


EXCLUSIVE

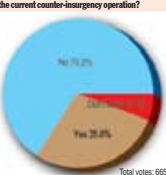
SWC also rises

A new draft bill that the government says it needs to coordinate grants to non-governmental organisations is raising fears of Panchayat-style controls on Nepal's civil society. The Social Welfare Council (SWC) wants all NGOs in Nepal to operate under one umbrella so it is easier to keep track of who is doing what. "This will increase transparency, make NGOs more accountable and effective," says the SWC's Tika Pokhrel. But activists and foreign charities in Nepal are not so sure. In fact, they say, the bill reminds them of the SWC's predecessor, the Social National Services Coordination Council which had a reputation for rent-seeking and graft. "This is a dangerous power-grab," one NGO representative based in Nepal told us. "Making the SWC a one-stop shop will centralise corruption, it will be a place where officials will demand a cut from all the charity money coming into Nepal."


The bill came up in the prelims on Tuesday for the Nepal Development Forum meeting where activist and First Lady Arzu Rana Debata said the SWC had outlived its usefulness. "There is a need for some kind of regulatory body, but the SWC is not it," she said.

SWC officials, for their part, say they need to be able to monitor money coming into the country so it is not channelled to the Maoists, and also to curb the proliferation of fly-by-night NGOs.

**nepalnews.com**
Daily News Online 11:11 AM
Q. Do you believe the Nepali media's coverage of the current counter-insurgency operation?



Total votes: 655

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Khumbu hopes for spring

Despite the emergency, trekking and mountaineering may lift Nepal's sagging tourism.

RAMYATA LIMBU IN LUKLA

Something does not make much sense here. Political instability, the royal massacre, 11 September, India-Pakistan tension, and the Maoist insurgency hurt Nepal's tourism very badly last year. So how come the number of trekkers visiting the Khumbu was not affected much in 2001 compared to the previous year?

The only explanation is Mt Everest. It is still Nepal's main draw. And adventure tourists appear less spoiled by security concerns than other types of tourists. Just over 25,000 trekkers and mountaineers came to Namche Bazar in 2000, while last year the numbers dropped slightly to 22,000. Khumbu is a one-industry area, and everyone here is looking forward to the spring season. A dip is expected, but the 2001 figures give them hope that things will not be so bad.

"They're still coming to see Mt Everest," says Jangbu Sherpa of Namche's Café Danke which is called "the world's highest bar". Despite a quiet new year owing to a dawn to dusk curfew in Namche and the state of emergency, tourists are still walking up the trail from Lukla. They gather for an early drink and a meal at the Café Danke and head off to their lodges before the soldiers from the barracks overlooking Namche's amphitheatre begin their patrols.

There is talk of a trekker who forgot there was a curfew and ventured out at dawn to catch the sun rise over Mt Everest when an alert sentry at the barracks accosted them with a semi-automatic. But, by and large, the counter-insurgency war seems to be happening far away from the stupendously beautiful scenery of these mountains.

The Maoist attack on the barracks at Salleri on 26 November that plunged the country into an emergency, and brought the army out to fight the Maoists, is the nearest that the fighting has come. But trekking agents are worried that exaggerated international news reports that cited the attacks as happening "at the foothills of Mt Everest" may have done some damage to Khumbu tourism.

Lukla is a two day walk from Salleri and there are hopes here of a tourism revival following the renovation of Lukla airport at a cost of Rs 130 million. Lukla's famous inclined runway is now a modern asphalt strip. No more parking problems for aircraft, and the hair-raising landings are smoother.

But the emergency has put a dampener on things. Then there was a scare in mid-January when plastic explosives, copper wire, and Maoist propaganda literature were found in a village below the airstrip after an explosion. There is no army presence in Lukla and there is just a small police contingent for the passenger security checks.

Lukla airport's station-in-charge, Passing Geljen Sherpa has asked for additional security from the Civil Aviation Authority in Kathmandu. "We haven't had a response so far," he said. When asked why, a CAA official in Kathmandu told us the army was over-stressed guarding five other airports and it was unlikely that soldiers could be spared for Lukla.

Anticipating the inaction, Lukla citizens have got together on their own to maintain security and protect the tourism industry. They close shop early and patrols keep a check on new faces in town. "It's the best we can do," says Lukla VDC chairman, Funuru Sherpa.

There is no help from Kathmandu and after the attack on Salleri, the two dozen policemen who were here were withdrawn to the army barracks in Namche. The policemen are now back, but they haven't been able to instill much confidence in Lukla.

There are up to four flights that come in every day, ferrying mainly Japanese trekkers. By the time the sun sets behind the Karyolung ridge line, Lukla is quiet, the restaurants and hotels close early, policemen melt into their separate quarters in the town. By next morning there is a brief flurry of activity as Twin Otter fly in from Kathmandu, the tourists hire their porters, and are off on the Namche trail.

But there is something other than the Maoist threat that makes Lukla residents



Lukla's new runway, still taking off downhill

nervous. It is the CAA's reported plan to refurbish Syangboche airstrip above Namche and make it capable of taking short-takeoff-and-landing aircraft. "If that happens, we're ruined," says a Lukla hotel owner about the business that will bypass Lukla as trekkers and mountaineers start flying directly to Namche.

The decision to build Syangboche appears to be the result of a falling out between tourism minister Bal Bahadur KC and his party cadre in Lukla who staged a demonstration against him on 16 October during the inauguration ceremony of the renovated airport.

"Bal Bahadur was angry about the loss of face in front of all those dignitaries," explained a Lukla lodge-owner. "His revenge was to make tourists go directly to Syangboche." KC's cadre were unhappy about the shoddy construction of the newly-built supporting wall along the northern edge of the runway which already looks fragile and may not survive the next monsoon.

If Syangboche goes ahead, Lukla locals may repeat their 1997 sit-in on the runway to protest cargo and passenger helicopters flying tourists directly to Syangboche. The airport opened for traffic only after the government stopped those helicopter flights.

But even if Syangboche does open, it may be safe for trekkers to keep flying to Lukla to allow time to acclimatise. An engineer who flew to Syangboche to survey the runway extension recently had to be evacuated after he was felled by altitude sickness.

No exit for Indosuez?

Credit Agricole is by now so sick of legal tangles in Nepal, it is getting ready to pack its bags and go.

BINOD BHATTARAI

The plot thickens in the divestment saga of Nepal Indosuez as two private Nepali investor groups battle it out in the courts for shares in one of Nepal's first foreign joint-venture banks.

But Indosuez's French parent company, Credit Agricole, is so fed up of the complications that have arisen after a legal challenge from a rival Nepali business house to its divestment plan that it is getting ready to pack up its bags and go. "If no decision is taken by 15 February we may simply leave the country," one senior Credit Agricole executive warned Wednesday. "And that will be a very bad day for Nepal."


Indosuez was finalising its deal on a formal offer made by a consortium led by Prithvi Bahadur Pande, former general manager of Himalayan Bank, when the Chaudhary Group disclosed earlier this month that it had agreed with Indosuez as far back as 1998 to buy its stocks. No one knew that a memorandum of understanding existed between Binod Chaudhary of the Chaudhary Group and Indosuez—not even the Nepal Rastra Bank.


After preliminary efforts to litigate in Singapore late October, the Chaudharys decided to bring it up at a Nepali court. The Supreme Court is now hearing the case, after a round at the appeals court. The Supreme Court has ordered additional information of the proposed acquisition, including details of the prospective buyers.

Chaudhary's lawyers are trying to establish that the 1998 MOU is a "binding contract", while Credit Agricole lawyers are set to prove that it is not a watertight agreement, but subject to a contract. How the Indosuez story unfolds will now depend on the battle between these two business giants and the court verdict: whether the agreement will be enforceable, if so the price, payment methods, and if the central bank will allow Chaudhary to buy.

