry of Education and plans to spend Rs42 billion over five years (1999-2004) to improve the access to and retain students in primary school, improve learning achievement and strengthen the capacities of local governance systems. The two countries have been able to agree on how to proceed: start the repatriation process for those that have been screened as Nepali would want, or first complete the verification of remaining refugees which could take over five years. Bhutan has been insisting.

The nation’s children must know it too.(Editorial)

#52, 7 June 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 victory of the opposition parties in the elections of the main opposition parties in 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. (Niwat item)
These battle tactics perfected by Mao Zedong were later adopted by the Maoists in Rolpa and Soltu. A former Maoist commander assesses the war so far, and predicts future strategy.

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

Now, they are trying to keep the army confined to the districts while they organize and regroup in the villages. Mao said: attack and then disperse like bees.

In these battle tactics perfected by Mao Zedong, they try to trick the army, block its supply lines and drinking water, all to wear them down and force them to make mistakes. The army will play a cat and mouse game with the Maoists, causing them and keeping them on the move. This movement will be an important factor which will help force the enemy to surrender or divide.

The army will try to spread the dragnet nationwide. In such a situation, the Maoists will have to choose between breaking the net and escaping, or just lying 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, the Maoists are fighting from the inside, while the security forces are fighting from the outside, 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 will play a cat and mouse game with the Maoists, causing them and keeping them on the move. This movement will be an important factor which will help force the enemy to surrender or divide.

The Maoists are trying to keep the army confined to the districts while they organize 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 offensive in the villages, the Maoists will retaliate by using human shields and being mobile. If the army is not as effective.

On this front, they may use guns and booby traps. The Maoists are on the move. This movement will be an important factor which will help force the enemy to surrender or divide.

Defeat or victory.

Maoists will necessarily penetrate the enemy and the people. The government will do the emergency to spread its side of the story, while the Maoists can 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-shield formula. If the army seems to be depending on air strikes, the Maoists will focus on ambushing ground advances as happens in Lantam. Aerial attacks from buffed-up 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 licocon 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 have effectively defeated the Nepali Police in the past six years. By attacking the army in Dang, the Maoists flung their guantlets. 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 Mahabharat midhills and left the movement three years ago due to internal conflict with the leadership. A version of this article first appeared in Himal Khabarpanch.)
A sked what he thought was his greatest accomplishment during his first tenure as prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba loved to recall how he steered three parties facing different directions for 18 months before Kansrezi saboteurs brought him down. When he returned to the job in July, Deuba understood how the magnitude of his challenge had multiplied. After all, the Nepali Congress is a case study in how managing the competing interests of disparate lobbies within a majority party is far more exciting than keeping together a fractious coalition.

By the time the government-Maoist peace talks had entered their second round in October, the cover of camaraderie contorted at the Nepali Congress parliamentary party election was blown off. Party chief Girija Prasad Koirala and his lieutenants directed the wobbly prime minister to speed up the negotiations and crack down on the rebels in view of the favourable post-September 11 international environment. When the rebel blitz forced Deuba to call out the army, Koirala acolytes, egged on by their patron, instantly began pressuring the government to lift the state of emergency as soon as possible. Three weeks later, Koirala felt it was time to take the lead. Even in the Congress president tried to project his latest call for national consensus as an underlying resolve towards solving the nation’s problems, he can’t make it sound 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 details 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 Surya Bahadur Prataprajna 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 reconilitating with the main opposition UMIs 22 points when 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 disquieting, in the easy acceptance the proposal received among the same leaders who are clearly on a fishing expedition, can you blame him for going ballistic in Butwal? When his administration details 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.

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**Shareholder scare**

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

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**Tightfisted no more**

The Ministry of Tourism has decided to rigorously screen the 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 and 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.

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**Chinese tourists handlers**

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**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 2001 was perhaps a terrible year for Nepal’s economy, but it was not as bad as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) portfolio 2001

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**When problems come, the countryside swarms...**

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 hotels and lodge facilities, and the Maoist problem. More air seats are needed to balance the internal growth of tourists. A strong national carrier is necessary to support the tourism industry.

Shouldn’t we be planning new strategies 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, because income shrinks, you cut down on expenses, because you cut down on expenses, you compromise on your product, and that in turn shrinks our business. The only catch in a 27-28 situation is there are no tourists. 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, 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 imaginative 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 ‘Westerners’ and that was the trend. Only after the 80s that non-Westeners were also recognised as tourists. In fact till date, Nepal still defines tourists as non-Nepalese. Domestic tourism is really a new non-traditional market. The NTB’s classification of ‘potential markets’ all fall into the non-traditional market. China and the Middle East are our two new potential markets.

