



DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

The army and the Maoists are playing a cat and mouse game.

VIJAY KUMAR IN KAPURKOT

It is a cold and lonely life for the 40 soldiers guarding the Kapurkot telecommunications tower here in mid-western Nepal. This windy hilltop at 2,000 m is also at a point where the Maoist-infested districts of Dang, Salyan and Rolpa meet. On 8 January, as part of their effort to target the country's telecommunication network, Maoist rebel-attacked the tower, but were repulsed and suffered significant losses. The army found 12 bodies in the area around the barracks. Nearby, villages found two dozen more.

As they usually do, the Maoists attacked in a human wave. Not all of them were armed, and while preparing for the attack they chanted slogans, sang revolutionary songs and beat drums. They were hit by withering fire from army sentries on the hill. When a comrade was hit, an unarmed Maoist cadre would take up his weapon. In these remote mid-western hills, such tactics used to terrify locals, and the consequent fear was overwhelming. It is a measure of the Maoists' earlier confidence that they made no secret of an impending attack. Still, a demoralised police either abandoned their posts or covered with their World War I vintage 303 rifles waiting for the devastating attacks.

The tables have now turned. Such pay-war tactics are not as effective with the Royal Nepal Army, and the Maoists have not been able to overturn a single army base after the surprise attack on the Ghorehali garrison on 23 November.

ber. As in Salleri on 26 November, the Maoists suffered heavy casualties in Kapurkot.

Infantryman Suresh Pun gave us this account of the attack: "It was 11 o'clock at night when we heard four gunshots and people shouting slogans. Our outpost is very isolated and situated on a hilltop. A fellow soldier on the watchtower had already seen them coming, and we started shooting at anyone who came near us. They came in droves—I guess they numbered over a thousand. There were only 36 of us. We just kept moving them down, and after a few hours they gave up and fled. We found 12 bodies in our compound. My guess is that they suffered more than 200 casualties that night."

The Maoists have two cardinal rules of combat: never leave a weapon or a dead body of a comrade behind. So the fact that so many bodies were left behind was an indication of the rout they suffered both here and in Salleri. "I don't think they can stand up against the army," says Pun. "We are much better trained and have sophisticated weapons. We are also exposed to war situations when we go abroad as peacekeepers. Moreover, our morale is high. They made a bad decision when they thought they could scare us like they did the police." Even so, the army has been forced to withdraw from vulnerable telecom towers, and the Maoists have destroyed at least three towers in Moyuli, Nuwakot and in the far-west in Lipang, past two months, cutting off phone connections to many districts. There are also indications the Maoists have abandoned such frontal attacks on fixed positions and are concentrating on ambushing army patrols.

Over in Rolpa, the district headquarter of Lipang has two faces. By day it looks like any other poor, remote mountain town in Nepal. By five in the evening everything shuts down, a palpable sense of nervousness grips the market. Even the dogs slink indoors. Maoists in the surrounding hills no more shoot in the air, set up bonfires and shout slogans on loudspeakers at night to intimidate the bazaar. The army has now brought in its long-range howitzers that have a range of 5 km, so the Maoists have fled into the hinterland.

But Lipang residents are still scared: the memory of the police crackdowns during Kilo Sierra Two in 1998 and Maoist brutality of recent years is still fresh in their minds. Fearing that they will once more be caught in the crossfire, most residents and political leaders have fled. But this has been made up for by the influx of refugees from outlying villages: people fleeing the fighting to the relative safety of Lipang. The army barracks located above the town has given Lipang residents a psychological boost, and a sense of security. But mindful of recent Maoist attacks on Rukumkot, Kalkot and Jumla they know that even here they are exposed. Today, you can still take a bus to Lipang but it means submitting to the strictest



View from the Kapurkot watchtower with Dhaulagiri in the northern horizon.

security, and if you are not a Rolpali, it may be impossible to get through.

For ordinary people, life is hard as always but made harder by the fighting. Bhim Bahadur Magar walked nine hours from his home village to Lipang to make his citizenship card. While waiting, he chatted with us in a tea shop. "There's no future here. I'm going to the Gulf to work. Earlier it was the police harassing us, these days it is Maoists," he said. "Now that the army is here, the situation has improved. But the army can't be everywhere at the same time."

In Lipang, local officials tell me that hundreds of Maoists have surrendered. But by all accounts these are not the hardcore cadre. Most of the leaders have either fled the district, according to local sources, or have gone off to India. Beyond the reach of the

army, the Maoists are still active in the remote villages. The army's main challenge here is logistics even if they know where the Maoist hideouts are, it is difficult to get there. A local army commander sums it up: "In Rolpa, the Maoists are down but not out. But it's just a matter of time before they realise the only alternative is to come back to the negotiating table."

(Vijay Kumar is a television journalist and editor of the fortnightly magazine, Nepal. He is one of the first journalists allowed to visit the frontline in the army's counter-insurgency war.)



HEMLATA RAI AND ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY
The SAARC summit suddenly stirred the Valley's municipalities from their deep slumber. The main intersections got repaired and widened, traffic islands came up overnight and suddenly there were parks and wide open spaces. It came at a price: Rs 60 million.

But Kathmandu's ambitious mayor Keshav Shitpath assures us all this was not a flash in the pan. "The Nepal midwest needs a big event to get inspired to work. SAARC was one, and the next is the king's coronation," he told us. He seems undeterred by the local government elections scheduled three months from now that will decide whether he remains mayor.

Even Shitpath's diehard critics would agree with that. And despite the cost, they say Kathmandu badly needed a facelift.

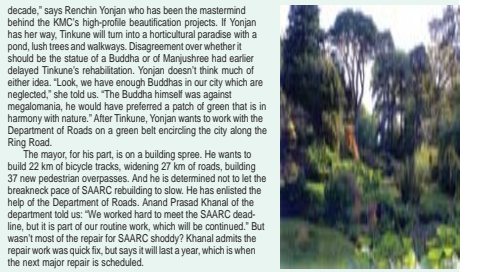
Matigahar intersection was a case in point: suddenly up popped a garden consisting of the largest kind of Nepali, surrounded by an astamangala and three traditional spouts. The garden is nearing completion, and the Kathmandu Metropolitan Council is already identifying a private sponsor to maintain it. Jyoti Shrestha, Pradhan of the KMC's Public Construction Department says: "We are hopeful. Industries, business houses and offices have volunteered to help maintain 20 traffic island gardens." No less impressive was the way ugly shanties and sand depots gave way to a four-hectare park over a matter of days in Tinkune.

"We had to clear things overnight for SAARC, but the challenge now is to figure out what this city needs in the next

decade," says Renuhin Yonjan who has been the mastermind behind the KMC's high-profile beautification projects. If Yonjan has her way, Tinkune will turn into a horticultural paradise with a pond, lush trees and walkways. Disagreement over whether it should be the statue of a Buddha or of Manjushree had earlier delayed Tinkune's rehabilitation. Yonjan doesn't think much of either idea. "Look, we have enough Buddhas in our city which are neglected," she told us. "The Buddha himself was against megalomania, he would have preferred a patch of green that is in harmony with nature." After Tinkune, Yonjan wants to work with the Department of Roads on a green belt encircling the city along the Ring Road.

The mayor, for his part, is on a building spree. He wants to build 22 km of bicycle tracks, widening 27 km of roads, building 37 new pedestrian overpasses. And he is determined not to let the breakneck pace of SAARC rebuilding to slow. He has enlisted the help of the Department of Roads. Anand Prasad Kharel of the department told us: "We worked hard to meet the SAARC deadline, but it is part of our routine work, which will be continued." But wasn't most of the repair for SAARC shoddy? Kharel admits the repair work was quick fix, but says it will last a year, which is when the next major repair is scheduled.

Tinkune will look like this...



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GPO Box 2251, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 977-01-4233377 Fax: 977-01-4233378
Email: nepal@nepalnews.com



WE AND THE WEST

The flying visit of US Secretary of State Colin Powell to Nepal on Friday is the highest-level visit ever after Spira Agnew stopped by for sight-seeing in 1970. This is as good a time as any to look at where Nepal fits in. After 11 September, every state that had been fighting an insurgency or separatist movement quickly hitched on to the US-led global "war on terror." It was convenient to look at a domestic uprising as part of a larger worldwide conspiracy so that we would be allied with the most powerful nation on earth. This may have given us someone to lean on, but such moral support is only a beginning with "C." When Indian and Pakistani forces were eyeball-to-eyeball in the Poonch Sector during the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, a lot of the eyeballs on the Indian side were actually Nepal's eyeballs. In 1998, Nepali soldiers fought and died in Sri Lanka while serving in the Indian army against Tamil separatists.

Gurkha soldiers faced and fought against another friendly country, China, in Asak Chini and NEFA in 1961. Fortunately our neighbours countries understand the historical reasons why this has been so. But others don't. When Gurkhas landed in the Falk-

Cambodia. The Colin Powell visit to South Asia is just the latest in a flurry of diplomatic activities: Musharraf to Beijing, Blair to Islamabad, Zhu Rongji to Delhi.

Nepal's foreign policy is a legacy of our unique history. And there are some contradictions we have had to live with in exchange for never being colonised. One of them is the diplomatically embarrassing subject of Nepali citizens serving in foreign armies and fighting countries with which we have friendly relations.

If there is one word Nepali leaders hope never pops up at NAM and SAARC Summits (just as well Nepal is not in the Commonwealth and we don't have to attend CHOGM), it is the one beginning with "C." When Indian and Pakistani forces were eyeball-to-eyeball in the Poonch Sector during the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu, a lot of the eyeballs on the Indian side were actually Nepal's eyeballs. In 1998, Nepali soldiers fought and died in Sri Lanka while serving in the Indian army against Tamil separatists.

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lands, Gabriel Garcia Marquez (among others) questioned the neo-colonial practice of our soldiers fighting to keep an imperial possession.

We like to repeat at every conceivable opportunity that Nepal has never been colonised. And it is true: we are the oldest established nation state in the region. But what is often overlooked, Mr Powell, is that Nepal has also been a western ally for nearly 200 years. In fact, ever since the 1814-16 Anglo-Nepal War and the Sugauli Treaty, the Kingdom of Nepal has been the most consistently pro-western country in the region.

After Jung Bahadur became the first royal from the subcontinent to pay a state visit to Britain and France in 1850, we helped rescue the British in Lucknow during the Mutiny. Gurkha soldiers were deployed in the disastrous British Afghan campaign in 1837. (What a historical twist that Gurkhas are now back in Afghanistan as part of the British commando force in Kabul.) Then through the two world wars of the last century, 100,000 Nepalis laid down their lives to defeat Germany and Japan—a shocking two percent of Nepal's total population at that time! No colonial possession sacrificed as much for Britain and the allies as independent Nepal did. And yet, visit the Imperial War Museum in

London today, and aside from a lone khukuri exhibit inside a glass case, there is no other recognition or tribute to this bloody contribution of the Nepali nation. And what a supreme irony that the two countries we helped the west defeat—Japan and Germany—are today Nepal's two biggest donors. And Britain and the United States?

Nepal has always been a west-leaning member of the non-aligned. One of the things that used to irk the babus at South Block no end in the 1980s was that Nepal voted differently from India in 78 percent of all UN resolutions. Nepal was one of first countries in Asia (after Thailand) which had diplomatic relations with Israel.

We are not passing judgement on this support to the colonialists, the west, the allies. It is just a historical fact. So why are we taking all this up? Just to remind Colin Powell that Nepal always stood by the west during its hours of need. Maybe the west should stand by the Nepali people when our democracy is in crisis. Not by beefing up our military or copping up to authoritarian evolution, but by a Marshall Plan-type economic aid for infrastructure, trade and tourism. In return, our own leaders must attend to the rot by improving governance and by devolving more decision-making power to the grassroots.



Colin Powell

STATE OF THE STATE

Colin Powell's R&R

We have nothing to offer, and nothing to ask—except understanding.

A deep throat inside Panipokhari Fort insists Secretary of State Colin Powell is coming to Kathmandu on his own accord. Maybe true. But Secretary Powell's surprise call is going to be another great photo-op for Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, still euphoric over being the middle man during the historic hand-shake between President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee during SAARC.