There could also be questions on whether Indosuez should have entered into an MOU in the first place, disregarding issues like its promoter partner's right of first refusal. "We were trying to establish that the Chaudhary Group has the right of first refusal because of the agreement," says Sushil Pant, who represented the Chaudhary's at the appeals court. "Whether the central bank will permit it to buy is something else." Credit Agricole's lawyer Sudhir Shrestha responds: "My client's contention is that the MOU is subject to further contract depending on negotiation, it is not a contract."

The legal battle is about basics. But there is a larger war here between rival Nepali businesses in which a foreign investor is trapped and can't extricate itself from Nepal even if it wants to. Credit Agricole officials don't understand what is so complicated: they want to sell shares to one group and the other group is putting a legal spanner in the works. And they say they have reached the end of their patience. Said the senior executive: "We are being held hostage. We are disgusted, because there is no rule of law."

**CRÉDIT AGRICOLE**

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HOPING FOR HOPE...

Nothing perhaps symbolised the waffling and thumb-twiddling in Nepal's present political leadership as much as the answer Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba gave at a joint press conference with US Secretary of State Colin Powell last week. Powell had just finished underlining the importance of improving governance and curbing corruption, when a reporter asked Deuba how he was going to address those issues.

In a classic case of passing-the-buck, our prime minister replied that there was the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Good thing he didn't use the acronym, otherwise Colin Powell might have thought for a moment that Deuba was seeking help from Langley HQ to apprehend Nepali kleptocrats.

Deuba reminded us of the fox guarding the hen coop: saying there is no need to worry because a rabbit is keeping watch. What astounds us is that even at a time like this, when the country is falling to pieces and there is a state of national emergency in full swing, corruption has reached new heights (or is it depths?). There is a renewed sense of desperation to the looting. They're plundering as if there is no tomorrow. At this rate, there won't be a tomorrow.

Our ship of state is like a super tanker that needs ten miles or more to respond to the captain's command. Any intervention made today to address poverty or generate jobs will take ages to show results. It is at times like these that symbolism matters. And what could be more symbolic than cutting the cabinet size to save Rs 50 million. Nothing would be more symbolic than making a concerted push to ensure basic health, education and services reach at least the headquarters of all 75 districts in the next two months.

Symbolism shows there is hope for the future, even if there is no immediate relief. The super tanker begins to turn. Hope is the most potent weapon in the government's arsenal. It is much more potent than helicopter gunships with night-vision. To restore faith in government, and to raise hope that the future has something good in store, Prime Minister Deuba needs to take charge and maybe take the advice of an inmate at Alcatraz jail who told us: "Can the prime minister dare spend a week in Ropax" (#77). Without even symbolic actions to back intentions, speeches by our leaders have started sounding hollow.

...AND HOPELESSNESS.

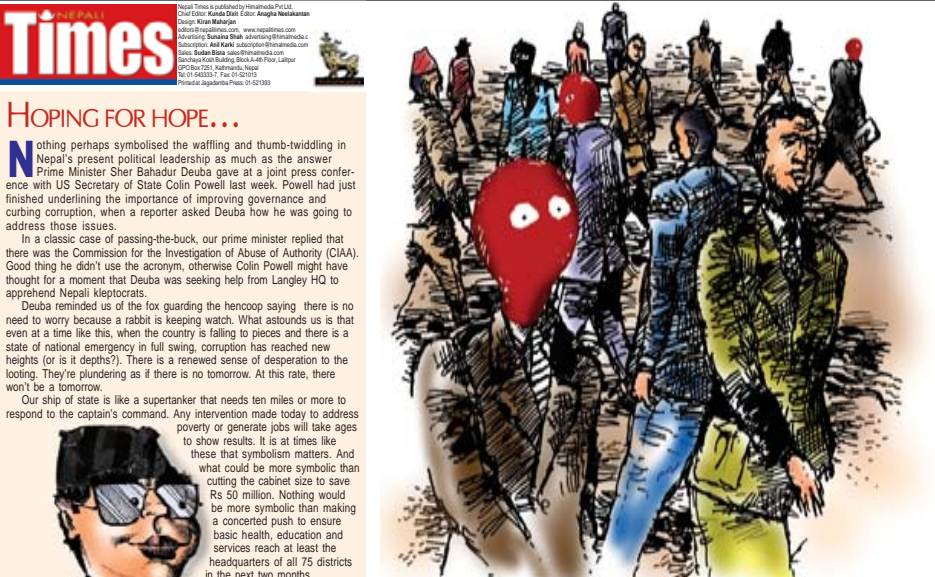
The Maoist strategy is to spread hopelessness. To show that this country has no future. And they are doing it with devastating effect by decreasing the government's revenue through threats and intimidation against business, and increasing state expenditure by ratcheting up the insurgency and forcing army deployment nationwide. The Maoists know time is on their side, and the longer this goes on, the more hopelessness it will breed. It is a smart, if somewhat desperate, move. The government and the security forces will have to counter by being even smarter. Unfortunately, we have seen only brute force, not too many flashes of brilliance.

Cornered by the army, the Maoists in the past weeks have been targeting what remains of the rural educated. They have launched a murder spree of village school teachers and social activists. The brutality of the killings is calculated to sow terror. We don't see the point of this unless it is a sign of reckless desperation. Which revolutionary handbook says you win over the support of the people through fear? Not Mao's. How does it help the revolution to slaughter ordinary village elders who are not your class enemy, just people who disagree with your method?

The teacher in Lamjung was tied to a tree, tortured and killed with a bullet in the heart. The teacher in Khotang was taken away, his hands and legs broken before he was killed. The teacher in Gorkha was dragged out of the classroom and butchered in front of his students. A 70-year-old man was killed as his grandchildren looked on.

Despite the emergency, the wave of extortion and threats have reached levels unprecedented even by the barbarous standards previously set by the comrades. Civil servants, teachers, health post attendants now have to pay 30 percent of their monthly salary to the Maoists. They have been told it may soon go up to 50 percent. The Ministry of Education, which is the biggest employer in Nepal, spends up to Rs 9 billion a year on salaries for teachers—it looks like nearly half of that is now going directly into the Maoists' coffers as ransom money. This may be something the delegates at the Nepal Development Forum pledging meeting next week may want to mull on.

Deuba has a point when he says peace is a precondition for development. But it is lack of development that endangers peace.



STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

Let them eat cake

Mutu maathi dhunga raakhi hasnu parya chha.

The remembrance of things past is part recollection and part recreation. Like the appearance of a rainbow on a rain-soaked day, memorable occurrences are too fleeting to leave a permanent impression. What we later remember is largely a picture of our own imagination. And with every lick, a part of the ice-cream melts in the mouth.

Describing such experiences based on memory is, then, an exercise in creativity.

This story too is part fact, part fiction—a fictional account. Much scientific research has shown that memory cannot be trusted without independent sources of verification. Details of this description may not stand up to close scrutiny. After all, it was such a long time ago, and memory starts to weaken with age.

Once there lived a carefree young in a rented room inside Nasringi Camp at Thamel. Two of his immediate neighbours stayed on the same floor of the house were a taxi driver and a cook. The young man never paid much attention to either. That was until he discovered, quite by chance, that the taxi driver was none other than Nepal's most famous singer, the late Narayan Gopal.

The taxi driver Narayan Gopal was unusually shy. He didn't talk much with anyone, let alone the young man who apparently did nothing other than read thick tomes all day long. Confronted with awe-struck namaskars, the legendary singer would sometimes respond with an absent-minded wave of his hand—highly creative people are introverted because their minds are otherwise occupied. In addition to being an idol to his fans, Narayan Gopal is now a cultural symbol of even Nepal's self-styled progressives.

Maoist critics lament that Narayan Gopal didn't sing 'songs of the people'. That is probably the best compliment to Narayan Gopal. Good thing he didn't,

Narayan Gopal didn't need to prove himself to anyone. He had attained, to use a Gandhian expression, "a harmony between thought and action, experienced the unity between art and life". He didn't need to be a card-carrying representative of the masses to speak to them through music. And Narayan Gopal's songs purified the soul.