Personally I think there is a huge potential in one non-traditional market: retiried or elderly 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 & exhibition) 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 sentiments. 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 estimate: 50 percent of the fall was really the MICCE (meetings, incentives holidays, ‘meetings & exhibitions’) component of the Indian market. This was not an unimportant component, but 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 re establish tourism industry. Is the government the root of the problem? Why?

Yes, I think that is the root of the problem. The corporate laws by the Nepal Stock Exchange are a complete farce. Larger, more reputed companies stayed away from the stock market, fearing trouble- mongering shareholders, while opportunistic promoters made a good killing, taking advantage of a dormant regulator and a slew of wanna-be shareholders with barely any knowledge of how markets work. Which is why it isn’t surprising that the exercise didn’t work too well. The second system that would probably salvage our economy is to liquidate of over Rs 25 billion and an estimated nominal remittance of over Rs 5 billion to be invested instead.

What makes matters worse in Nepal is that what is, after all, a capitalist, corporate concept has been infected with a pathetic anti-social anxiety. Do we dare to attend a shareholders meeting, for no reason other than to handle other corporate entertainment. Shareholders are busy engaging in the grunt work of corporate governance, but they have supposedly been given the freedom to give them dividends that make no financial sense, to conduct any sort of business, to purely distribute dividends as an other incentive. The matter of the lunch is not such a big deal anymore.

How is the stock market doing?

The stock market is doing dandy, with all the institutional and individual participation. There are many opportunities for the small investor to participate in the rise and falls of the stock market. Though the stock market is not a place for happy sociological discussion, it requires revolutionary thinking on the part of the government and our laws. Spiritual and MICE (meetings, incentive holidays, meeting & exhibition) tourism are also other new markets for Nepal.
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 30 million is likely to be freed from savings on recurrent expenditures (excluding, of course, the cost of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s new 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 Nepali new security situation to peddle hardware, and new plans are afoot to purchase telecom equipment and quick-fix Bailey bridges using commercial loans.

Deuba, however, has been told that the cost of the war is going to be difficult to find and that is where the freed cash may end up. Issuing bonds worth Rs 1.5 billion, the NRB 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 capital in banks to result in investment.

The war has already cost Rs 4 billion, and Mahat says the government has approached international donors to help it out. The government is asking for some of the fundraising process to fund priority programs like rural roads, drinking water, education, health and bridges, and rechanneling money already earmarked for those projects to security.

The donors say they have not automated the requests to their capitals, but admit they are frustrated by the governments lack of focus on poverty alleviation and corruption control. Increasingly desperate, the government says it will now take any help it can get. The price of war: Rs 4 billion. 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.’

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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.

Liping in Tibet, we could already see tall concrete buildings glittering in the sun along Zhangmou’s ridgeline. Looking back toward Tatopani and Nepal, all we saw were a few huts and shops, and naked hills, a non-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 had warned by friends that if any of us were denied entry, we should quietly ìdisappearí 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 get right on. Rather than sit around contemplating the supposedly mercerital 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 BPM Nepal 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 Chinese-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 Tibetans 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 ëcropí 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 sleek women looked like ramp models, but we also wondered how such visions of loveliness had landed in this remote outpost of civilization. We would soon realise that there was much more to Zhangmu than just kikhamai.

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, apparently, was every male in town to whom 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 upon 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 walk adorning 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 putting, 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 Xigtau, but even Zhangmu, just beyond our own scruffily, poor border, that had become mini-Patpons. 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

SANGEETALAMA 2002
RAJENDRA KHAIRA
IN ZHANGMU

The Friendship Bridge across the Bhote Kosi at Kodari with the buildings of Zhangmou on a distant hill. Welcome to the People’s Republic of China.
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 we suspected that the real operators were men, lurking behind the scenes. Two women guided us to a sofa to listen to a man synching a slow, probably romantic Chinese song to a videoclip. A few couples were dancing languidly. 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 man, built like a brick, with a wide grin and wispy braided hair, the primordial image of a man of the people. He was slow, and the angel put her hands on Ganesh Man’s knees. How could we begrudge them this perhaps the best fun he had in his life? When we left an hour later, Ganesh Man tipped the woman Rs 100.

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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. 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 orgams, they no longer had to travel to exotic and expensive Bangkok or Hong 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.

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

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

Recently, it was shown that withdrawal symptoms were experienced after only three days of light use. Heavy users confront a worse situation. Dr Blyen Wells, a rehabilitation expert, comments, “it’s the first time I’ve seen something that resembles the withdrawal symptoms produced by hard drugs in heavy cannabis users.”

Another argument in favour of relaxed laws on cannabis is 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.