In 54 years of the United States and Nepal's relationship to wage diplomatic war in the most dangerous region of the world, then we have nothing to fear from Secretary Powell's itinerary. But the mandarin at

more to do with South Asia in general, than Nepal in particular. Or is it that the secretary just wants to catch his breath after trying to bang Indian and Pakistani heads together, and before heading off to Tokyo for Afghan fund-raising. The Americans have blown a fortune in bombing desolate places like Tora Bora to dust. Now they need the coffers of Japan, Saudi Arabia and the Europeans to help rebuild it.

If Kathmandu is just R&R for a former soldier on a mission to wage diplomatic war in the most dangerous region of the world, then we have nothing to fear from Secretary Powell's itinerary. But the mandarin at

Shital Niwas should tread carefully. There is an old Nepali saying that when a powerful *jaminda* blesses the huts of the poor in his village, he is probably on a lookout for a new concubine.

Despite the fawning accounts that IVP-returns unleash in the Nepali press, American assistance to Nepal has been steadily decreasing over the years. The United States is now way down on our list of donors—it ranks fifth. Much American aid has been channelled through multilaterals like the World Bank and the IMF, which impose suffocating conditions on the political economy of the country. And

outrageously expensive consultants ensure that much of the aid money flows back to where it came from.

Trade between Nepal and the US is not very encouraging either. The fallacy of free trade in the absence of free movement of labour can clearly be seen in the sale of millions of bottles of branded colas even to the poor who struggle to make a living in less than a dollar a day, while garment exports from Nepal to the United States languish in their neglect. It is not the shoes after all.

The guest is god for us Nepalis. But why is this particular one here? To what do we owe this *dashant*? What have we done to deserve this blessing?

In the value system of global capitalism, whatever is cheap is not worth its price. In the past, Nepal has always offered its support to the Americans for not to nothing. Indira Gandhi extracted \$9 million from President Johnson for her understanding of America's geopolitical role in Vietnam, and still kept her anti-American bias. In a country that is drowning in the lowest per-capita recipients of American aid—a fact that surprised Henry Kissinger no end when he came visiting. But the failure is entirely ours: we didn't know how to market ourselves.

Fischer, finds it troubling that "the United States devotes less than \$10 billion a year—only a tenth of 1 percent of its GDP—to economic aid, less than half the average of other industrial countries, and a third of the average for Europe." However, it has little hesitation in footing the bill of over \$1 billion a month to fight its war in Afghanistan. A war so pointless that Ralph Nader compares it to burning a haystack to find a needle, and then refusing to see that the needle is not in the ashes after all.

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During Secretary Powell's visit, however, we are singularly fortunate to have our own man in his camp. Ambassador Michael E Malinowski is as much of a seller as a buyer—he understands Nepal, having served as Deputy Chief of Mission during the tenure of the festive Jyoti Chhang Bheda. Back then, Malinowski was the quiet American who co-ordinated American assistance while Madam Ambassador played matchmaker to find a needle, and then refusing to see that the needle is not in the ashes after all.

Bridges like the ones that Malinowski got flown into Nepal on giant C-54s in 1993 have more than metaphorical meaning. In a country that is drowning in the rolling waters of poverty and apathy, and an insurgency that feeds on it, we have nothing to offer. We have nothing to ask for, except understanding that comes from over half-a-century of association. ♦



Colin Powell

NATION

COMMENT

Shenanigans in the power bureaucracy

Is the government's new Hydropower Development Policy an attempt to bypass the Constitution?

On 15 October 2001, the cabinet approved a new hydropower development policy for Nepal. The document does indicate some understanding of the weaknesses and challenges facing the sector, but it is a cumbersome labyrinth. What we needed was a lean and dynamic policy statement.

But more seriously, clause 6.11.4 of the policy document curiously attempts to bypass Article 126 of the constitution that requires a two-third majority ratification of resource sharing treaties if it is of a long-term and serious nature. The clause states: "Permission to implement large multipurpose reservoir projects will be granted by HMG through this policy itself. However, the question of sharing of natural resources is outside of this policy's framework."

So, with this policy (which has been approved by only the cabinet and has not been presented to the parliament for a simple majority approval) Nepal's water bureaucracy has sought to empower itself to be able to license Karmali to an Enron-equivalent, using Karmali to an NGO without financial credibility.

or Sapti Kosi to a government company set up by the lower riparian, ignoring the parliament as well as clause 126 of the constitution. What is even more alarming is how our elected representatives, especially the opposition parties, have chosen to remain silent.

It is positive that clauses 6.15.2 states that the renewable Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) will be unbundled into three organisations to independently handle generation, transmission and distribution. This, however, is an admission that the merger of Nepal Electricity Corporation and HMG's Electricity Department under donor pressure in 1985 was a mistake. A look back at history tells us how a few astute power bureaucrats of the Electricity Department manoeuvred to have themselves deputised to the Ministry of Water Resources instead of the NEA and thus undercut HMG's stated policy of having one power utility.

A decade later this group was able to resurrect the department as the Electricity Development Center, which is now a full-fledged department (EDD) in contravention of certain provisions

of the NEA Act. Now, through this policy, the EDD not only hopes to break up itself, the NEA, but to create three new bureaucracies with full HMG control: a regulatory office, a study and promotion center and a management body (clause 16.5.1).

We already have the EDD, the existing Water and Energy Commission and other paraphernalia within the Ministry of Water Resources. Still, the power bureaucracy is on an empire-building spree that is breathtaking in its scope. Villages and district governments are denied any meaningful role in power generation, distribution or regulation as per the local self-governance act. This has opened up the possibility for serious conflicts in the future.

What's more, the last clause in the document (6.16) states: "HMG can, as per felt needs, build and operate hydropower projects by itself or with friendly countries and development agencies through treaties or agreements." This single freudian slip undercuts all the platitudes in the policy document regarding encouragement to private investment and the need to diversify through similar escape clauses that essentially say that no matter what is written in the document HMG can jolly well do whatever it likes.

Those who want to discipline others will learn self-discipline by keeping the institutional framework opportunistically fluid, this policy document diminishes investor confidence, especially of Nepali investors. Genuine foreign investors will be convinced about investing here only if Nepalis themselves are investing in hydropower development.

BACK-TO-FRONT

In a multiparty democracy, policy is made by political parties who legitimise their policy commitments through elections and have them implemented through the bureaucracy. In this failed kingdom, however, things are back-to-front: policy is made by a clique of self-interested bureaucrats who manage to get it implemented through politicians that do not read. A government bureaucracy cannot say, "We are working as per policy." What it must say and do is, "We are working as per the law." This policy document is an attempt to override the constitution as well as existing legal regime without going through the parliamentary process of changing laws and regulations.

The power sector in Nepal needs serious reform, for which this unconstitutional policy document will be of much help. What we need are just four points stated with firm political will: 1. Nepal's hydropower will be developed with the objective of ensuring Nepal's industry and agriculture competitive advantage by providing them cheap and

by DIPAK GYAWALI



reliable electricity. 2. To produce and distribute this electricity, instead of a single government monopoly, a pluralistic, all-inclusive institutional framework will be adopted which will support the private sector in generation through transparent competition and maximise the participation of local self-governance units in distribution. The transmission grid will be maintained as a national electric highway under government ownership and regulation, but open to all. 3. The primary responsibility for reaching 85 percent of the population that still has no access to electricity will be with the national transmission grid that HMG will develop and maintain. It will be this national grid which can trade excess electricity with neighbouring countries under the existing "Village and District" arrangement. 4. If a Nepali or foreign investor wishes to export electricity to the Indian market, it will be encouraged under the following policy regime:

a) Export of electricity from a run-of-river project through the national grid will be seen as not constituting an "all-encompassing, serious and long term" resource-sharing matter as seen by clause 126 of the constitution. b) For a storage project, if all the regulated water can be used within Nepal, if the displaced population is less than one thousand, and if the electricity export will be done through the national grid, then it too will be deemed to be of a simple nature not requiring a two-thirds approval by parliament.

c) For a hydropower project with a large reservoir which wishes to export independently outside the national grid, the investor must apply to the government stating clearly the export price as well as the royalty it proposes to deliver. The government can permit the investor to survey and investigate such projects, but they will only be in relation to projects where HMG has come to some understanding with India regarding downstream benefits, and the modality for sharing them.

The application, which must be accompanied by all supporting documents, will be placed before parliament for approval by a two-third majority. By the government together with what HMG proposes as royalty, tax as well as social and environmental mitigation measures. The only other matter that the government needs to state firmly is that it will place before parliament amendments to the electricity acts and regulations to match the four policy commitments stated above. There is no need for a cumbersome and conflicting policy document of fifteen pages with multi-score clauses that belong more properly in an act or regulation. ♦

Dipak Gyawali used to be head number of NEA and resigned over the Anni-3 in 1993. He is a member of the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology. A version of this article appears in the current issue of *Nityanika*, May 2000

LETTERS

AFGHANISTAN
Musharraf Hussain's analysis "Afghanistan's potential" (#76) threw some light on Afghanistan's extraordinary history. But could this history repeat itself in Nepal? We should not make the same mistakes the Afghans did and open the Pandora's Box of ethnic divisions. Let us shun groupism and communalism and remember that we are first Nepalis before we are anything else. If we don't do this, there will be no possibility of peace, and without peace there will be no development and without development we will be pulled into a vicious cycle that may cost us our independence.

Ashas Parajuli
Baneswor

INTERNET POLL
Your Internet Poll question "Should the Maoists now return to the negotiating table?" (#76) is timely. Yes, the Maoists should come back to the negotiating table. Everybody should agree that poverty is the root cause of extremist politics. Poverty alleviation should be given highest priority. Both the Maoist and the government side should agree that there is rampant corruption in the country. To root out this malaise, some known select politicians from both the Nepali Congress and the Maoist should be barred from active politics. Instead, they should be declared anti-nationalists. Maoists and royalists should work together under a government headed by the Nepali Congress. What better tribute to BP Koirala's national reconciliation dream? Indeed, BP's thesis of national reconciliation should be interpreted differently under the new changed circumstances.

Mike Sharma
by email

Your question "Should the Maoists now return to the negotiating table?" should actually have read "Should the Maoists now be eliminated?" and to that my answer would have been a strong 'yes'. They have caused enough mayhem and destruction.

P Rana
USA

CK LAL
This is to congratulate CK Lal for his most recent columns, especially "Celebrating South Asianess" (#75) and "Worrying about Nepal in Paris #74". I find Mr Lal's broad cultural and social canvas transcends the pettiness of most other political commentators and are unlike the tired columns we have become accustomed to in Nepal. I'm sick of the banal analyses of how and why things are going wrong. It is always refreshing to see attempts at generating constructive, original insights into our society and politics.

Rajib Sarkar
by email

PASHUPATI SIB RANA
Thank you for that most forthright and plain-speaking article by Pashupati Shumshere JB Rana ("Reform vs revolution", #76) and your editorial "The morning after" in the same issue that bolsters his argument that this is the time the government should launch a serious drive to address rural development, control corruption and to simply show that it is there. The government must use the emergency to galvanise the political will to raise internal resources, give the economy a kick-start and address the roots of the Maoist crisis. Time is running out.

Gaurab Regmi

CHECKLIST
I liked the checklist of ten points in your editorial ("The morning after", #76) that urgently need government intervention. But I doubt if anyone in government is reading it, or even if someone is, that they are actually going to take those pointers. Maybe Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba doesn't have the attention span to read all ten points and should just do something about your number ten: "Show us some proof that we have a government."

Rabin Gurung
Pokhara

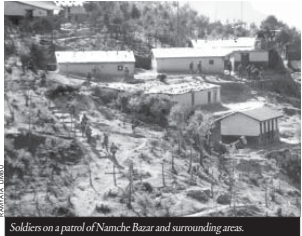
SCARY
Have I been misinformed or are the following facts and figures I have seen in the past issues of your paper to be believed? • Some 56,000 of the 92,000 HMG employees got their jobs through presentation of fake certificates? • Some 32,000 citizenship papers issued during the time UML was in power were revoked by the Congress government? • Bahuns and Chhetris who constitute only 15 percent of the 23 million Nepalis hold 90 percent of government jobs? What else is in store for Nepal?