Mass media, and democracy, turned Narayan Gopal into a national icon. But his neighbour in the Thamel apartment, Babu Kaji, turned out to be a different sort of artist in a medium that is much less recognised. He became the Master Chef of Nanglo—another name that is now a legend in its own right. For quarter of a century, Babu Kaji's creations have pampered the palate of millions of tricky connoisseurs and demanding customers.

Zealous fans of our Swar-Samrat will find it preposterous to put Babu Kaji on a pedestal with their idol. But Narayan Gopal himself would have had no objection. He was a practical person with few pretensions. And Prout would have certainly approved: no art is as powerful as an honest portrayal of everyday life.

At the rooftop restaurant of Nanglo recently, I was struck again by the magic that ambience and food can evoke. There

was an aroma of hot soup wafting in the winter sun, the sight and sound of a sizzler arriving. In such a setting, Ashwini Tharu planned a month-long art festival parting after something similar in Europe, or Kericho Yonjan visualising a grand boulevard on the scale of Champ Elysee between Bhadrakali and Singha Darbar, sound perfectly realistic. Eating in the sun below the blue skies in the company of friends you realise what may have made Louis Armstrong sing "What a wonderful world".

But joy is a fragile feeling. It falls on the ground of hard realities, and shatters. A bejewelled woman is by the door of her car, a uniformed chauffeur shoots two street dirt cars, Sher Bahadur Deuba's government is generating taxes through an ordinance. Holding the SAARC Summit was a matter of prestige for Nepal, and Deuba looked visibly gleeful when he suddenly saw President Musharraf.

Extending his hand to Prime Minister Vajpayee. But raising taxes to pay for his

41-member jumbo cabinet? Perhaps Deuba's political mentor has an answer. Asked whether his personal honesty had any meaning in the political environment of a country where the word politics itself has become synonymous with corruption, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai replied on camera that being a nose could relieve you from the guilt of having mounds of manure at your roots. And only Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat could have come up with a scheme as ingenious as voluntary disclosure of property. Mahat is so forgetful that he once forgot to disclose his own foreign bank account.

As the third flatmate, that carefree youth sharing the Thamel apartment with Babu Kaji and Narayan Gopal, I look at the two and realise that living with inconsistencies is what makes life bearable in these contradictory times. ♦



The present situation in Nepal is similar to an insect caught in a spider's web. Whatever it does to fly free, the insect gets more entangled in the sticky silk. The problem is that the ruling Nepali Congress has abandoned even the effort that a fly caught in a web exerts.

The government has shed its responsibility to resolve the country's problems, and has handed it all over to the security forces and the army. In fact, the activities of the prime minister and the cabinet seem to be confined to keeping indiscriminate taxes on the Nepali people and justifying it by saying they need to pay for security, using the emergency to muzzle the press, and restricting human rights.

Our country's problems are no longer confined to law and order. We now face an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. In fact, it is the current recession and unemployment that may bring Nepal to its knees, not the security situation. Uncertainty, drift and anarchy threaten Nepal and Nepals. Will the present wave of murder, mayhem, violence and insecurity persist? For how long? Will the blood and tears ever cease? When will we see the beginning of a revival in business climate, in investment, in tourism? How can we get out of this trap? What will it take to set us free?

Many Nepalis are asking these questions, and they are at a loss to find answers. Like it or not, we are caught in a vicious cycle of violence. There is no point blaming it all on fate and shaking our heads, the time has come to band together to jointly find answers and work towards a solution. For this, the government must first abandon its selfish, venal and inhuman response to the sufferings of the Nepali people.

The political leadership must take the initiative to look for solutions to the present crisis—in fact that responsibility falls on the shoulders of the president of the ruling party and the prime minister. It is no longer about who becomes prime minister, who gets to stay on the job. It is about who is best capable of solving the problems we face. All political parties that believe in the Constitution

must unite and work together.

Even though the Maoist threat did require the military to be mobilised to restore order, the situation did not warrant the declaration of a state of national emergency. The government could have taken the political parties into confidence and deployed the army and declared an emergency only in certain areas. Although the army has achieved some successes, the terrorist activities of the Maoist have not abated.

On political, economic and social fronts, the emergency has not yielded the desired results. In fact, the possibility is growing that the emergency may actually turn out to be counterproductive for the nation and the people. The biggest negative impact is on the economy—the emergency has virtually killed off the tourism industry. Domestic transport, especially the night bus services are severely limited, industries are closing down, people are losing jobs. And at a time like this, the government is using the excuse of falling

revenues to raise the tax burden. It is not addressing its own profligacy, inefficiency and incompetence, but is instead squandering the people who are already squeezed enough. If things go on at this rate, the people's patience may soon snap.

There is therefore no alternative but for the government itself to lift the state of emergency. It must begin a dialogue with the opposition parties before the next parliament sitting to discuss ending the state of emergency. It is becoming obvious that the Maoist plan now is to prolong the conflict by sowing more violence. Since they cannot take on the army, the Maoists are now brutally murdering unarmed civilians and innocent citizens, keeping up the level of violence to force an extension of the emergency.

NOT-SO-SHINY

The Maoists have escalated these assassinations and murders of non-combatants in the past few

weeks, and the question that must be asked is this: is the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) turning from a political group with terrorist leanings into a terrorist group with some political leanings? The Maoists fashioned themselves after the Shining Path and used to say that they wanted to turn Nepal into Peru. Their wish may come true because their later actions invite the fate of the Shining Path and its leader, Gonzalo Cordova. The Prachanda Path is now headed towards the same dead-end as the Shining Path. Don't Prachanda, Baburam, Kiran and Badal see this?

Maybe they are too busy trying to destroy what remains of the government's legitimacy and standing, dragging the army into controversy, and engineer a split among the constitutional parties. A rift between the army, political parties and government, fomenting distrust between political parties and the monarchy, this is what they want. It is important for all political parties and individuals to be vigilant

LETTERS

Nepal... (#76). It is the rural people who always suffer from state of emergency. But who will hear their cry? The media is forced to keep quiet, human rights organisations are marginalised and most political parties are silent. And even the government does not know how long the present situation will last. Diverging development money to security will only make the situation worse because it will not address the roots of the crisis, which is the result of the government's past neglect of development.

Umesh Chandra Rai
Lagankehl

Your editorial ("We and the west," #77) is confusing and needlessly emotional. Nepalis fought two world wars for freedom, not for western powers alone. Those who fought were well compensated by the British. If the British and the Indians were to stop recruiting our young boys for their armies, we would have two alternatives: wash dishes in India or join the Maoists. Bahans oppose Gurkha recruitment because they do not benefit from it as much. For janajatis, a foreign army is the best possible employment opportunity. And why should the west pay for the corruption of our leaders? All political army leaders are highly corrupt, the king and the army are our only hope.

Lila Khatiwada
Los Banos, Philippines

COLIN POWELL
It's pretty clear that everybody is baffled by Colin Powell's unexpected visit. But the manner in which both your editorial ("We and the west," #77) and the usually excellent CK Lal (#77) focus on the US Secretary of State's visit to Nepal in the context of increased financial aid is pretty disappointing. The direction of your write-ups confirm the deep malaise that affects the Nepali mindset—that of a conviction in our impotence. We have utterly no trust in our own ability to set our house in order and to move

Ram Limbu
Sydney

Just read in your Internet edition the informative article on Prithvi Narayan Shah. However, I failed to see the logic behind the three cups hanging around at the base of the statue of the Great Unifier.

Jack Prasai
Botswana

DEVELOPMENT, NOT WAR
I agree with Binod Bhattarai's "Meanwhile, in the rest of

full speed ahead in the path of economic and social development. This is why all our efforts towards such goals are so half-hearted and so fruitless. Foreign aid at this time is always welcome but the real solution lies in our own deep-rooted problems.

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Rajendra Rai
Pulchowk

Your editorial addressed to Colin

Powell was meant more for our own government than for the US Secretary of State. The Americans may help, but as you say, in the end it will have to be the government that must get its act together by curbing corruption and delivering development through effective decentralisation.

Gopal Gurung
Saneha

FOGgy
CK Lal's column on the tarai, "The sun will come out tomorrow" (#76), was, well, foggy. If winter crops have caused the fog should we then stop cultivating wheat and starve? Instead of carping about tube-wells, he should have suggested alternatives. Should we build dams?