Indeed, widespread reports concerning the 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 2001), show the contrary. In a study of pilots smoking only a single moderate joint, there was a huge impact on the physical performance and health budget costs.

For an agent that affects a variety of transmitter systems, it 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.

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 UK, US 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.

Chemical systems and it works via its own receptor, that 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.

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 psychoses, 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 experience. A transmitter-like substance, with such powerful effects, must affect those circuits. So blowing your mind might be exactly what marijuana users do.

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

Quick connections from every corner of Nepal to any corner of the world
Argentina was last month plunged into its deepest political and financial crisis in decades. President Fernando de la Rúa was brought down by riots that left 20 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 reserve powers of a currency board—the magic wand. When in 1991 Argentina tied the peso to the dollar and prevented its central bank from printing pesos freely, there was reason to applaude. The new policy ended decades of high inflation and currency debasury. 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 provided by the country’s central bank, the country could compete internation- ally. Fiscal policy would be constrained, the economy would not self-destruct, and the currency board would no longer the lender of last resort. In the early-to-mid 1990s, corporations would never abandon convertibility and let the peso fall, while transforming outstanding obligations into pesos. The moratorium on foreign debt payments an- nounced by incoming President Rodriguez Sa will cushion the blow. With the currency at a level that makes Argentina competitive, reconstruction can begin. With the currency board to instil a false sense of discipline, real institutional reform will have to be tried, provincial finances will have to be cut off.

Buenos Aires police on the lookout for rioters.

Argentines must save themselves.

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entered a deflationary spiral, though it remained committed a zero-budget deficit policy. Budget cuts reduced demand and output, revenue collapsed, making additional budget cuts inevitable. The lesson would be obvious to Keynesians: with monetary policy immobile by the currency board, and with fiscal policy immobilized 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. Public employees, whose salaries were either never paid or arbitrarily cut, its provinces, who have not received the transfers accorded them by law, its depositories, who 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 fall, while transforming outstanding obligations into pesos. The moratorium on foreign debt payments announced by incoming President Rodriguez Sa will cushion the blow. With the currency at a level that makes Argentina competitive, reconstruction can begin. With the currency board to instil a false sense of discipline, real institutional reform will have to be tried, provincial finances will have to be cut off.

The second—and perhaps the most dangerous—illusion. When in 1991 Argentina was forced to abandon convertibility, 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 provided by the country’s central bank, the country could compete internationally. Fiscal policy would be constrained, the economy would not self-destruct, and the currency board would no longer the lender of last resort. In the early-to-mid 1990s, corporations would never abandon convertibility and let the peso fall, while transforming outstanding obligations into pesos. The moratorium on foreign debt payments announced by incoming President Rodriguez Sa will cushion the blow. With the currency at a level that makes Argentina competitive, reconstruction can begin. With the currency board to instil a false sense of discipline, real institutional reform will have to be tried, provincial finances will have to be cut off.

Buenos Aires police on the lookout for rioters.

Argentines must save themselves.
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?

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

One strike and out?

NEW DELHI - Environmentalists opposed to the construction of the dam being built in a known seismic zone in the high Himalaya have found an unlikely ally in right-wing fundamentalists who want to protect the sacred Ganges. But even this may not succeed in stopping the government for the dam is part of the $2.4 billion project. In another development, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder agreed to provide $32 million worth of credit for the project before he visited India late October, reversing an earlier rejection of a credit point by point by the German government. The project is currently set to number six city-states that have emerged over the last decade. There is always a dilemma in a post-conflict situation, saying Karzai.

Islamic rules, preserving the country, upholding the rule of national and international laws, ensuring the right of prisoners and the SIC, or their nominees 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 stop atrocities against the opposition and religious minorities.

Dam update

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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?
India should not interfere in Nepal

—Mahendra Lama

The Indian government has assured the Nepali government that every request from Nepal will be considered with due respect, and its decision will be taken according to the national policy.

Nepal is a democracy and the state machinery might start abusing the power if the government not only during peace but even now, when it is at war. The government cannot completely forget the possibility of peaceful negotiations.

The country is in a very difficult situation. If such a situation persists, it will have an impact on the Nepali government and its residents. It is important to understand the situation and proceed with caution.

In the case of India, the government cannot completely forget the possibility of peaceful negotiations. India should not interfere in the affairs of Nepal. Any interference will be harmful to the two countries.

No matter what cries of help Nepal directs towards India, the Indian government has assured the Nepali government that every request from Nepal will be considered with due respect, and its decision will be taken according to the national policy.
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.