DB Lama
Survey, UK

CORRECTION
In "Summitting by air" (#75) we incorrectly reported that Cosmic Air does not guarantee window seats on its mountain flight. It does. - Ed



Nepal's national parks are endangered



RAMYATA LIMBU
IN KHUMBU

It's been quiet in Phungi Tengha this January. Apart from locals on their way to Namche for business, and the odd tourist stopping in for a cup of tea at one of two lodges en route to Tengbhoche Monastery, this little wooded enclave in the heart of the Sagarmatha National Park shuts down early.

The two lodges close their doors before the evening light fades, and are cautious about entertaining latecomers. Even the small group of soldiers based at the tiny army outpost in Phungi Tengha, located at the base of the hill on which Tengbhoche Monastery stands, has shifted to the security of Namche, where a company of an estimated 250 soldiers check the foot-traffic coming in from Lukla.

From their perch on a plateau enclosed by barbed wire fencing and surrounded by freshly built dugouts, the soldiers watch over Namche Bazar through pine saplings. They're careful about maintaining strict evening curfew. Since the emergency began on

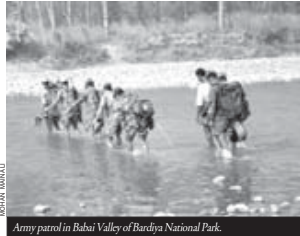


Rhino poachers caught in the act.

26 November, soldiers take turns to patrol the area and are especially careful to watch the Tashi Lapdha Pass to the west and the Annapurna Pass to the east, possible entry points for Maoists from Dolakha district and Sankhuwasabha, respectively. National security is a priority. In between, they can squeeze it in, the soldiers carry out their original duties—working with the two dozen park staff to check the poaching of the musk deer and other endangered species, and the illegal trade of timber and medicinal plants.

"Even with the army more involved in guarding against Maoists, we're managing to carry our patrols," says Mirgina Sherpa, a game scout. "There has been the odd case of poaching, but nothing big."

Since the Maoists attacks on Salleri in Solukhumbu, and in Dang, and the consequent emergency, the army has made it a point to pull in their troops from remote outposts in protected areas—especially hilly regions, where the insurgents are most likely to attack by night and



Army patrol in Babai Valley of Bardia National Park.

problems in Chitwan, where poaching activities are on the rise. "Keeping in mind that national security is a priority, we're making use of whatever resources we have," says Tirtha Maskey, director general of the department. "In Chitwan, we've reinforced park staff by adding 15 security officials from the palace's Wildlife Protection Department." The department is intent on mobilising its anti-poaching units and local informers, in Chitwan, Sukhlaphanta, Parsa and Bardia to work with regular park staff.

Concern for national security may also prevent more than 60,000 villages from entering Royal Chitwan National Park this winter to collect overgrown elephant grass—an annual event that takes place every January, in the first week of Magh. "We have allowed a regulated

access," says the source. Since the emergency and the withdrawal of soldiers from isolated posts, three dead rhinos were found inside the Royal Chitwan National Park, their hooves and horns missing. "It's definitely a case of poaching," our source in the army told us. "By now local poachers probably have figured out from where we've pulled out and are getting active."

The army has been guarding Nepal's national parks since 1976, and are partly responsible for the low level of poaching, here compared to neighbouring countries. National parks now cover nearly a quarter of Nepal's area and an estimated 5,000 soldiers are stationed in seven national parks and four wildlife reserves around the country.

While stressing that other protected areas remain relatively unaffected, department officials acknowledge that there are

number of villages to cut grass in designated plots in Sukhlaphanta, but haven't yet decided about Bardia and Chitwan," says Maskey.

While the army, which maintains two companies in the western and eastern part of Bardia, has tried to maintain as many of the original outposts in the park area, at least 30-35 percent of park area is unreachable. Says a Bardia National Park official: "This is a relatively Maoist-sensitive area. Some areas are under direct vision of the army at all times, but they do maintain high security during the day even in the areas they've pulled out from."

A major problem the army is facing in trying to maintain national security are the large groups of landless settlers maintained by political parties as vote banks in places like Bardia and Sukhlaphanta.

Says an army official, "While we do conduct body searches on people passing through the area, and also interrogate them, it is extremely difficult to control Maoists from the crowds of landless settlers who freely pass through the park corridors. They don't dress any differently. It becomes easier for the Maoists to infiltrate the area."

In the remote Khatpat National Park, located at the junction of Bajura, Bhangal, Doti and Acham districts, all the outposts have been merged, and the company of army soldiers operates from the headquarters based on a plateau inside the park. "In some places, they've burnt and destroyed our outposts, but so far they haven't been able to attack the central points. They underestimated us. They thought we were like the police. But soon realised we're better trained, better equipped for such an attack. At least we have troops, weapons, supplies, and rations to sustain 24 hours of fighting in a remote post," says our army source.

Frequent Maoist activity and the emergency don't mean bad news only for the unprotected animals and ecosystems of the national park. They have also managed to scare off tourists, which means the livelihood of many people dependent on wildlife tourism is in danger. While a few hotels and resorts inside the park are barely functioning, hotels outside the park find their clientele has simply dried up. ♦

Women are getting on with the business of living, despite those idle male hands that wreak havoc just to pass the time.

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"Can the prime minister dare spend a week in Rolpa?"

He is 38, and an active member of the leftist Samyukta Jana Morcha party. He was picked up by police in 1998 during the Kilo Sierra 2 counter-insurgency operation. He has been languishing in Liwang jail with 23 other inmates (one of them a woman) without trial. He does not want to be identified and spoke to Vijay Kumar earlier this month.



How come you could make it to Rolpa during such difficult times?
Vijay Kumar: The army gave me a ride. I came for my TV show.

How did you get inside the jail?
VK: The DSP in Liwang gave me permission.

How long have you known him?
VK: Just met him for the first time in my life. But I have heard of him. By the way, how long have they kept you here?

Slightly more than five years. VK: What charges?

They (police) came to my village and one day said there is Kilo Sierra going on and arrested me. They slapped shanti surakhya

(law and order act) on me. VK: So you're not a Maoist?

No. But I did vote for Krishna Bahadur Mahara (presently a Maoist politburo member) when he was elected MP.

VK: So, tell me, what is the solution to this Maoist problem?

First, try to find out why the people revolted. There is so much exploitation by the state, it exceeded the people's tolerance limit. No one is addressing the basic needs of the people. Politicians are busy amassing vast wealth. How many of these leaders have come to Rolpa? Even you, big names in journalism, say you sent juniors here. Can the prime minister dare spend a week here? Look at us: we have spent five years without trial.

If we are guilty, a court should have said so. The biggest injustice is that even if we are convicted, the maximum jail sentence would be two years. But I have already been here five years. You call this democracy? (Explosive deleted) VK: You want to leave some money so you folks can have masu bhar?

No, thanks. But we would appreciate it if you could tell others about us. And, oh yes, can you tell the CDO to allow us to watch television? After the emergency we haven't been allowed to watch.

VK: Sure. Some day I hope to see you in Kathmandu.

We're touched that you came. Some day...

Return to sender

Kathmandu's water could be in danger of being seriously contaminated. Greenpeace volunteers have begun packaging toxic pesticide waste at an unsecured storage facility at Khumaltar. The group, which says the waste poses a severe danger to Kathmandu's drinking water supplies, has prepared a detailed inventory of the waste and the companies that manufactured the products. In addition, the activists have secured the toxins in larger barrels and asked the companies concerned to collect and safely dispose of the poison. The toxic waste in Khumaltar, which originated in companies in Germany, Netherlands, USA, Japan and India, includes 18 organochlorides (which travel swiftly up the food chain and are carcinogenic), 5 heavy metals (including mercury compounds, banned in Europe and the US many years ago due to their cancer-causing properties) and 20 other classes of chemicals. The larger companies listed on the inventory include the German Bayer AG, Dutch Shell, Swiss Ciba Geigy and Sandoz, American DuPont and Monsanto, and Japanese Sumitomo. Most of the pesticides were imported under ad projects aimed at increasing agricultural yield.

Greenpeace activists have been trying to organise the garage-like storage facility since July last year. They found the walls of the store lined with unstable, rusty iron shavings, filled with hundreds of tins, bottles, bags and cans, the contents of some spilling over, and mummified corpses of rats and cockroaches caught between the crates. "Verbally the companies are positive (about helping with the clean-up), but have to date refused to take initiative. They never do anything pressed to," says Greenpeace's Andreas Bernstorff, leader of the Khumaltar clean-up operation. "We've now found first aid kit, that is putting everything in safe packages for transport." In Germany, a spokesman for Bayer AG, a German newspaper Bild am Sonntag said if it indeed it were true that his company's products were identified, it would contribute towards the detoxification process.

Bayer has the largest waste deposits in Khumaltar, including organic mercurio-chloride (Agallin, Conesol) which is banned in most developed countries. Others, such as DuPont's dozen bags of Marlate (50 percent DDT), and Shell's Dieldrin, of which there are a number of 50 kg sacks in Khumaltar, have also long been out of use. By the Stockholm Convention 2001, all uses and stocks of such old pesticides have to be destroyed. At present Nepal has over 74 tons of obsolete pesticides stored in Amliekhung (50 tons), Nepalgunj (20 tons) and Khamray, which is estimated to hold about five tons.

Say no to plastic

There's a campaign on to ban plastic bags from the scenic Pokhara Valley. In an appeal to the Pokhara Appellate Court, Advocate Bishwa Ghimire has asked for a ban on the production, distribution and use of plastic bags inside the valley. In the campaign, Ghimire has named the Pokhara Sub Metropolitan City, the District Development Committee and District Administration Office, Kaski, the Pokhara Industry and Commerce Organisation, the Pokhara Valley Town Development Committee, the Small Cottage Industries Office, Kaski and the District Irrigation Office, Kaski, as defendants. Experts say that excessive use of plastic bags has polluted Pokhara's Phewa Lake and the Seti river, subsequently ruining surrounding agricultural land. The plastic bags have also harmed Pokhara's biodiversity and caused environmental degradation and killing animals. The Pokhara Sub Metropolitan City estimates that 38,750 families live inside the town. Each family uses an estimated five bags a day for carry fruits, vegetables, medicines, and clothes. Going by these numbers, close to 200,000 plastic bags are used in Pokhara every day.

Special intervention

The Nepal Oil Corporation is cracking down on petrol pumps around the country. According to recent reports, the NOC has fined at least 10 gas stations up to Rs 75,000 for selling consumer diesel and petrol adulterated with kerosene. The NOC has also banned some pumps from selling fuel for six months. Meanwhile, the Special Police Branch is also looking into the adulteration of petroleum products. Following numerous appeals from rate consumers regarding the adulteration of transport fuel, a working group has been formed to look into the adulteration of petroleum products from third companies. The working group, headed by the director general of the Nepal Quality Control Department, will include members of the Nepal Oil Corporation and the Special Police Branch. Adulterated diesel and petrol not only cause environmental pollution, they also seriously damage engines. The Special Police Branch says it is monitoring petroleum tankers transporting fuel from Amliekhung to Kathmandu. The Nepal Oil Corporation acknowledges the adulteration, and has been carrying out checks at the estimated 80 gas pumps in the Valley.

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HERE AND THERE

Sisters are doing it for themselves

One of history's least-learned yet oft-tested lessons is in the American proverb, "the devil makes work for idle hands." Now such phrases sprung up in distant times when gender workshops hadn't made us sexually secular. So there was no need to state the obvious, that the idle hands in question belonged to a young man. Women are never idle, or if they are, the devil—any culture's version—is not interested. Part of female superiority is the apparent inability of most women to wreak capricious havoc simply to pass the time.