Sanjay Shah
Birgunj

NOT FIRST
At the end of Vijay Kumar's "Down, but not out" (#77) you state that he was one of the first journalists to be allowed to visit the frontline in the army's counter-insurgency war. But his visit was almost a month after I went along with some of my colleagues at Kantipur Publications, visited Ghorahi and Kapurkot.

Tilak Pokharel
The Kathmandu Post

Bhaskar Koirala
by email

POLLS
The Nepal Times/Nepalnews.com weekly polls gave a grossly inaccurate view of what a majority of Nepalis think. It only reflects the opinions of those who are computer and internet literate. The result does not represent the inclinations of most Nepalis.

Bhaskar Koirala
by email

to counter this conspiracy to undermine our national democracy and constitution.

The international political mainstream is firm in its belief in multiparty democracy, an open society, a competitive political and economic system, freedom and human rights. Any political party that ignores these values is not true to the people's wishes. The Maoists are defying this world trend.

You cannot have a revolution by just lifting the jargon of "new socialisms" from Mao Zedong's little red book. In fact, our Maoists have gone against the basic tenets of Maoism by carrying out activities that can only be called terrorist. Could it be that Prachanda and Baburam are powerless and are forced to say these things at gunpoint by their own comrades?

What should the government do? One decision it can take immediately is to reduce the size of its jumbo cabinet, and cut unnecessary expenditure. Every minister must have only one minister. All hangers-on and advisers must be removed. All foreign travel at official expense must be curtailed, receptions, parties and other unnecessary expenses and perks restricted. If the government doesn't take care in its own backyard, it has no right to pass the burden to the people. Other immediate steps that need to be taken:

• A constitutional and legal framework must be set up to curb corruption.

• Investment and business must be protected to spur economic growth.

• Development work must be unleashed.

• Socio-economic reform must be introduced.

To make these things happen, it is vital to govern nationally. Prachanda, Baburam, Sher Bahadur and Girija Prasad have to change the way they do things. Time allows everyone an opportunity to reform, but time does not wait. The prime minister, the Nepal Congress president and the Maoist leadership should know this. But does they? It is already getting late to cut ourselves free of this spider's web. ♦

Raghavi Pant is a former journalist and a CPN-ULM MP from Lalitpur District.

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The Valley air just got viler

HEMLATA RAI

When the cement factory and civil aviation authorities say visibility is worse this year than ever before.

Chobhar officially shut down on 14 January, everyone assumed the quality of air in the capital would improve dramatically. After all, Himal Cement had for the past 25 years been pumping soot and cement dust into the valley's atmosphere.

The cement factory is gone, but the air quality has not improved. The reason is visible right here below Chobhar hill on any given morning. The factory lies idle, its stack smokeless for once, but across the Bagmati on a picturesque staircase of terraces, fields are at least six new brick kilns spewing out acrid black smoke. Across the hill below the swanky new villas at Bhatipati, and all along the southern outskirts of Patan, a pall of black-grey smog smudges the sky—overnight emission from the furnaces of hundreds of new kilns baking bricks to meet the increasing construction demand of Kathmandu Valley.

The effect of all this smoke is not readily apparent to city dwellers. But in southern Patan residents complain that laundry hanging up to dry, tables and chairs have a veneer of black soot every morning. What this is doing to the lungs of valley residents is anybody's guess.

A study by the environmental group, Clean Energy Nepal (CEN), showed that there are three times higher levels of particulate matter in the air in villages located near brick kilns compared to villages which had no kilns. Although the brick kilns are not the only culprits, environmental activists say that they are emerging as the single biggest cause of particulate pollution in the valley. Old vehicles, adulterated diesel, construction activity, burning rubbish heaps are the other causes.

The kilns are arrayed in an arc between Bhaktapur to Thamel, and night-time emissions here mix with Kathmandu Valley's notorious fog to create a dense grey smog every morning. This

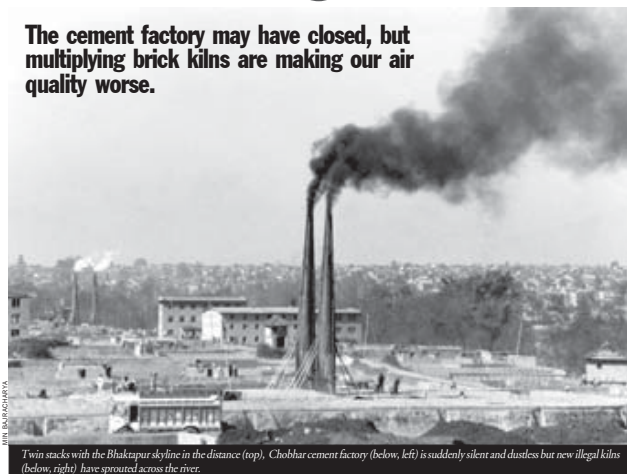
cloud of pollution is right on the flight path of Kathmandu airport, and civil aviation authorities say visibility is worse this year than ever before.

In the past two months, there has been a sharp increase in the number of flight cancellations and aborted landings at this airport," a meteorologist at the Air Transport Support Centre at the airport told us. While he wouldn't speculate on how much of this is due to the brick kilns beyond the end of the runway, he admitted that "poor visibility is greatly exacerbated by high levels of suspended particulate matter in the air".

A captain with Royal Nepal Airlines who flies Boeing 757s says he has never seen it as bad as this winter. "Sometimes the smog does not lift till past noon. And even if the runway 20 approach is clear (from the north) the 02 approach (from the south) is completely covered up." Bigger jets of international airlines all make instrument approaches from the south, but visibility is reduced to below the minimum required for landings because of the brick kiln-induced smog on final approach.

According to a landmark survey in 1996 by the World Bank, the number of days in January with visibility more than 8 km at noon had decreased from 25 days in the 1970s to only five days in 1993. In 2000, this further deteriorated to only two days. Meteorologists now say air quality has got worse in the past year because of the kilns. Flight cancellations are affecting the already crisis-ridden tourism industry, and causing significant losses in revenue for airlines who have to burn more fuel to hold in the air, or make costly diversions to other airports because of poor visibility in Kathmandu.

The Nepal Environment and Scientific Services (NESS) regularly measures Kathmandu's air pollution levels, and has identified unsuitably-built kilns as major polluters, burning far too much low-grade coal for the volume of bricks they



Twin stacks with the Bhaktapur skyline in the distance (top). Chobhar cement factory (below, left) is suddenly silent and dustless but new illegal kilns (below, right) have sprouted across the river.



produce. They are called "bull trench" kilns and have been banned in just about every other country in the region because of their primitive design. Making matters worse is that they burn either low-grade coal, and some even pack tyres and plastic waste into the furnaces to get

them started. In the past year, brick kilns have come up all over the Valley with spectacular speed. The state of emergency and the counter insurgency operations have driven thousands of families who are scared of being caught in the crossfire to the safety of Kathmandu. (See "People moved by the people's war", #41) and homeowners here are cashing in on the phenomenon by rushing to add floors to their buildings. The Central Bureau of Statistics recorded less than one percent

growth in the construction sector last fiscal year, but it is estimated to grow by three percent in 2001/02. The real estate market which had crashed has suddenly picked up in Kathmandu.

The building blocks of the construction boom are bricks. And these are baked from the fertile clay and alluvium of the valley floor. Kathmandu bricks that used to sell for Rs 1,700 per 1,000 a year ago now go for twice that. New kilns are coming up every week, and with every new room built, the quality of the capital's air deteriorates.

Visibility and air quality are both far worse in the winter months, December, January and February. Kathmandu's bowl-shaped topography makes it difficult for warm, dirty air to escape because it is trapped underneath a layer of cold air—a phenomenon called temperature inversion. Brick-baking is also concentrated in the dry winter months when farmers rent out their fallow fields to the kilns.