It’s a typical practice session for Japanís signature sportóflail until one falls to the floor with red-faced and panting. They grapple and collide with resounding thwacks, muscles taut and bodies glistening with sweat, the two sumo wrestlers stare each other down. With the number of men in amateur sumo is dropping, said Tomoko Fukushima, an official at the New Sumo Federation, which oversees women’s sumo. “Also, we want to get sumo recognized 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. “The outcome is quite clear-cut.”

Sumo, at its simplest, is a sport in which two contestants enter a clay ring and meet head to head 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…
The Diary
GANESH RAJ SHARMA

The pages of BP’s jail diary in English record the inner turmoil of a man under incarceration—a 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, he was offered 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 and was privy to many of his plans and strategies. Still, I maintain that I am not the author of 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.

Cast of characters

Sushila: Sushila Koirala, BP’s wife
GM: Ganesha Man Singh, senior Congress party leader
Shikharesh: BP’s son
Jayaprakash: Indian statesman
Jayaprakash Narayan
Nilambar: Nepali Congress worker
Rambhab: Rambhab Prasai, who later became treasurer of the Nepali Congress party
Anchaladhish: Khum Bahadur Khadka, present Home Minister
Nilambar: Nepali Congress worker

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 with a spoonful of 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 healers were supplied to us. My room is warm and comfortable. Only my mind is in turmoil remembering dear ones. In this psychological state, I cant do serious work. Tried to read Santayana but it is not available. But why with six men? To identify us to them?

Back at Sundarijal

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITION


- Textiles of Gujarat Until 12 January, Indigo Gallery, Naush, 413980.

EVENTS

- Fulbri 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, 621240, 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, 621240, or Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel, 437437.

- Book launch Samrat Upadhyayas Arresting God in Kathmandu. 30 December, 6PM. Fulbri Hotel, Pokhara.

- Friends of the Bagmati Clean-up and heritage walk, plus workshop activities for children. Saturday, 29 December. Details at dwarfak@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 800. For more info and directions 427357, 416863.

- LaSlooon and 1974 AD Party, dance, food, immersed around 31 December. Gyan Hall, behind North Korean Embassy. Tickets Rs 1,000 per head available at LaSlooon Restaurant and Vinithothee Publishers. 532592.

- 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 laVaparnara, 227711.

- Dinner and Party Live band, Hollywood theme, Rs 30 per person. For reservations, ring Dwarfak Hotel. 479488.

- Engaged, available or ready? Wear red, green or orange and convey your status. Dinner, free drink, live Mumba band Groove Suppa. For reservations, ring Radisson Hotel, 411818, 423888.

- The Festival Food stalls, bowling, arcade games and live performances by Xmarka and Avanta. Organised by Vibes, 30 December, 12PM onwards. Mitali Gateway, Bowling Boulevard, Kantipathi.

- New Years Eve Dinner With live music. 8PM-1AM. Summit Hotel, Rs 621810, 624489.

- Stay over Three schemes, two with a night’s stay. Also included: complimentary entrance to the Rox Bar, bed and breakfast or dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant, dinner at the Cafe, live music and wine at the Rox Bar. For details ring Hyati Regency Hotel, 491234.

EXITING OUT

- Tired of Turkey and Christmas Pudding? Krishnarpan Nepali and Newari speciality restaurant with six-to 20-course dinners starting from Rs 225. For more details,环Himalayan Mountain Bikes, Thamel, 437437.

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GETAWAYS

- Three schemes, two with a night’s stay.

- Far Pavilion Two nights, three days, B&B package with tours and Pokhara-Jomsom return airfare. Expects Rs 250 per head. Valid until New Year. Jomsom Mount Resort, 493009.

- Short Christmas and New Year breaks Starting from $155 per couple for two nights at Dwarfak Hotel. 479488.

NEPALI WEATHER

- Sixty days without a drop of rain. The bend points towards the third week of this year’s 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 reflecting the disturbances from the west. Wednesday morning’s satellite picture shows some high and dry cloudy 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 hot in Kathmandu Valley and balmy days as the sun returns next week.
NO TYPO: 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.

CONSERVATION

Tigerwalla

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

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,” 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. If he 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.”

MIN BAJRACHARYA

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

CONGRATULATIONS

Carlsberg Nepal PGA 2001 Winner: Deepak Toppo Hitler being awarded by Mr. Motar Gopal Khattar-Chairman, Godhiska Brewery Pvt. Ltd.

Carlsberg Open Golf Tournament 2001 Winner : Yelsen Singh Ashiwal being awarded by Mr. Motar Gopal Khattar-Chairman, Godhiska 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 5th 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 unformed self, and get 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 the 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 “monkeys”) 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 “donkey”) 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 resolutions, 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.