Here in Nepal, it should be self-evident that idle young men are at the root of many social ills. Stirring up trouble under any party's banner is the exclusive preserve of bored youth, all male, often drunk, and making little or no contribution to the common weal. Even at the extremes, the far left, the vicious, racist riot, look closely and you'll find that gender is not an issue. They're all men, and young, to boot. Yes, yes, I know all about the infamous Maoist women warriors but how many sit on the Politburo, plotting the attacks, bandhs, bombs and general undermining

of Nepali society as it now stands. None, that's how many. Go to more orthodox parts of the country and watch it all unfold before your eyes. The women, well, it's hard to find them. They're out in the field, ploughing, planting, harvesting, weeding. They're home making meals. They're taking children to health posts or getting them ready for school. And the men, what about them? Well, those people sitting in the sunshine, listening to the radio and debating distant and arcane Kathmandu politics—deep voices, furry cheeks, idle hands...men, all of them. Later, the same bunch goes out and spends hard-earned (by women) money on booze and unleashes a volley of domestic violence on the exhausted better-half at home. And not just in Nepal. In America, spousal abuse skyrockets on days of major sporting events when men get drunk watching television and women get on with real life.

I've always wondered why this was so, and how we get away with it. Tradition and orthodoxy of whatever religious flavour almost always glorify the male. Perhaps a starting point is the major deities and prophets of religion, all men. Then the notions put about by clergy, again always male in gender and attitude. Women "were created from men, made from Adam's rib". One man's word is worth the wisdom of four women. Men are "closer to god". Women can't own property or make their own way in the world, ergo they are property, first of their father, then of their husband's family. The gender that makes all the trouble—drinking, whoring, rioting—committing 99 percent of the crimes, is the one that has divine sanction to do it. The all-male

priesthood of every major faith on the planet goes out of its way to do so. Men not only steal, rape and pillage exclusively, they also pollute, abuse, harass, lie and conceal more than their counterparts across the sexual divide. No wonder they call women "the fairer sex". It's not a reference to appearance; trust me. So what to do? Well, in richer lands, sisters are doing it for themselves. Slowly, by evolution and creeping infiltration into previously all-male enclaves, women are taking over. I'm not talking here about Margaret Thatcher—she was more of a Benazir Bhutto figure than a clarion call to arms for her fellow women, a lady who married money and then launched a political career, freed from the need to support herself. No, the west (outside of Scandinavia) is still awaiting its first female political leader of substance. But women matter in every other walk of life, and they'll continue to expand their role.

It's happening here in more orthodox, less developed lands too. Forget Ms Bhutto or Ms Gandhi, and look up the anti-globalisation campaigner, Vandana Shiva of India, or the amazing Asma Jahangir of the Pakistan Human Rights Commission. They make their own way, and leave a trail of useless, discarded men behind them, those without the wisdom to follow and learn. We have great sisters in Nepal too, but I won't embarrass them with a mention. They know who they are. But I'm really worried about all those idle male hands and their ability to wreak what women achieve as they do it for themselves. Maybe we need to make a deal with the devil. ♦

by DANIEL LAK





Plagiarism politics

ing and analysing the response to his latest clarification of his post-emergency entreaty to determine when he might need to issue the next advisory.

UMI, general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, preoccupied with his own covenant on bringing Bam Dev Gautam's brigade back into the fold, wants to see in writing whether Koirala's blueprint is broad enough to accommodate parties offering a formal response. While the smaller communist factions are weighing how the big boys' deliberations would numerically affect the volatile "nau bam/das bam" configuration, the Sadvahana family is on vacation because it feels the party's name conveys enough goodwill to last for a lifetime.

So it was the Rastriya Prajantaran Party's turn to show its hand. Pervyed by the Kangresis' and Communists' pilferage, the ex-punch decided to revise their seven-month old broad national consensus programme that was based on a concept paper made public two years ago. At a press conference last week,

RPP president Surya Bahadur Thapa (photo, left) said a few changes had been made to the programme because of the "changed circumstances". (Which means the country's third-largest party has promptly moved into damage-control mode).

Those of us who detected untimely movements in and around Thapa's Malgion

residence in recent weeks can now rest assured that Koirala was only trying to put together the details of a consensus package the Nepali Congress and communists would produce.

Rejecting the prevailing belief that the RPP's unity plea was a ploy to gain power, Thapa said the platform was the requirement of the time. As an avid admirer of Thapa's impeccable sense of timing over since he bounced back into the Panchayat mainstream from virtual oblivion in 1979 while Congress- and communist-affiliated students were hounding *mandals* from college campuses across much of the country, I can hardly gubbe with that argument. But I was disappointed by Thapa's stand on Koirala's platform. "During my meeting with Girija Prasad Koirala, he did not give me any reason to believe that the consensus (call) would be used to get back to power." Of course he didn't. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai still can't forgive himself for believing that Koirala had granted him the prime minister's job for a full five years well before the early birds had cast their ballots in the last general election. "I don't want to share power with the communists and I will never because of the 'changed circumstances'." (Which means the country's third-largest party has promptly moved into damage-control mode).

trading. Given the way Kangresis, bahupanthas and former punch are accusing one another of pilfering their platforms, we will probably never know who the progenitor of this howling obsession with harmony really is.

Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala is collect-

forget that those were words coming from the only founding member of the Nepali Congress on the planet.

As the RPP chief might suspect, Koirala probably recalls vividly how his candour in front of then-prime minister Thapa helped delay BP's release from Sundaripur prison in the 1960s, especially when GP was under express orders from the palace to be discreet about the secret parties that were going on. ("Bisweswar Prasad Koirala ko Atmabharat" pp.309-310).

To be sure, leaders of all parties in the amity caravan would have to arrive at a minimum common agreement on issues and procedures before they can submit their agenda to the prime minister. Even before that, however, each party would have to make sure everyone inside is aboard. Since the alliance partners would probably be dealing with the premier as an institution, it's beside the point to wonder how many heads of government they expect to stretch this exercise over.

The RPP has suggested six points for inclusion in the minimum common agreement: a) a working plan to solve the Maoist problem; b) progress in economic, social and political sectors; c) improvement in electoral procedures and introduction of an interim government; d) a code of conduct for political parties; e) anti-corruption pro-

gramme; and f) clear terms for good governance.

Among the other specifics in the RPP agenda are progressive taxation on fixed property and investment of funds so collected in soft loans to landless and poor farmers; introduction of a quota system for dalits and janajatis for education and jobs; and empowerment of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

If I had to put all this in a sentence, it would probably read something like this: Ensuring the people's welfare by creating a democratic, just, dynamic and exploitation-free society through coordination among Nepalis of all classes and occupations on a national scale. But the RPP luminaries recall that was precisely what Article 19 of the Panchayat Constitution of Nepal 1962 envisaged.

Thapa says any enduring consensus would have to be forged within the framework of the present constitution. Now that's a tall order for politicians who can't stop calling each other crooks even while they expect to share power.

Moreover, when three decades of partylessness couldn't prevent the three-way Thapa-Chand-Marich Man split in the Rastriya Panchayat in the spring of 1990, how prudent would it be to rely on a consensus reached by parties that are in a perpetual process of fusion and fission? ♦

"Capital adequacy is going to be a problem..."

- Himalaya Sumshere Rana, chairman, Himalayan Bank

British-Indian banks in India, tokens, waiting and all. When the joint venture banks—Nabil was the first—median banking also arrived. The NBL and the Rastriya Banija Bank should have changed operations, but they continued with old practices. They didn't change. Anand Bhakta Rajbhandari was at NBL for 29 years, and he knew the credit worthiness of each party and made loan decisions accordingly. After the loan pressure was applied, loans were extended to parties who were not really business people. With bad loans, you either have to recover them or write them off if they are beyond recovery. Nobody had the courage to do that and they have piled up. But then they still have their network and depositors who still have confidence in the bank. I think it can be turned around.

What do you have to say about the role of the central bank while all this was happening, in terms of monitoring and supervision?

I think we have to encourage professionalism to inspect and supervise. When the joint venture banks came licenses were given one after the other even to parties who didn't have a good reputation. It was difficult to inspect and supervise the increased number of banks. There was some kind of a complex, because when I started at the NBL, the Rastriya Bank, I said that the salaries of its staff should be 25 percent higher than government salaries. Later on they were made the same. Then the joint venture banks came and maybe the sons and nephews of some NRB senior staff members working in these banks began drawing a higher salary than them, so there was some sort of inferiority complex. All these years they have not been successful in timely inspection and regulation. The NRB is very much present, but its effective presence has not been felt. But things are changing now.

How would you rate the NRB's supervision of banks run by the private sector?

Central banking and commercial banking are slightly different. I was a central banker, a Ministry of Finance man, Prithvi Bahadur Pandey was a central banker and did a stint as general manager of the RRB. Commercial banking has now become very complex. One thing lacking in the NRB is that they do not have people thoroughly conversant with the fine loopholes in commercial banks. They have a few top people who are quite knowledgeable, but the middle level staff are not. Inspectors will be needed, but if the report will come after six months, what is the use? Things are changing, though. Now we have a dynamic man in charge of the banking operations, and he has always been his presence felt.

Which sector among industries?

Iron, steel mills... almost all industries, the tourism sector, which is hotels and airlines. Our exposure to the come after six months, what is the use? Things are changing, though. Now we have a dynamic man in charge of the banking operations, and he has always been his presence felt.

You also have some very bad consortium loans...

Most consortium loans are not doing well, we have almost taken a decision that we will not join a consortium unless we lead it, because there are many pressure groups in Nepal and because there are four or five banks, some group can always apply pressure on one bank or other. All right, all businesses do not succeed, all businesses cannot be profitable. When you recognise that, then we have to say "all right, we will close the deal". But then there are pressure groups and there are always one bank or the other opposing that and we cannot take the decision alone.

Have you been quite successful, what decisions would you say were critical to your success?

One was the decision to attract deposits. One very successful product we introduced was for our savings accounts—five account holder disbursement, we pay to the first four times the deposit amount, subject to the ceiling of Rs 500,000. Every month we hold a lottery and there are 19 prizes, sometimes we give gold coins, sometimes watches, sometimes cash vouchers, so our savings accounts have been very popular. I think current accounts mostly go to the older banks, embassy accounts and INGO accounts also. Our deposit mobilisation has been very successful. We then introduced tele-banking. It was not a resounding success, but it has also attracted customers, as it saves a lot of time. We have also been involved in introducing new products, new technology, ATMs and our own Himalayan Bank credit card.

On the surface, all private sector banks seem to be doing fairly well. How much of that is due to the poor performance of public banks? Obviously, we have benefited from that. Even now Nepal Bank Limited is a giant. It will not go into liquidation, but can be turned around. It was the model after

They will have to tackle that problem. The directives are welcome, but they should have been fine tuned looking at the state of our economy and our banking practices. Secondly, the timing was not right—when there is downturn, when we are finding it difficult to get interest payments and instalments of loan payments from clients... to come up with new regulations now was not right. Now if the payment is not made on the due date, you have to immediately see aside 12.5 percent as a possible loan loss provision. So the loan loss provision is going to be huge, which means we cannot extend credit with that money, so the opportunity to make a profit is less, because you cannot use that money for business.

Has the central bank been fair in enforcement so far?

We were wondering whether the directives would be enforced professionally. If two or three actions that they have taken was an indication of what they are going to do, they have applied them fairly.

What advice do you have for people trying to reform the financial sector?

I think we have to encourage professionalism in decision-making. Leadership is very important. In the central bank, it is not easy for the governor to assert his leadership, because he is aware that for only two or three were able to stay there for the full term. But now under the new act, the governor cannot be removed for "espionage", which were never defined. So he gives a sort of security to their tenure. I think (the present governor) is a man with guts, so we are hoping that things will improve.

People are talking about Nepal going the Argentine way if something is not done to shore up the financial sector. Would you agree?