But there are signs of grassroots resistance. In the town of Tikathali in Lalitpur district, locals have lobbied with the

government to have seven illegal kilns outside their village banned. In Bhaktapur villagers actually attacked a polluting brick kiln and destroyed the chimney and furnace. The Godavari Village Resort in Kiti is working with the local VDC to find alternatives for nearby farmers who are tempted to rent their fields to kilns in the fallow season.

But although grassroots activism may be growing, the government is plagued by familiar lethargy. For example, the illegal kiln owners in Tikathali have so far ignored the ministry and the Lalitpur CDO office and have refused to even receive letters written by them to close down within 35 days or pay a fine. Still, the fact that locals are worried enough to take action is seen by environmental groups as a good sign.

"The resistance to brick kilns is coming from the grassroots," says Bhushan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal. "They are now much more conscious about the damage that the kilns do to the air and to the fertility of their soil."

◆



Selling our soil

Nepal has a chance to learn from the expensive mistakes we in the west made.

Along the ridge to the south of the picturesque village of Bungamati, you come to an area where previously there had been layers of fan shaped rice terraces and trees descending towards the Bagmati River. Today, there are sterile grey-brown bricks, lined up like wooden soldiers across the mutilated dead fields bereft of their topsoil.

Slip, bang, slip came the sounds of teams of men beating out more bricks to join the rest. I stood in horror at the sight of the destruction of yet more of the fertile Kathmandu Valley soil. These fields have faithfully fed families for generations, it is now being sold to some bigshot brick company. In just a few weeks the beauty and fertility will all be gone. How is Nepal to feed her growing population?

People need food, clothes, services. To purchase those, they need land or jobs. Work on the land is hard, but worse are many of the other options open to poor people—the carpet factories, street life, migration to India or the Gulf. At least working the land gives some measure of security and dignity, a quality of life (provided the air is not polluted by a brick kiln next door). This must be preferable to miserably paid labour (or no job) in an expensive city. Those who work the land often may not own it. They work for the landowner, and are

able to keep only a proportion of the crop. But they are in an even worse position when it comes to getting jobs elsewhere, at the bottom of the economic heap as the landless poor.

There are signs of popular resistance. Residents of Bhaktapur recently attacked and damaged brick kilns, which were illegal and polluting their homes. If the system fails, then people take up matters into their own hands so that a selfish few don't get what belongs to everyone. ◆

(Cherry Bird is researching environmental education in Nepal, and has lived here for five years.)

by CHERRY BIRD

tural land left in the Kathmandu Valley, which has a civilization that grew from the fertility of its soil and the hard-working farmers who tilled it.

The physical limitation imposed on the Valley by its size, water supply and the pollution-trapping characteristic of its topography means we are already exceeding the limits to its growth. The fertile soil left by the original lake should be used as much as possible for agricultural purposes. Also, we are sending it up in smoke.

Born in England at the beginning of the 1950s I grew up watching the results of the unthinking and unregulated development that followed the second world war. In the 1960s and '70s, many of us awoke to the fact that this craziness had to stop. The industrialists, money makers and politicians ridiculed our protests, telling us to "get real" and accept that pollution and environmental destruction were the price we had to pay for modern life.

Nepal has a chance to learn from the expensive mistakes we in the west made. Please take the opportunity, before it is too late. There are signs of popular resistance. Residents of Bhaktapur recently attacked and damaged brick kilns, which were illegal and polluting their homes. If the system fails, then people take up matters into their own hands so that a selfish few don't get what belongs to everyone. ◆

(Cherry Bird is researching environmental education in Nepal, and has lived here for five years.)

Water gets pricey

Drinking water is about to become more expensive, says the Nepal Drinking Water Supply Corporation.

The corporation is completing the last phase of its preparations to increase the price of drinking water by 25 percent, a Rs 2.25 increase to Rs 11.25. Kaushalath Bhattarai, manager of the corporation says the increase is absolute necessary if further projects are to be implemented. The NDWSC has been complaining of inadequate funds to increase projects to quench the Valley's growing demand for water—it says it loses Rs 5 per 1,000 litres at the current price of Rs 9, and claims that balancing the current losses would require a price hike of at least 70 percent. It will be about five years before the Melanchi Drinking Water Supply Project will bring in the expected 17 million litres of water daily to the Valley. The NDWSC hopes that the price hike will enable it to provide as much as six million litres of water per day to different parts of the city in the next few months.



Melanchi khola

Left warning

Ten Left organisations including the United Marxist-Leninists have criticised the government for mistreating innocent people and abusing activists of their parties following the declaration of the state of emergency in the country. In a common press release, the ten Left parties have demanded the immediate release of hundreds of people it says were wrongly jailed by the government. They have also criticised the government's decision to collect taxes for security purposes through a special ordinance. The parties have also called on the Maoists to check their violent activities and mistreatment of workers from other parties. The release includes a list detailing 38 cases of torture and oppression by the government, including the arrest of Chhabil Tamang, vice chairman of Bana Village Development Committee in Sankhuwasabha district. Tamang was blindfolded, beaten and then taken to an army camp, where he was allegedly given a pipe and ordered to beat other prisoners.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

UNESCO/Kathmandu invites applications from qualified Nepalese citizens for the following position.

Project Staff in Education Unit

Duty Station : UNESCO Kathmandu Office, Kathmandu, Nepal
Desired Qualifications : At least Bachelor in Education, Social Science, Community Development or any other relevant subject with minimum 5 years field experience in Education or Community Development. The candidate should have very good interpersonal skills, excellent command in written and spoken English, computer skill and proven competency to perform the following duties.

Major Duties and Responsibilities

- Support Community Learning Center (CLC) Projects as well as other projects under the education programme;
- Frequent field visits (40% of work) for providing technical support to community people and field staff, and monitoring the projects;
- Support government counterparts to coordinate with local authorities at district and community level, INGOs/NGOs/CBOs, other UN Agencies and workshops;
- Organize various training, seminars and workshops;
- Monitor and follow up on-going projects and compile reports;
- Assist in designing and planning programmes for Education Unit.

Candidates meeting the above criteria are requested to send their application along with a letter of interest, complete resume with pp photo, Nepali citizenship paper and academic certificates, to the following address by 8th February 2002. Women candidates are encouraged to apply. Only short-listed candidates will be called for an interview.

TELEPHONE INQUIRIES WILL NOT BE ENTERTAINED.

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Grey area shows where the brick kilns are concentrated at the southern edge of the Valley, and (right) smog on threshold of runway at Kathmandu airport.

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SAARC's forgotten triangle



After the SAARC summit's stifled silence on the issue of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, it's perhaps time for louder thinking on other ways of resolving it. The disappointment that has descended on the Bhutanese refugee community after the Kathmandu Declaration was released is understandable, especially since most SAARC member states are coping with their own clusters of displaced people. Septics, however, always saw little taking of the South Asian summit's tiding up the matter because the SAARC charter explicitly forbids discussion on contentious bilateral issues. Lost somewhere in the extremes was the reality that the Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal are a matter of bilateral concern. Since Nepal and Bhutan don't share a border, these hapless men, women and children had to trudge through Indian territory to their asylum in Jhapa and Morang. Moreover, it's important not to forget that a third of the 150,000 ethnic Nepalis driven out of Bhutan are still on Indian soil.

While lamenting the lack of progress on a settlement over the decade, let us not lose sight of the scale of the challenge Kathmandu and Thimphu have to surmount. Nepal says that almost all the 100,000 refugees living in camps in eastern Nepal have valid papers proving they are Bhutanese nationals. Bhutanese are unwilling to take back only genuine refugees who, it insists, number no more than a few thousand. Then there's the catch. Thimpu says many ethnic



AP/WIDE WORLD

One man's ethnic cleansing is another's preservation of nationhood.

Bhutanese refugee camp in Jhapa.

Nepal has left the country voluntarily and some had committed economic offences, which under Bhutanese law, disqualifies them from citizenship.

After nearly a dozen rounds of ministerial talks, Kathmandu and Thimphu have worked out a way of identifying and categorising the refugees. Since the complicated mechanism was spurred more by international cajoling than regional compulsions, it would perhaps be unwise to expect early repatriation.