BIZ NEWS

Power to the people

The Nepal Electricity Authority began the "wet test" of the Kali Gandaki hydroelectricity project last week. The project, after being delayed by over a year, is finally ready to come on line. It is expected to generate enough power to meet Nepal's electricity demand for the another three to four years. The plan is to test each one of the three 48-megawatt generators one after the other before switching the turbines to produce 482 gigawatts-hour of power annually. The project will also have pondage capacity, which means it can store water to use the turbines at peak capacity for six-hours even in the dry season. Leaks in the tunnel during testing and problems with erection of 12 pylons on the northern transmission line near Pokhara are threatening more delays. The project uses water from the Kali Gandaki diverted at Mirri in Syangja district through a six km long, 8 m wide tunnel to the semi-underground power house at Belhari.

Dividends

The Standard Chartered Bank Limited has reported a profit of Rs 431 million, a roughly 10 percent increase over 2000/01. The 9th January annual general meeting of the bank has approved a 100 percent dividend to its shareholders. Likewise, the Himalayan Bank, which announced a profit of Rs 287 million—roughly 41 percent growth compared with the previous year—is to give its shareholders both dividends and bonus shares. Everest Bank has said its profits in the same period were Rs 147 million, and that it will issue 10 percent preference and bonus stock.

Rs 22.5 million

The Tourism Board is conspicuously absent in the Tourism Ministry statement. The announcement also says the promotion program will be formulated, implemented and monitored by a committee headed by the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation. Industry sources say there is a message there to NTB which might have been sidelined because it has been unable to produce results, or the money will simply be a source of slush funds. Everything the committee proposes to undertake is already being done by the Board.

Air India

Air India's maiden flight to Kathmandu bringing in VIP passengers, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for the 11th SAARC summit on 3 January, is a record in itself. The arrival of Air India also points to the possibilities that lie ahead for Nepali tourism, should there be revival in Indian arrivals in the future. Even though Air India does not have scheduled flights to Nepal, more and more Nepalis are using the airline for connections from New Delhi, says a company press release. Most of these Nepalis are headed to destinations in the Gulf or Malaysia.

High tea

Duncans Industries, one of the largest players in the Indian tea market, is launching in Nepal two products in the strong tea category, Double Diamond and Pikup. Double Diamond, made of dark brown pure grains of fine quality tea, will be available in the market in a 250 gm pack in Rs 60, while a superior blend of fresh tea from the best gardens, Pikup, will be available in a 200 gm pack priced at Rs 41. Both products are packaged in metallised foil-lined pack. Duncan Industries has been producing and selling teas for 160 years and is one of the top three marketers of packed tea in India.

FOLLOW-UP

Radha visits Govinda in jail

After we reported the plight of Govinda Mainali who is serving a life sentence in a Tokyo jail on a rape-murder charge ("Here comes the story of Govinda Mainali," #39), the judge who sentenced him has himself been accused of having illegal sex with a minor and disbarred.

Japanese and international activists have been campaigning with the Japanese government and the Supreme Court, which is expected to rule on an appeal to send Govinda back to Nepal. They are convinced Govinda is innocent and have formed the "Justice for Govinda" pressure group, which some Nepalis in America have also joined. The activists paid for Govinda's wife Radha to fly to Tokyo to see him in his jail last month. This was the first time in eight years that he has seen her.

"I don't know what I'll say, but I may cry when I see him," Radha told reporters through an interpreter before walking into the Tokyo Detention House. Believing in her husband's innocence, Radha finally made the trip to Japan from Jhapa to encourage him and do call for public support.

Govinda, 35, went to Japan in 1993 to seek his fortune, and was working in an Indian restaurant. He was arrested in Tokyo in 1997 on suspicion of murdering an executive in a Japanese energy utility who worked in a high-profile job by day and was a sex worker by night in Tokyo's Shibuya red-light district.

Radha and Govinda did not discuss the case much during the 20-minute meeting. Govinda spent most of the half-hour asking about family especially about his daughters Mihila and Elita. The younger Elita was born after Govinda left Japan and he has never seen her.

Also present in the visiting room separated by a glass partition was a lawyer and a jail guard. The lawyer said Govinda looked more composed than usual, apparently in an effort not to worry his wife. When she said she would be able to stay in Tokyo for only a few weeks, however, Govinda pressed her to stay longer. Radha was in tears when she came out of the detention house.

Govinda was arrested in March 1997 on suspicion of murdering the woman in a Japanese Ward and pressing about 60,000 yen (\$3,000). The apartment was near the condominium where he lived at the time. The case attracted extraordinary public attention in Japan because of

Here comes the story of Govinda Mainali who is serving a life sentence in a Tokyo jail on a rape-murder charge ("Here comes the story of Govinda Mainali," #39), the judge who sentenced him has himself been accused of having illegal sex with a minor and disbarred.

Govinda Mainali is still in a Japanese prison, awaiting the Supreme Court's ruling.

the double life of the victim. Govinda, who has never admitted his involvement in the case, was acquitted by the Tokyo District Court in April 2000. Nevertheless, the Tokyo High Court decided to keep him in detention after prosecutors appealed the case, instead of allowing investigating authorities to deport him over an invalid visa. The high court then reversed the lower court ruling and sentenced him to a life term in December 2000. Despite the lack of new evidence, the high court turned down the earlier ruling that said there was "room for counter-argument" on every aspect of the version of events given by prosecutors.

Radha is convinced of her husband's innocence. "My husband is a gentle and quiet person and would never be able to kill anyone," she said. "Knowing everything about his wife, all I can say is he did not do it." Radha is worried that their daughters are bullied at school by children who call their father a murderer. When she left her home for the visit to Tokyo, the daughters told her to "bring daddy home," she said.

Ramesh Aramya, president of the Nepalese American Council, who was also in Tokyo at the time says 50,000 Nepalis in the United States are fully backing Govinda. "Anyone who studied this case comes away with the conviction that justice has failed," he said. Back home in Nepal, however, the Govinda issue has still not been raised either by the government (which depends heavily on Japanese development aid) or by activists. ♦

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Soaring over Nepal

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RAMESH POUDYAL IN POKHARA

Imagine a Himalayan griffon vulture riding the catatic winds over Sarangkot. The air roaring against her ear, soaring on the mid-morning thermals, higher and higher until Phewa Lake is like a little green jewel,

Machhapuchhre and the Annapurnas etched against an azure sky. Now imagine that griffon vulture is you.

That is what it is like to go paragliding in Pokhara. Nepal's latest adventure tourism activity. Get up there to look at central Nepal and the Annapurnas from

the vantage point of the gods.

Paragliding is the sport of flying—yes, flying—using a specially designed parachute. It is the best way to experience all the wonders of Nepal—lakes, mountains, natural splendour and for some, even nirvana. Note: paragliding is different from the

ultra-lights that you hear whirling above Pokhara every morning that offer an hour-long right-seeing flight in small motorised gliders.

Few guidebooks urge us to go ahead and soar right into the crisp, fresh air of the mountains. This is a shame, because paragliding and Pokhara go together like tomatoes and timur, strawberries and swirly whipped cream. Now, finally, there is hope for those of us in Pokhara who want some activity, but cannot afford the time to go on a trek. No more is renting a boat (yawn) and paddling listlessly across Phewa Tal (snore) the only option. Now there is a chance to get one of the biggest highs of them all—getting up close and personal with that great inverted forked fish-tail of Machhapuchhre.

Sunrise Paragliding, the first Nepali company to start commercial paragliding, has been in



Want to get up close and personal with a mountain or two? Paraglide in Pokhara.



business in Pokhara since 1999. Since then more than 1,000 people have been airborne in the skies above Pokhara, and got a little bit closer to the mountains. In order to promote the activity, which has huge adventure sport cache overseas, the company has also been organising "international level" championships. In the third paragliding championship held here in December, there were 16 contestants from ten different nations. Participants were required to take off from Sarangkot, fly above Torepani and land at a designated spot on Lakeside. They were judged on the varying levels of skills they exhibited in the air. Although there were fewer participants in 2001 as compared with the previous year, when there were close to 40 competitors, enthusiasm was high.

The highlight of the event was when Nepali participant Rajesh Bomjom won the solo flight

event. Rajesh, the first Nepali to receive a paragliding license from London, works for Sunrise Paragliding. Says the high flier: "It hasn't been long since I started flying, but the feeling is inimitable—once you're off, it feels as though you have wings. Jump off from Sarangkot and kiss the beauty of the Himalaya and the lakes, and you wish you could fly forever." Many competitors had pretty adventurous plans, including flying over Syangpa, Palpa, Parbat, Kaski and the Annapurna Conservation Area, but these had to be cancelled due to bad weather. Despite that, some competitors showed off some pretty hair-raising tricks—even landing on the waters of Phewa Tal with their girlfriends making up the second flier that the chute can carry.

Nepal's terrain and weather make it an ideal paragliding country, especially from mid-

autumn to end-winter. You're best off flying between late morning and late afternoon, when the wind speed at this time of year is just right to soar like an eagle. Indeed, that is exactly who you fly with—paragliding is considered best and safest in the warm spaces favoured by high-flying birds such as eagles. Quality flying needs fair wind, too much of it, or rain, is an obstruction.

As with anything to do with flying in Nepal, the bureaucracy has to get involved. And under our 1994 Civil Aviation Policy, the Civil Aviation Authority has approved commercial paragliding taking off from the Torepani cliff in Sarangkot, over Lakeside, the Mahendra caves, Phewa Phaan, and landing at Naudada. Still, paragliders have to be on the lookout for the morning Pokhara-Jomsom shuttles and get used to the Twin Otters and Dorniers

droning beneath their feet.

It is strange that although Nepal is promoted so often as an adventure sport destination, the opportunity to fly the majestic skies is such a recent one. Late it may be, but at least it diversifies a tourist market that is getting just that little bit jaded, not to mention having to cope with all the craziness of the last year. Commenting on how the sport has brought about more variety in tourism to Pokhara, Biru Bomjom, director of Sunrise Paragliding says with conviction: "We need to be innovative and creative if we are to take Nepal's tourism industry forward. We think paragliding as an adventure sport can help in this."

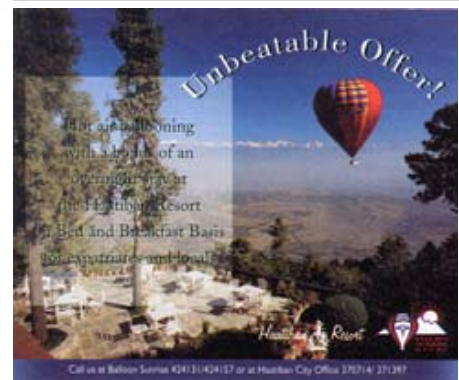
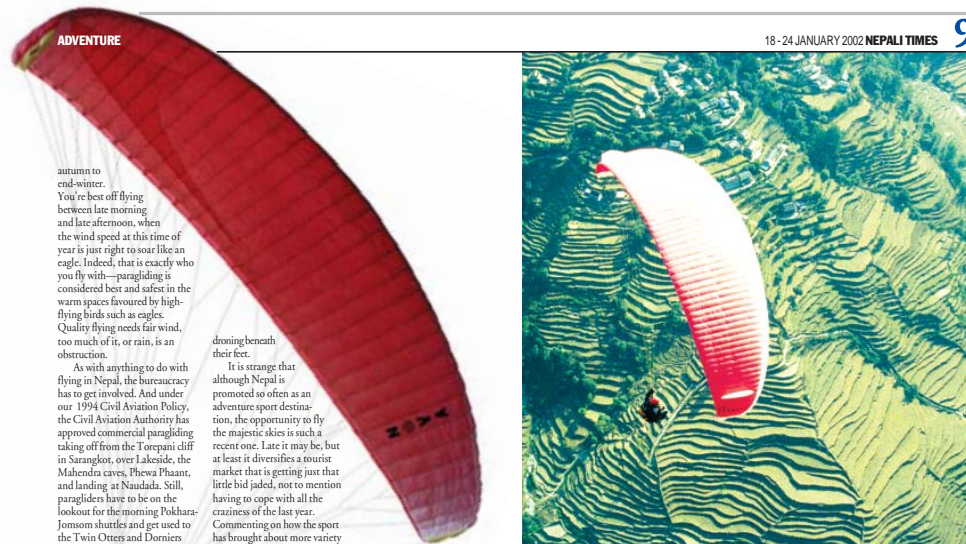
Bomjom started the business with paragliding chutes that each cost about Rs 200,000. It is a big investment, and of

course safety is an issue, so, until there are more skilled pilots in Nepal, Bomjom has had to hire foreign pilots. And as there aren't any training facilities or schools, Bomjom has been providing those interested unofficial training right here in Pokhara, following the three-level paragliding course set out by the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, the

world body that governs paragliding rules. Trainees completing this course can fly for an hour at a stretch, but because Sunrise Paragliding is not listed with the FAI, they do not have the authority to issue licenses after the training is complete. Bomjom is doing his best, but says dealing with an unhelpful bureaucracy can be wearying.

This means that though Pokhara is among the top destinations in the country for international as well as domestic tourists, the sport has not been able to attract as much excitement as it would virtually anywhere else in the world. The massive decline in tourist arrivals last year might be partially to blame, but it is a pretty expensive option, at \$70 for an

hour in the sky. The only other Nepali paraglider, Narayan Parjuli, says we should be patient—and give it a shot. "Perhaps Nepalis are not aware of the fun of flying with chutes, but truly, once you start, you never want to descend." Oh, and there are discounts for the ride of your life. ♦

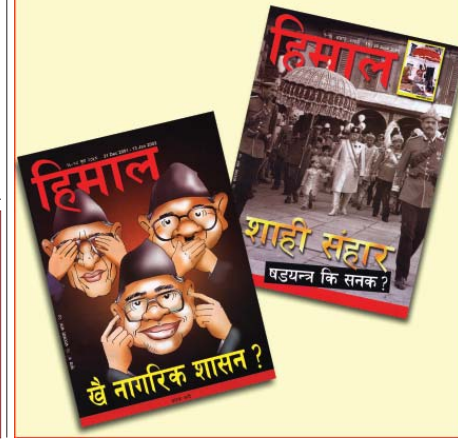


The January issue of Himal is now on news stands.

In addition to being a special issue on reconceptualising the region, this month's issue includes a free downside-up atlas-quality map of South Asia.

Time to learn Nepali

Reach the consuming masses by advertising in Himal Khabarpatrika.



by MANJUSHREE THAPA

Talk to us

Budhabar, 8 December
(Statement of former Chief Justice Bishwa Nath Upadhyaya and other prominent people).

It has already been a month since an emergency was imposed in the country under Article 115, Clause 1 of the constitution. The Maoists withdrew from the peace process and started a bloodbath, and three decisions were taken by government—it imposed an emergency, mobilised the army, and issued the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention and Control) ordinance.

Besides suspending the fundamental rights of the people, all the emergency has been able to do is spread chaos and terror, and create a vacuum in the life of the people. Nothing else has come out of it. Just because an emergency is in effect, this does not mean that the government can do anything it wants. It gives absolute powers to neither the government nor to government officials. The constitution gives the people certain rights and an emergency cannot just withdraw them. Come what may, the rights of the people will always be there. They can only be suspended for a limited period of time. No action can be taken against people without the necessary laws. During an emergency, when some kinds of powers have to be limited, Article 115, Clause 7 gives the government powers to get certain orders issued. But no orders have been issued under this clause till date. Given this, it isn't surprising that people will question whether we need an emergency and what its outcome will be. The government does not seem interested in framing special orders.

The people were told that the emergency was imposed to control the Maoists and mobilise the army. However, it wasn't necessary to impose an emergency just to mobilise the army. Why did the government think it necessary? The people have no clue, and the government does not think it is important to provide answers. People ask why an all-party meeting was not called to take this decision, why it was necessary to impose an emergency simply to mobilise the army, why fundamental rights have been suspended and why the civilian government does not have control over the army. These are some questions that media has been asking. Earlier, when hundreds of people and policemen were being massacred, the government wanted to mobilise the army. The army already refused. Therefore the correct procedure had to be followed. Once the emergency was imposed, all procedures were completed immediately, and the army was mobilised within no time, which shows that the emergency was a pre-condition for army deployment.

Outside the Valley, the people's reading of the situation seems to be that civil administration has become weaker and is relying increasingly on the army. The police have been forced to hand over to the army all the reporters they take into custody. The army itself takes into custody people it suspects of being Maoists or Maoist sympathisers. Instead of handing these people over to the civilian administration, it takes custody of them, questions them and locks them up. It is one thing to deploy the army, but it is completely another matter for the army to enforce a military regime. The army has been mobilised to tackle the Maoists, they have to follow the orders of the government, i.e. they have to follow civilian law and procedures, they cannot implement military law and order. This must be explained to the people, otherwise after the emergency has been withdrawn, there will be legal problems. We demand that the government explain all this to the people, immediately and in full detail.

At the same time that the emergency was imposed, another ordinance to control the Maoists was also put in force. Article 115, Clause 7 of the constitution clearly provides enough space for the civilian government to give orders to bring the situation under control. It was unnecessary to implement another ordinance for this. The government has not bothered to explain. This shows disregard for the constitution, and will also trouble the people once the emergency has been withdrawn. This ordinance should be scrapped immediately and we request the government to immediately implement the provisions provided by the constitution.

There was an ordinance issued alongside the emergency declaration. Because the constitution gives government the power to issue special orders, the necessity of legislating through an ordinance is unduly and will not only remain a nuisance on the necks of the people after the emergency ends but will also remain as a permanent inhuman law. That is why we call on our Majesty's Government to scrap the ordinance immediately and issue the necessary orders to fight the Maoists using the provisions in the constitution (Article 115, 7). The government is also said to be preparing to issue other ordinances. In an emergency the government should be worried about covering parliament, not framing laws through ordinances. The emergency does not suspend the rights of the MPs or parliament, and any attempt to use the emergency for anything other than fighting the insurgents will be deemed a misuse of emergency powers. The government must convene the regular winter session of parliament to ratify the emergency and to make other necessary laws.

The constitution has clearly stated that if necessary, the fundamental rights of the people can be suspended during an emergency. However, the government must have adequate reasons for taking such a step. The government is responsible for protecting the lives and property of the people, protecting national wealth, taking action against unlawful activities and providing good governance. These can be done by using its powers and the security forces, but it is not necessary to suspend the fundamental rights of the people. It is not right to restrict information flow, even during an emergency. ... We request the government to not do anything that will weaken or harm democracy, the political system, or the people, and do everything that can be done to remove fear from the minds of the people.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Non supporters of the Panchayat system and the king were tortured, and even killed during the Panchayat era, but at least the cases were investigated. They weren't shot at blindly like now.

—Chitra Bahadur KC, MASAL, leader, Jana Aardha, 16 January

Hard to digest

Jana Aardha, 9 January

A woman waiting on the veranda of her house is shot down by a person armed with a gun. Her husband sees her fall, his house is set on fire, his wife is shot dead and he watches his wife breathe her last.

It is hard to imagine such things happening unless one is a eyewitness. As if this were not bad enough, the government media committed another atrocity against this poor man by announcing the following day that a "terrorist" had been killed in an encounter. Not only did the man lose his wife, she was also branded a terrorist a day after she died.

After reading the daily government reports, even people who do not agree with the policies of the Maoists feel betrayed. The government has branded the Maoists "terrorists". Government forces have been arresting many innocent people on the slightest suspicion. Until and unless a case has been proven, no one can be arrested. The government is doing exactly the opposite—it is arresting and harassing innocent people, even when they are not at all supporters of the Maoists. It arrests a lot of people and then issues press releases stating that those arrested are suspected of being Maoists. This is a deliberate attempt to mislead the public.

Dhruba Adhikari, a teacher at the Nepal Press Institute, is fed up with such behaviour on the part of the government, and says that the situation has now become such that the government is now becoming such a PA (journalist) no longer completely trust government press releases. The Ministry of Information and Communication has asked all media organisations to publish news that helps uplift the morale of the armed forces and motivates them, and does the opposite to the morale and level of motivation of the Maoist forces. The government on a regular basis issues statements in line with this agenda. The Defence Ministry forgets that an emergency has been imposed in this country precisely due to this kind of twisting of facts.

After the emergency was put in place, public meetings have stopped completely. Because of the emergency, the ruling Nepal Congress has indefinitely postponed all its programs and public meetings. The opposition parties, namely the UML and the ML, who also support the emergency, have called off all their programs. This is why no public meeting has taken place in this period.

The government is doing everything it can to demonise the Maoists. In this regard, it sometimes puts out its conflicting information. A couple of days ago, the Defence Ministry put out a release which claimed that more than 500 villages in a village in Rolpa had been freed from the Maoist hand. It was a procession against the atrocities committed by the terrorists. But, because the release did not name the village, the Defence Minister's speech at the meeting's supposed to have taken place in, people are having a hard time believing the report.

People may recall that some time ago the Defence Ministry put out a release stating that the armed forces had captured a large number of Maoist activists and seized their weapons.

Nepal Television carried this news. On one of the captured guns was a picture supposed to be of Prachanda. Even Hinal Khaparkanta carried this information and a picture of the gun. Nepal Television is doing all it can to show that the armed forces are winning victories, and all the country's business institutions are wholeheartedly in support of the emergency. In the same vein, the government recently issued a release stating that the people of Surkhet were fed up with the Maoists and had taken

out a procession, with thousands of people participating and protesting against the Maoists. We were told that the people were protesting the fact that the Maoists had kidnapped people from the village, and demanding the release of all the villagers who had been abducted. But we never got to see this protest on television, and there was no follow up to this story. As a result, many people came to the conclusion some time ago that this was done to hit at the morale of the Maoists.

A few days later, the Defence Ministry put out the news that in the course of its "search and destroy" operation, the army had destroyed five caves in Dohladha that were used by the terrorists. ... (There was no follow up).

A watery grave

Jana Aardha, 9 January

Employees of the Ministry of Water Resources and its many affiliated organisations had hoped that with the imposition of a state of emergency, corruption in the ministry and its departments would be ended. But they have been proven completely wrong—they have discovered that corruption has reached new, shocking heights. This ministry was known for its rampant corruption. Maoist government vehicles, and this has actually increased recently.

Bijay Gachhadra, who is known to be corrupt, a Minister for Water Resources, Laxman Basela, the PA (originally from Nepal Television), uses a Pajero that used to have a white number plate now turned red (private). In the same way, Manoj Bhowa, a fourth grade officer in Godshapara, has now been made personal PA to the minister and he too uses a Pajero that earlier had a white plate but has now been converted into a red number plate. Similarly, Narayan Sharma, PA to the defence minister, also uses a Pajero whose number plate has been changed from white to red.

Another vehicle belonging to the ministry is always seen parked in front of the minister's personal office. Sources say that after Gachhadra became minister, 22-25 vehicles of the ministry are being misused. Number plates are being changed from white to red to avoid detection as if tomorrow will not come. All this is taking place when the country is in a state of emergency.

Maoist mines

Budhabar, 9 January

The Maoists had laid a land mine for the army in Khura Village Development Committee in Rukum district. The mine exploded, killing three of their lives in that ambush, and a fifth was seriously injured. In Kalika VDC in Bardia, the Maoists laid another land mine for the army. Instead of the expected ambulance of the local Red Cross ran over it, and was completely blown up. The ambulance was going from Gulerya to Thibrande and was carrying a patient. Surely the Maoists "class war" had nothing against ambulances that ferry sick people.

Meanwhile, the Defence Ministry has said that three army personnel were killed and 24 others injured by a mine laid over the Maoists near Salang Khola in Chaudhundi, Lamjung. After the imposition of the emergency, the Maoists started targeting the army with mines. Thirteen army personnel have died as ambushes, two in Puyuban, three in Gorkha, three in Burele, two in Mogyel and three in Lamjung. The Maoists have not been able to

openly face the army. They know they would be decimated if they tried to take the army head on, and that is why they are now relying on mines. A truck of the Armed Police was caught in an ambush in Surkhet, and four people lost their lives. Recently, a vehicle of the district police in Gulerya was caught in a mine and completely destroyed.