Internationalisation of the issue contains its own risks. For each human rights group that assails the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon's

restrictive domestic policies, there is an aid agency ready to lavish praise on Thimphu for having provided as a model for sustainable development. Start talking about how ethnic Nepalis who have lived for generations on the southern plains of Bhutan are treated as second-class citizens in their own country and you'll find influential voices in the west who say they don't want another ancient culture destroyed in a whirlwind of democracy. One man's ethnic cleansing is another's preservation of nationhood.

It would probably be more sensible for Nepal to consider the

range of options it could pursue on its aid agency ready to lavish praise on Thimphu for having provided as a model for sustainable development. Start talking about how ethnic Nepalis who have lived for generations on the southern plains of Bhutan are treated as second-class citizens in their own country and you'll find influential voices in the west who say they don't want another ancient culture destroyed in a whirlwind of democracy. One man's ethnic cleansing is another's preservation of nationhood.

Such an offer from Kathmandu could also provide a clear demonstration of the kingdom's ability to engage in a home-grown version of

economic diplomacy, especially in a world full of 45 million refugees and internally displaced people. International donors, fatigued by turmoil from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, may see in Nepal's gesture a genuine reason for fast-track consideration. Once the Bhutanese refugees are assimilated in the mainstream, the money and material aid that would start pouring in would have a multiplier effect on the national economy struggling to widen a severely shrunken tax net.

What matters most, however, is the verdict of the refugees who are clinging on to tattered photographs of the houses and land they hope to return to one day. While seeking their views, it should be acknowledged that the issue could become most explosive on the geo-strategic front. A referendum under UN Security Council auspices may have to be contemplated in the camps. Instead of remaining prisoners of the past—or the present—Nepal and Bhutan should think about their common future.

Those who consider this prognosis unduly alarmist should reflect on the following scenario. One day *Kuensel* carries a cogent commentary on why the Bhutanese government should move towards raising its international profile by, among other things, establishing more embassies abroad, diversifying its sources of weaponry and naming its first SAARC secretary-general.

That piece would probably prompt enough freer thought to prompt strategic analysts in India to warn their government of how the

foreign intelligence agencies were using Bhutanese territory against India. (By the way, the chief minister of the north-east Indian state of Assam began the new year by castigating New Delhi for not doing enough to discourage cross-border terrorism on his bank.)

Under growing pressure from both North and South Blocks and an alarmed media, Indian leaders are forced to cite the 1949 treaty that guarantees Indian non-interference in Bhutan's internal affairs, but allows New Delhi influence over the kingdom's foreign relations. Thimpu responds by saying that "influence" is just a figleaf for naked intention. India argues that the accord is in line with the 1910 treaty Bhutan signed with British India, giving the shahs control over Bhutan's foreign relations. Thimpu insists that piece of history only strengthens its case for abrogating an accord that is out of step with a world in which the minor microstate is asserting its right to exercise full sovereignty. At this point, New Delhi sees the extended community of Bhutanese refugees in Khudnabari, Beldangi and other Nepali camps as useful messengers in advising Thimphu to straighten out its priorities.

All this means we'll have to find a regional solution—and soon. Perhaps the architects of sub-regional cooperation could work towards a common framework within the growth quadrangle framework. For starters, how about setting up a joint working group on the refugee triangle? ♦

Taxes=Inflation

Now every Nepali home—not just the rural teacher, political party worker or police constable—will face the brunt of the Maoist insurgency. Last week, government raised customs duties and other charges to bolster the hard-hit economy.

The most straightforward part of the tax deal is the one rupee surcharge on petroleum products, which will send prices shooting up across the board—even though the Nepal Oil Corporation has said it will absorb the added burden and keep present prices. This new fiscal measure, combined with the central bank's decision to loosen monetary policy some weeks ago, virtually guarantees severe inflation. The average National Urban Consumer Price Index was 2.8 percent in end-October, within the budgetary projection of 5 percent for this fiscal year.

The government, which decided against other possible cost-cutting measures such as trimming the cabinet, says the new taxes are temporary and will be reviewed after the current situation improves. When exactly that is, no one is saying. Government hopes to raise Rs 1.5-2 million through the following new taxes announced on 16 January:

- There is a new surcharge of Rs 1 per litre on petrol, diesel and kerosene.
- Phone bills will be higher because the telecommunications service charge has gone up to 15 percent from the earlier 10 percent, payable over the regular 10 percent Value Added Tax.
- Excise on tobacco and alcohol products was raised by an average of 5 percent and a charge will be levied even on aerated drinks and bottled water.
- Motor vehicles have been charged an additional 10 percent over the already high import duties. The duty on an imported passenger car would now be 140 percent.
- A new 1 percent security surcharge has been added on all goods in the 5 percent customs duty bracket, goods that already attracted a 1 percent surcharge are now required to pay 3 percent.

The charge for "agriculture improvements" has been raised from 5 percent to 10 percent on rice imports.

• Export service charges have been raised on some major Nepali exports to India (possibly as a bargaining chip in the trade treaty negotiations)—the new charge on hydrogenated vegetable oil is 10 percent, up from 5 percent; cathodes, wire bundles, bell, wire, sheets and copper items and zinc oxide will now be charged 6 percent; and acrylic yarns, 2 percent.

Inflation is not the only fallout of the new taxes—as prices rise and people buy less, the incentive for industry to produce more falls rapidly, and Nepal could see a long period of minimal growth. That means a deep recession.

VDIS update

The government has extended the date for Voluntary Declaration of Income Scheme to mid-February 2002. It was hoped that the drive, initially planned to run from November 2001 to mid-January 2002, would bring in unaccounted-for income in the region of Rs 4.42 billion into the tax net. Actual revenue collection in the campaign has until now been no more than Rs 442.1 million. By government estimates, about 300,000 Nepalis pay income tax and Nepal has another 100,000 registered taxpayers.

The revenue department's deal was to "declare unaccounted income and pay 10 percent of the present value of accumulated wealth, or face investigation for possible cancellation of undeclared property". The campaign has had a flip side—essentially, the government is supposed to have sent letters to businesses and business leaders who are already taxpayers "reminding" them about the deal, in addition to bombarding the media with adverts hinting that every one who owns a three-story house or a car (even on a bank loan) was a defaulter. They were harassing the same few who already pay the taxes," a businessman told us. "We only hope they send similar reminders to their own colleagues in the party and in government this time."

Black or white



Times are bad, but we now have a chance to set our revenue house to rights.

Even as the world was staring in fascination at the Euro's multicolour changes, here in Nepal were preoccupied with the world in monochrome. After all, in the time-honoured tradition of this part of the world, money is either black or white. And, in the guise of offering us incentives to legislate it, we have just been told by the government that, unlike the Michael Jackson song, but much like the person himself, it does matter whether you and your money are black or white.

This is not so much a moral judgement, but a way to sell the government's badly-placed coffers. It seems to be working—a recent much-publicised effort is supposed to have brought out as much as Rs 360 million that the authorities could use. Perhaps this did happen, but then again, what government has ever admitted failure in this matter?

Successful projects that beset millions sponsoring programs on FM and the private media, but the end result is usually much the same. But for some business groups contributing to the last-minute collections, the figures would have been positively alchemical.

The collections translate to about eighty snazzy new four-wheel drive vehicles that zip around Kathmandu roads and the 0.5 hectare of land that makes up Singha Darbar. Enough said. The public is waiting for an announcement of the much-publicised list of top evaders and the probable action that will be taken against them. The gossip at cocktail parties is that people are getting their names taken off the list by hanging about the corridors



of power—after all, everything and everyone has their price here. The credibility of the government is at stake, as this time the common VDIS can be chalked up as another misstep. Political appointments in revenue management will always be flawed by the best-intentioned and planned but the government is not immune. Perhaps the process should start right inside its own justifiably maligned agencies, especially those related to revenue. A clean-up there would be the strongest possible message to other evaders. The severe and unprecedented revenue problems the government is facing can be turned into an opportunity on this count. Even as expenses are soaring due to increased spending on security, routine revenue have dwindled as businesses are themselves facing mounting losses.

There cannot be a more opportune moment to act. This might be the last chance for the government to get its revenue house in order. If it misses the boat, perhaps no one will believe in these schemes anymore. ♦

Readers can post their views at artbeed@yahoo.com

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Not banking on Nepal

from ➞ p1

Strong words. And words that will be very damaging for Nepal. Government officials admit that the exit of Indusuez will further damage investor confidence in the country at a time when foreign investment is the only hope of kick-starting the economy. The Indusuez divestment is being closely watched by investors for signs of the government's seriousness (or lack thereof) in other privatisation and investment projects.

The possibility of an out-of-court settlement in the Indusuez case has not yet been ruled out because the battle is essentially over who gets how much. Should there be no settlement, Indusuez may be headed for a longer-than-expected delay to sell and exit, which would be a sign for other potential foreign investors why they should not come to Nepal.

Credit Agricole made up its mind to divest after trying for three years to convince the government to increase its share of ownership. Otherwise Nepal Indusuez was just not worth the trouble, given that the French group had already closed shop in even larger markets like Malaysia as a part of its international consolidation efforts.

When it began its selling efforts in July 2001, Indusuez wrote to the central bank seeking its clarification of if it should first offer its shares to its main Nepali promoter partners: state-owned insurer Rastriya Beema Sanshan (RBS) and Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB). A 1995 rule bars individuals and institutions to own more than 10 percent stock in a bank. RBS and RBB already owned 15 percent each of Nepal Indusuez.

The central bank wrote back giving a yes-and-no answer that it should make the offer, but the two could not buy because of the 10% rule. Credit Agricole wrote to the NRB again seeking a more straight-forward answer. The Rastriya Bank sent a "re-clarification" saying that the RBS and RBS could not increase their holdings. Then in August Nepal Indusuez wrote to its promoter partners about its desire to sell and sought their opinion on the Rastriya Bank rule.



PHOTO BY PUSKAR BHUSAL

Finally by some RBS shareholders.

In November Nepal Indusuez wrote again the governor of the central bank almost begging for a straight-forward answer on if the RBS and RBB could buy or not. The central bank wrote back quoting Directive Number 8, issued under the financial sector reform initiative which laid down ownership rules.

And just when it was looking like Indusuez was about to get along with its deal with Prithvi Bahadur Pandey and his consortium, the Chaudharys stepped into the scene. Indusuez is trying to offload its 50 percent holding of 849,922 shares at Rs290 million.

Further complicating matters is the context—Nepal's moribund financial sector with a steady erosion of the Rastriya Bank's regulatory role due to increased political interference and patronage after 1990. Even the private banking scene may not be as rosy as it is seen from the outside. According to banking and auditing sources, of all the 15 commercial banks in operation only one, Standard Chartered Bank, is fully sound because it complies with standards even more stringent than the central bank's new directives. The other is Indusuez which, despite some risky exposures because of consortium loans, is still said to be sound. Two other private banks are financially so-so, but the rest are ailing. ♦

INTERVIEW

"The government needs to take the private sector into confidence."



Rabi Bhakta Shrestha is president of the FNCCI, and managing director of the NE Group, whose interests include the joint venture with Hindustan Lever. Nepal Times spoke with him recently on the business climate of the country, and the need for professionalism in business and transparency in government.

Nepali Times: You've taken over the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) at a time when doing business in Nepal is becoming more difficult than ever. How does it look from your seat?

Rabi Bhakta Shrestha: The last few months have, I think, been the most difficult time in our living memory. Things are difficult not only for us, but for the entire country. Things are unclear; we cannot say how long this difficult phase will last. Our worry is that government does not have the money to pay for security and if security doesn't improve, we can't say how bad things will get. Industry can't withstand any more taxes because we've already had a very bad year. Government should worry more about providing stable governance and a predictable policy. We need political commitment to rebuild the economy, and no government can run when the economy is in tatters.

NT: What are the three most important improvements needed?
RBS: The three top things that need a priority solution, in my view, are: a) improvement in the security atmosphere—there should be a solid feel that the government is serious about the security situation; b) the credibility of the government's policies—matching deeds with words—should be proven by implementation and good governance; and c) the government should guarantee that the policies once made will be continued for a reasonable period of time. Moreover, the government should take the private sector into confidence before revising economic policy, which needs to be done, taking into account the current situation.

NT: Are you hopeful things will improve in the medium-term?
RBS: I am a born optimist. I think things cannot get any worse. Now, they should start to improve. I hope the government, political parties, the industry and business community, and civil society have all learnt their lessons. Realising the consequences of our past mal-performance, we should proceed with new vigor.

NT: Isn't part of the problem the unprofessional approach of even those said to be captains of industry?
RBS: One can always blame the entrepreneurs. Even when government policy abruptly changes and a venture that was a good proposition until yesterday becomes unviable today, one can blame the entrepreneur and say 'why couldn't they forecast the change in policy'. Having said that, I do not feel everything is all right with our businessmen or 'captains of industry', as you call them. The lack of professionalism in business is also due to our government policies, and social beliefs, and our value system. It seems not to reward professionalism.

NT: What is the FNCCI's position on financial sector reforms?
RBS: No doubt, these are needed. Our banks and other financial institutions should be made to follow modern rules and norms. But we need to make our institutions capable of following them. The Nepal Rastriya Bank, unfortunately, without proper discussion and deliberation, brings out such proposals. But we are the party most affected by these proposals. These should be heard, we should be consulted before being surprised with some new initiative. The NRB's policy implementation needs to be transparent and accountable.

NT: Isn't reforming the financial sector the first step towards improving the investment climate?

RBS: No doubt, but bringing in stringent, idealistic rules and procedures alone will not improve the investment climate. The key is implementing policies and good governance. Besides, there are questions of security and other industrial issues—why should investors come to Nepal if they get better deals in India and China?

NT: How are your own businesses, including your joint ventures, doing?
RBS: My business, like the entire Nepali economy, is suffering from the recession. Our business volume is down, especially in our joint venture, Nepal Lever Limited. Exports of toothpastes and soaps have gone down.

NT: What is the FNCCI doing about its other problem—the renewal of the Nepal-India trade treaty?
RBS: We have been working with our partner organisation, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), on this front. Had the government taken our proposal seriously in the first instance, I think the problem would have been solved by now. But bygones are bygones, and we are still working with the CII. The FNCCI-CL Joint Economic Committee is meeting this week. The Indian prime minister's visit to Nepal and what he said during the SAARC Summit indicate that things can be sorted out by 5 March.

NT: You had an audience with the king recently, what did you talk about?
RBS: It was a great learning experience for me and I am deeply indebted to His Majesty for the opportunity. I thanked His Majesty about the business and economic situation in the country. He was very worried about the economy and said that we are all first Nepalis and then businessmen, and it is in the interest of all of us to make things better together. He seemed fully aware of our national ills and we discussed possible corrective measures.

NT: Did you discuss business? The king also was in business until some time ago, how do you assess his understanding of the problems you now face?
RBS: We did not discuss any particular business. The discussion was focused on the overall business climate. I found His Majesty very keen to learn about the problems faced by Nepali businesses and the concerns of people in business. He has a very good grasp of the issues facing Nepal and its businesses. His Majesty time and again stressed the need to put out national duties and obligations first.

Festival of Australian films in Kathmandu



Australian cinema is fresh and exciting, among the best in the world. Kathmandu can get more than a taste of it. In celebration of Australia Day, the Australian Embassy in Kathmandu is hosting a festival of contemporary Australian films from 26-28 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.

Says Crispin Conroy, Australia's Ambassador to Nepal: "Australian arts and artists have much to say and many unique ways to say it. Australia's physical isolation, rich indigenous artistic traditions and diverse cultural influences have created a whole range of vibrant new art to share with the world. The Australian films featured in the Embassy Roadshow reflect these influences: indigenous culture and spectacular Australian bush scenery in the Yolngu Boy and Italian immigrant culture in Looking for Alibrandi."