The Maoists believe that mines are very effective and have been increasing use for ambushing the security forces. They realise that this inflicts the maximum damage on the enemy without any loss to themselves. The mines are placed in areas where vehicles have to slow down for difficult crossings and bends, and this way they inflict maximum damage.

The Maoists learn this art from the People's War Group of India and used mines for the first time in 1997 in Dharwad in India. Since then, the damage and death caused by mines have increased.

Many individuals and organisations are requesting all the people to be very careful. They should be lunched. According to the Ban Landmines Nepal Campaign, in 2000 alone, 115 policemen, four Maoists, as well as to 90 other people (including 29 children) have been caught in mines. Ninety-four have died.

Koirala rule

Budhabar, 9 January

Girija Prasad Koirala is having some problems. He had asked the head of the PR department, Narayan Sharma, for an explanation. The explanation Koirala demanded was against the decision taken earlier at a meeting of the Congress Central Working Committee, which Koirala himself chaired.

Koirala asked Acharya if he had stated publicly that the monarch's wealth should be made public and if he had suggested that the issue of amendments to the constitution should be taken to the public. He further asked Acharya if this was not contrary to the party's philosophy and whether he realised this and this would have on the Nepal Congress. The party asked Acharya to explain the charge in writing.

When ever two more disapproving Nagis, the talk invariably, necessarily turns to the declining state of the home state. Should one return home under these circumstances? And the inevitable "Kegane" has double meaning: one is the perennially pessimistic, fatalistic inclination that Nagis associate with that lamentable phrase, but the other indicates the lack of job prospects. "Kegane ganeg"?

Nepalis live abroad voluntarily for various reasons. The first reason is to make more money, of course. Income that presumably guarantees "standard of living," an envied "lifestyle."

Acharya submitted his six-page-long response. On the issue concerning the monarch, Acharya explains what he said in public was within the guidelines set by the Central Committee in its meeting in June and that this would not affect the party in any way. He claims that all he said was definitely within the parameters set by the party.

Acharya's explanation goes on to remind Koirala that there have often been times when NC members have spoken their minds—even if they were being saying was completely contradictory to party policy. Acharya says that since everything he said was within the guidelines set by the party, there was no need to ask him for an explanation. (Apparently Koirala did not like what he said and last week he asked Acharya to resign from his post as head of the NC publicity department.)

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

NEPALITERATURE

The thing about writing is, you have to be alone while doing it. Of course, you needn't be sequestered in a quiet hillside resort with nothing to distract you save for a view of the Himal, but you need to be alone. More or less. You might be on a packed bus when a poem strikes, but you must turn away from your chatty seatmate in order to jot it down before it is lost, forever, to the rush of time.

This January, nine writers started off on Nepal's first ever residential writing retreat at the High View Resort in Dhulikhel, where they have nothing to distract them save for a view of the Himal. They are acting as guinea pigs in a way, testing out Martin Chautauri's hypothesis that residential retreats such as this—lasting four to six weeks—will significantly enrich the writing of manuscripts in Nepal.

All indications are positive so far. When I went to visit the writers (to make sure that they weren't cursing Martin Chautauri for marooning them in a place where there was nothing to do but write), I found them lounging in the sun with books, sitting at computers, skimming over notebooks, scribbling to their heart's content, or staring into space in anticipation of inspiration. They were doing exactly what the organisers envisioned them doing. And they were enjoying it.

Crisped by the winter sun, writer

COMMENT



The view from Dhulikhel

Khagendra Sangraula bragged of having finished a play, and having started a new book that began as a novel, but turned into non-fiction. Writer Bhuvan Dhungana was hammering a recalcitrant novel into shape, and putting together a collection of short stories. Language activist Bhupadhar Thakur was finishing up a Kullung dictionary, and starting to transcribe interviews of members of the Kullung Rai community. Critic Ramesh Bhattacharya had put Greece behind him, and was moving onto other countries in his tome on European literature. Engineer Yogesh Rai had launched on a meditative, introspective work that left everyone at a loss with his philosophical soap opera. Crisped by the winter sun, writer

Diaspora in dilemma

Foreign Resident Nepalis (FoREN) see only dirt, dust, decay, decrepitude, demagogic democracy, garbage, and graft the moment they clear customs. Maybe they should continue to wallow in the wealth of their adopted west.

Others are primarily concerned with expanding their knowledge, skills, and experiences, which they hope at some point will rub back home. Then there are those rare birds—the types who once used to join the Foreign Legion or become deckhands on tramp steamers—who expect to leverage their fluency and fluency of the high life through their own stress, their "retensions". Even as the family man frets about the quality of education back home, he is forced to turn a blind eye to the increasing violence and discrimination his children may face at school, especially the urban public schools in the US. If his career does not advance as

quickly as he had expected, all things being equal, he cannot but suspect that he is being held back because of the colour of his skin, aggravated perhaps by his insufficient grasp of the local language and social mores. But there is no such thing as free lunch, especially an expensive one. The pursuit and pleasure of the high life through their own stress, their "retensions". Even as the family man frets about the quality of education back home, he is forced to turn a blind eye to the increasing violence and discrimination his children may face at school, especially the urban public schools in the US. If his career does not advance as

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their own. Some take morning walks, others sleep in; some work in the sun, others huddle indoors, under blankets; some steal over to Dhulikhel bar to buy local liquor, others observe strict abstinence on the matter of alcohol. There is plenty of time to play, if they wish, but most of the time they write, and when they are sick of that, they read. During mealtimes they consult each other about problems in their work, and swap suggestions, examples, anecdotes, and jokes. When I was there I asked the group: did they think that this kind of residential retreat was helpful? (This is, after all, the first such retreat in Nepal; perhaps everyone was dying to get done with it already). But there were nods all around. "As soon as I saw the announcement, I wanted to go," Ramesh Bhattacharya said. The last time he'd had so much uninterrupted time to work was when he spent time in jail as a democracy activist, he said. "There was the same set schedule, the same food atmosphere, and all the meals were taken care of." I took this as a positive comment about the retreat, which is how he meant it, he assured me.

I left the retreat site pleased with the organisers' sake—and also pleased that the Japan Foundation Asia Center had agreed to fund the program. There are several organisations in Nepal that hand out such fellowships to writers and journalists; but writing isn't just about

by RAJENDRA KHADKA

One of the dirty secrets suppressed during the '90s' success of Silcock Valley was the alarming incidents of wife abuse and domestic violence, especially among Asian immigrant communities. Even before the dot-com nose-dived, the newly hard immigrant was often the first to be laid off. During those times, he consoled himself with humorous clichés such as "rags to riches to rags" and "riches again." But the rags-cum-longer-than-expected, well... it was time for the abused women to demand to be let to the hotline or seek refuge in shelters for the abused.

Fodor! Dostoevsky, that incomparable driver of human psyche, once wrote that human beings have three kinds of secrets: one that they reveal to others, another that they reveal only to themselves, and the third deadly kind, which they dare not reveal even to their own selves. Exiles, too, harbour secret traumas and exist within themselves, some which they reveal to others, but others not even to themselves. One of these, nurtured silently in the deepest recess of one's clamorous consciousness, is used to console oneself during moments of despair. From one's own mind, it is a secret mantra, it is when the going gets tough, one can always go back home! Usually after a long night of drinking, certain deep-seated secrets, if not sentimentalised, suddenly burst forth in swift, fragmented utterances, or dribble out slowly, like boiling, liquid fury, self out from the cracks in the person's cover, such as: "It is wonderful to live abroad when young, bright, but once you get old, even your children will forget you. Then it is hell."

But to return home, does one have to wait until one is reduced to a doddering, blabbering old fool? Does one really want one's talents when one returns home when one is one's prime? It is not to be uncomfortable back home, but if a return is inevitable, then it may be better to follow the

(Rajendra Khadka is the editor of Traveller's Tale Nepal, published in San Francisco in 1997. He lives in Kathmandu.)

ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

♦ **Nepali and Hindi movies** online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

EVENTS

- ♦ **St Augustine's Alumni Association of Nepal** Lunch get-together at Hotel Nirvana Garden, Thamel. Rs 200 for singles, Rs 350 for couples, Rs 550 for couple with two children under 12. 26 January, 12 noon onwards. 432922
- ♦ **Guitar workshop** by two classical guitarists. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 27 January, 10.30AM-12.30PM. Rs 250 per head. 248999
- ♦ **Nepali classical dance and folk music** at Hotel Vajra. Dances of Hindu and Buddhist gods Tuesdays and Fridays, 7PM onwards, the Great Pagoda Hall. Ticket and tea Rs 400. Nepali folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6.30PM onwards, hotel restaurant. Hotel Vajra. 271545
- ♦ **Contemporary jazz dance classes** by Meghna Thapa. At Alliance Francaise Sundays and Tuesdays 4.30PM-6.30PM, 241163. At Bani's, Hotel Yak & Yeti, Kathmandu, Wednesdays 6.30PM-8PM, Saturdays 1.30PM-4.30PM, 434830
- ♦ **Beetle Mania, tribute to George Harrison:** Poolside party with live band, DJ. Come in a Beetle, pay Rs 2,222 for as many as will fit in the car. Rs 450 per person head with drink and snack. Free tickets with *The Himalayan Times* quiz. Hotel de l'Annapurna, 25 January, 3PM onwards. 221711



MUSIC

- ♦ **Classical guitar for world peace** Renowned guitarists from Thailand, Germany, Japan and Nepal. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 26 and 27 January, 4PM. Rs 400 per day, Rs 700 whole festival. Classical Guitar Society of Nepal and Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ♦ **Coffee and live music** with Dinesh and Tilak. Saturdays, Saturday 6.45PM-9.15PM. Himalatte Café, Thamel. 262526
- ♦ **Live music** Tuesday and Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant. 414336

EATING OUT

- ♦ **International Duck Festival** Lunch and dinner duck recipes from around the world using imported duck. Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti, until 31 January. 248999
- ♦ **Winter Specials** Hot mulled wine, rataatoule-filled pancakes, Chicken hoisin. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
- ♦ **Winter drinks** Khukuri cocktails at the Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 221711
- ♦ **Mamma Mia** Pizzas with special toppings, special pasta menu and complimentary Coke with every order, 15 percent discount for Standard Chartered Bank credit card holders. Complimentary shuttle from Pokhara lake-side four times daily. Shangi-La Village, Pokhara. 061-22122



- ♦ **Ceremonial cuisine** Six to 20 course dinners from \$19, four-course lunches \$13. Krishnarpan Restaurant, Dwarika's Hotel. 479488
- ♦ **Combo Meals** with burgers, salads, fries, coke, pasrry, all Rs 350. 3PM-6PM, The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel. 411818
- ♦ **Children's Saturday** Games, prizes and food every Saturday, 12 noon onwards. Bakery Café Baneshwor and Teku.
- ♦ **Rox Restaurant and Bar** Traditional European cuisine from woodfired oven in show kitchen. Live music, cocktails and snacks at the Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 491234
- ♦ **Authentic Thai** food Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant. 425510
- ♦ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialities. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg. 225890
- ♦ **Barbecue lunch** with complementary wine or beer for adults, soft drink for children. Saturdays and Sundays at the Godavari Village Resort. 560675

GETAWAYS

- ♦ **Escape to Nagarkot** Special packages for Nepalis and expats at The Tea House Inn. Singles Rs 800 B&B, couples Rs 1,200 B&B. 410432, 680048
- ♦ **Fresh air and tranquility in Kathmandu Valley** Stay at Triple A Organic Farm Guest-house in Gamcho, south of Thimi. Rs. 1,500 per person per night, all-inclusive. Email aaa@wink.com.np. 631766
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Yak Yeti Yak is on holiday and will return next week.

BOOKWORM



Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical history, Contested Meaning, and the Globalisation of South Asia David Ludden, ed
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001
Rs 1,112
The most important and influential change in South Asian, especially Indian historiography in recent years has been brought about by the Subaltern Studies project. This volume of critiques and "readings" of that project is the first comprehensive historical introduction to the movement and the worldwide debates it has generated among historians, political scientists and sociologists.

Civilizations Felipe Fernández-Armesto
Pan Macmillan, London, 2001
Rs 700

This volume examines societies from the maritime civilisations of the Polynesians to the Dawada people of the Sahana and, in focusing on cultures other than those of Imperial Rome, Enlightenment Paris or Renaissance France, gives new insights into how humanity survives. It concludes that societies can be judged on how civilised they are, but only by investigating their interaction with their own environment.



People, Policies, and Plans: Foreign Aid and Health Development Judith Justice
Mandala Publications/ University of California Press, Kathmandu/ Berkeley, 1986
Rs 335

A new low-priced edition of a classic work of medical anthropology. Through a rich ethnographic account, Justice shows how understanding local cultural information can improve health care in Nepal, and also the barriers to the use of this information at the planning level. She shows how anthropologists and planners can work together to provide health care to match the cultural systems of its target population.

Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism



Tanika Sarkar
Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001
Rs 920

Sarkar explores the Hindu ideas and conventions, as expressed in literary and social traditions, elite voices and popular culture, that gave shape to dominant—north Indian—conceptions of "caste," "wildness," "mothering," and India as a "Hindu nation." She also examines how early Indian religious traditions of sainthood, heroism and sacrifice are being subverted/ transformed by militant, fundamentalist forms of Hinduism.

Courtesy Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandala@cscl.com.np

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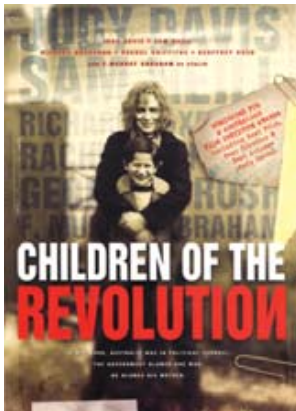
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Antipodean avant-garde



DIANE SUMMERS

Hollywood has got a fresh creative wind in recent years. Acclaimed directors such as Baz Luhrmann (Moulin Rouge, Romeo and Juliet), Jane Campion (The Piano), George Miller (Babe, Mad Max), Peter Weir (Picnic at Hanging Rock), Bruce Beresford (Winners, The Untouchables), and internationally renowned actors such as Russell Crowe, Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett, Toni Collette, Heath Ledger, Geoffrey Rush and Mel Gibson have shaken up Hollywood's standard fare of sex, violence and glitterati.

What many movie goers do not know is that these directors and stars are either born and bred Australians or, like Russell Crowe and Jane Campion, New Zealanders drawn to Australia's fine acting and film schools. Every one of them launched their careers in Australia's flourishing independent film industry.

In celebration of Australia Day, the Australian Embassy in Kathmandu is hosting a festival of contemporary Australian films from 25-28 January 2002 at the Russian Cultural Centre.

The features and short films were selected from a package prepared by the Australian Film Commission called The Embassy Roadshow. The Roadshow aims to provide an insight into Australia, its landscapes and multi-cultural lifestyle, its politics, society and culture. Films have been a success story for Australia in recent years. After all, this country of only 21 million people has managed to provide the acting and directorial space for so many original talents who went on to international success. This did not come out of the blue. A little known fact is that in the first decade of the 21st century Australia was the world's most prodigious film producing country. The advent of more expensive sound technology in 1927 and the Depression years of the 1930s killed the Australian

Australian cinema is offbeat and exciting, among the best in the world. This Australia Day, Kathmanduites can get more than a taste of it.



film industry. It lay slumbering until the 1970's, when the government established the Australian Film Commission and provided tax incentives for film investors. In a country where there are no film majors, the Australian Film Commission has provided vital assistance to the film industry by the way of financial help and the establishment of the prestigious Australian Film and Television School.

The festival kicks off with Children of the Revolution, an avant-garde film about the communist movement in Australia. Communism was widely popular in the 1950s when many Australians believed it was the political path to combating social ills. The film follows the fictitious life of Joan Fraser, a young spirited woman, who dreamt of nothing but a worker's revolution. Her stream of letters to her idol, Joseph Stalin, do not go unnoted and after a brief affair, Joan returns to Australia carrying his child.

"Young Joe", as the child is called, is Joan's hope for the future of Australia and worker's liberation. Ever the dominating and controlling mother, Joan stage crafts young Joe's life, taking him along to the political demonstrations of the day and riding high on his arrests and periodic imprisonment. But children have wills of their own, and when Young Joe takes another path, Joan can do nothing. Parallel with the disappointments in Joan's personal life, the communist movement unravels. The crimes against humanity perpetrated by Stalin become known. But Joan believes blindly in her hero and denies any wrongdoing by him. The Berlin Wall crumbles and communism slowly collapses in Europe. Young Joe has gone over to the establishment and evolves eerily into a replica of his father. Joan becomes more volatile and more desperate as her world of ideals disintegrates.

Children of the Revolution stars Judy Davis, who Woody Allen calls "probably the greatest movie actress of her generation" and who recently received an AFI award for best actress for her portrayal of Judy Garland, Sam Neill (Jurassic Park) and Academy Award winning actor, Geoffrey Rush (Shine, Elizabeth).

The Sum of Us, which is a

be screened on 26 January, is the poignant tale of a father and his son. Harry is a widower and lives with his 20-something son, Jeff. Both have something in common—they are looking for love. Harry searches for a life partner through a computer-dating agency. Jeff searches for the love of his life in the gay pubs of Sydney. In an enduring display of fatherly love and understanding, Harry accepts his son's sexuality—to the point of being meddlesome in his son's love affairs. With the backdrop of the unnoted and after a brief affair, Joan returns to Australia carrying his child.

In one of his first movies, Veteran Crowe displays an impressive thespian range in his portrayal of the easy going, warm-hearted Jeff who faces tragedy with a strength and selflessness that is the core of his being. Veteran Australian actor, Jack Thompson, conveys the loneliness that lies beneath the surface of Harry's energy and optimism. This fine Australian film depicts the gay culture of Sydney with sensitivity and clarity, and shows us that the acceptance of homosexuality is simply an act of love.

Other films to be screened include comely shorts Oups, Hoppin' Mad and Mozzie. Other features include Yolgou Boy, Looking for Alibrandi and My Mother Frank.



AMONG THE BUDDHAS King Gopendra at the historic Sanyak Mahadun Puja at Swoyambhu on Monday, 14 January.



SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW: The rains on Wednesday, 16 January, brought an unusual rainbow over a happily droughted city.



LAND ROVER BURNING: Unidentified arsonists torched a Land Rover being used by the CDO of Ramechhap in Kuponode on Tuesday, 15 January.

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NEPALI WEATHER

Better late than never. Although it came too late to be of any use to the winter wheat, the rains were welcome. The northwesterly front as we see in this satellite picture is still hugging the Himalayas and may bring some more isolated showers. But most of the precipitation had dissipated by the time this cloud formation travelled all the way from the Mediterranean. The snow has come down to 3,500 m and all high passes are covered up. With the heat cleared, the days will be sunnier with a rise in daytime temperature after the thick morning fog clears.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
18-07	20-05	21-04	21-03	22-03

Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Kleptos Anonymous



To whoever stole my mountain bike (eight-speed Hero with Kevlar handlebar and Shimano XTR M910 shifters) last week, I would like through this regular weekly column to make it clear in no uncertain terms that stealing is wrong. It is a sin. If you steal, you go to hell. You go straight to hell, and you can't collect a hundred dollars if you pass "Go". To steal is to break the Seventh Commandment (or is it the sixth) which says: "Thou Shalt Not Steal Thy Neighbour's Wife." Give her back at once.

Considering the ongoing epidemic of theft and plunder throughout the land, the bicycle thief who perpetrated the lift-and-run crime may have thought—everyone is doing it, so why can't I? Good point. Hard to argue against such absolutely convincing logic—they are all eating horse manure, so I'll also eat horse manure. Makes perfect sense.

I can understand his predicament. Some of us just can't help it, so let he who is without sin cast the first stone. For example, a certain close relative who lives in Teku between Chandroshan (Chet Bhandari) and the Veterinarian Hospital who shall remain nameless for the duration of this column, is an avid shower cap collector. He cannot stop himself when he sees a hotel

shower cap, he just must have it. They are useful: he wears them under his motorcycle helmet when it rains, and to protect himself from draft on cold nights. Till the time of going to press he had several hundred shower caps from various hotels around the world.

Since we are all in confessional mood here, let me also say that I, too, have had these urges from time to time when at the end of a hearty meal in a restaurant I can seldom suppress the urge to pocket five toothpicks—one to excavate the nooks and crannies in the molar right there and then, and four others for future reference. And Q-tips. Just can't resist Q-tips—never know when one may find oneself in a traffic jam at the Ragmati Bridge on one's way to one's office when one can use idle moments to stir lazily inside one's own inner ear. Such bliss.

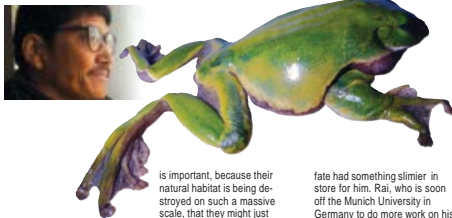
At a recent meeting of the Kathmandu chapter of Kleptomaniacs Anonymous, some colleagues made the astounding confession that they have a soft spot for shower and body gels, conditioners and body lotions from hotel bathrooms. That is when I, too, was forced to admit that I have on more than one occasion been tempted to cut off a cable-ready Sony Z7' Blam from the Hat Yai Hyatt. Nice machine. Only the fear of having to pay excess baggage and slip a couple of big ones to the customary officials at Tribhuvan International Airport stopped me from lifting it. But only barely. The real reason I did not steal said Sony was because it didn't fit in my pocket.

Some of the other participants at the klepto meeting were high government officials. One admitted that he had not returned his office Pajero even after he was sacked for faking his MA certificate from Darbhanga University, but that he might keep the car for a few weeks more because he had to go down to Hetauda for his brother-in-law's wedding. I wanted to tell him he should take a bicycle, but that would mean stealing it from someone. ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Kalu Ram's frogs and geckos



At first glance, it is hard to imagine Kalu Ram Rai getting cosy with cold-blooded frogs and geckos. But this Tribhuvan University lecturer of zoology has spent 17 years teaching and adding to Nepal's herpetofauna by introducing new species of frogs, lizards, and even a turtle. And soon, he is going to realise the first-ever PhD on the subject from TU.

For the last two years Rai has spent a lot of time in different parts of east Nepal collecting samples for his dissertation, the impressive sounding "Environmental Impact, Systematics and Distribution of Herpetofauna in East Nepal". For this soft-spoken man with reptilian tastes, it is something of a race against time. "Identifying and recording these species

is important, because their natural habitat is being destroyed on such a massive scale, that they might just disappear even before we know they exist," he says.

In the course of his research, Rai recorded three new species of amphibians and two new reptile species—the foot-long *Gekko gekko*, a rare species of lizard locally known as Tok Tokoh. The earthworm-like *Ichthyophis*, a limbless amphibian, was also recorded for the first time in Nepal by Rai, along with several others species of frogs, such as the *Sphaerotheres nandae*, the *Kalula taprobatica*, and even a flying frog—*Rhacophorus maximus* (see pic). Rai's turtle goes by the zoological name of *Cyclemys oldhami*.

Born in Chumlung Village Development Committee of Khotang district, Rai was educated in a simple village school. As a child, he dreamt of becoming a medical doctor, but

late had something slimmer in store for him. Rai, who is soon off the Munich University in Germany to do more work on his findings, doesn't mind. He because the more such professionals Nepal has, the better.

We profiled another herpetologist, Karan B Shah in October ("Karan's wild side," #57). It turns out Shah and Rai, though competing with each other to become the first PhD in herpetology from TU, are fast friends. "We share our information whenever we need it, but this time I might end up first, as Shah registered for the PhD later than I did."

Rai's discoveries are not all purely zoological either. Traveling around, he discovered that many communities in the high hills of eastern Nepal eat some species of frogs, like the *Man Paha*. "People in the hills use it as food because they have limited access to a nutritious diet. It tastes a bit like chicken." A new Nepali export? ♦

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