The international commercial success in the 1990s of films such as The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, Strictly Ballroom, Muriel's Wedding and



Shine updated the profile of Australia—no more do overseas audiences associate it just with the lunatic Mad Max films or the haunting 1970 film Walkabout (made, ironically, by an Englishman, Nicholas Roeg). Ask anyone now what they think of Australian cinema and the adjectives "offbeat" and "wacky" start to get overused.

As for Australian-nurtured talent in Hollywood, this year's Golden Globe Awards provided proof again, if it were needed, that Hollywood is seeing a brilliant southern invasion—Moulin Rouge won the award for best motion picture (musical or comedy), Nicole Kidman won best actress (musical) for her turn in the same film, and Russell Crowe bagged the best actor award for his splendid portrayal of the lost, disturbed mathematics genius John Nash.

All screenings will be at the Russian Cultural Centre, 26-28 January. Tickets, Rs 50 per screening, are available at the Australian Embassy in Banskari and the Radisson Hotel. All proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to a local charity. Children under 18 will not be admitted.



movement unravels. 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 (below) is the poignant tale of a father and his son. Harry is a widower and lives with his 20-something son, Jeff. Both 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 middle-aged in his son's love affairs. With the backdrop of the famous Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney, Jeff falls in love. Harry too, but with a woman who does not share his understanding. In one of his first films, Russell Crowe displays his 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. Sydney's gay culture is portrayed with sensitivity and clarity, and shows us that the acceptance of homosexuality is simply an act of love.

The Yolngu Boy describes the collision of the new world and the oldest living culture on earth—that of the Australian Aborigines. Lorpua, Baij and Milika are three teenagers of the Yolngu tribe who once shared a childhood dream of becoming great hunters together. But things change and dreams become harder to attain. Baij is "walking on the wild side", a lost soul in search of a place. Milika is more interested in sport and girls than in the traditional knowledge he is being taught. Only Lorpua, who still cares about their dream,

can see that their paths are diverging. When Baij goes too far and finds himself on the wrong side of the law, Lorpua must weigh his own future against saving that of his friend. He persuades the boys to trek to Darwin, to argue Baij's case with a tribal leader. Leaving behind their kinship and community, the boys journey through unifying wilderness to Darwin. To survive, Lorpua, Baij and Milika must draw on a combination of the ancient bush knowledge they were taught as boys, Baij's unique street instinct and most importantly, on the bonds of their friendship.

Looking for Alibrandi (above), based on the bestselling rites-of-passage novel by Melina Marchetta, revolves around Italian-Australian Josephine—or Josie—Alibrandi (Pa Mifrand), a senior at high school. There has never been a man in Josie's life—now there are three: Josephine's father, played by



Anthony LaPaglia, left when Josie's mother Christina (Greta Scacchi) was an unmarried pregnant teenager. He is now back in town Josie decides to get to know him better, and he gets increasingly involved in her life. Meanwhile, John Barton, polished, rich and bound for law school, is romantically interested in her, as is Jacob Coote, a handsome working class boy who moves her in ways she never thought possible. Meanwhile, the fiercely smart Josie is also waging war on family tradition, the snobs at the wealthy private school where she is a scholarship student, and those who question her mixed identity. Set in Sydney's vibrant Italian-Australian community, this emotionally charged film follows the feisty heroine's struggle to balance the pressures of school, family and friends, while at the same time, coming to understand herself.

Hotel Sorrento, released internationally as Sorrento Beach, is based on the acclaimed play by Australian writer Hanne Rayson. Wal Moynihan is a retired widower who lives in a seaside town in Victoria, Australia with his oldest daughter Hilary and her son Troy in a house affectionately nicknamed Hotel Sorrento. His youngest, Pippa, has just returned from a visit to New York to explore setting up a chain of American sandwich franchises in Australia. Meanwhile in London, the middle daughter Meg has just been nominated for



the Booker Prize, for a thinly-veiled autobiography. Melancholy. Meg and her English husband argue about Australia's cultural identity vis-à-vis Britain, while back in Sorrento, the family's conversation focuses on things American, and the threat to Australian values. News of Meg's nomination filters through to an excited town, but as weekend residents Marge (played by Joan Plowright) and her nationalistic magazine editor friend Dick go to Sorrento to find out more, tragedy strikes—Wal has gone missing at the beach. The family reunion in the wake of this is uneasy—each sister feels overshadowed and



devoutly religious mother who hopes to revitalise her life with a university degree. Her long-suffering teenage son, David, thinks it a great idea. Until, that is, she arrives at his university campus and clashes with everyone from teachers to her fellow students. Frank-the-Warrior becomes Frank-the-Warrior, engaged in warfare with the Easome Professor Mortlock (Sam Neill), who sees before her a road fraught with trials and obstacles. But a peculiar brand of anarchic courage keeps pushing

Frank onward, even when it seems as if things can't get any worse. How Frank handles this, and other setbacks, becomes an inspiration to those around her who want to change their lives but are afraid to take the chance. Written and directed by award-winning filmmaker Mark Lamprell (Babe: Pig in the City), My Mother Frank was produced by Phaedon Vass (Così) and shot by renowned cinematographer Brian Bebeby (The Adventures of Pinocchio, Queen of the Desert). ♦

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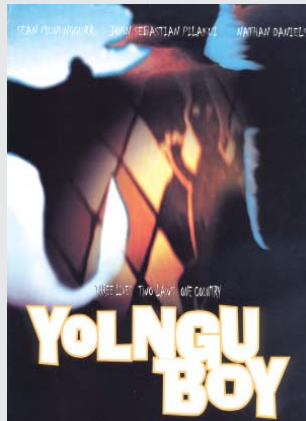


he festival kicks off with Children of the Revolution (above and top), an avant-garde film about the communist movement in Australia. The film follows the riotous life of Joan Fraser, a young spirited woman, who dreamt of nothing

but a worker's revolution. Her stream of letters to her idol, Joseph Stalin, do not go unnoticed 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 domineering 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 will of their own, and when Young Joe takes another path, Joan can do nothing. Paralleled with the disappointments in Joan's personal life, the communist

Screening Schedule

Date	Show Time	Film	Duration
25 Jan	1730HRS	Children Of The Revolution	114 Mins
26 Jan	1430HRS	Ops	6 Mins
26 Jan	1440HRS	The Sum Of Us	100 Mins
27 Jan	1100HRS	Ops	6 Mins
27 Jan	1110HRS	The Yolngu Boy	100 Mins
27 Jan	1500HRS	Mozzie	8 Mins
27 Jan	1510HRS	Looking For Alibrandi	100 Mins
27 Jan	1800HRS	Hoppin' Mad	7 Mins
27 Jan	1810HRS	Hotel Sorrento	112 Mins
28 Jan	1800HRS	Mozzie	8 Mins
28 Jan	1810HRS	My Mother Frank	110 Mins



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TECH BRIEFS

Faster, better banking

Mercantile Office Systems, a leading software developer, recently released a new version of their popular online real time banking system, Pumon Plus. The system is currently installed in 11 commercial banks and eight finance companies in the country. Pumon Plus III is a modular function, which allows a diverse array of operations to be performed a lot faster than many of us are used to, such as issuing import/export Letters of Credit and guarantees, telebanking, any branch banking, account reconciliation, budgeting and Nepal Rastra Bank reporting.

The software will be demonstrated at CAN Info-Tech 2002, and can also be looked up at <http://www.pumonplus.com>. Mercantile says Pumon Plus III is probably the first banking software in Nepal to incorporate biometrics technology and smart cards to authenticate users for access to its database and software.

All the news that's fit to read

Late afternoon in the Valley. Even as Capitol Hill sleeps, Kathmanduites can have their copies of *The Washington Post* delivered to their doorsteps. Or, for that matter, *The New York Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Boston Globe* and twenty other dailies from the US, *Le Monde* and *International Herald Tribune* from Paris, the *Moskovskaya Pravda* from Moscow the *Mainichi Shimbun* from Tokyo, or any of 200 newspapers from around the globe.

Bazaar International, a Thamel-based company that supplies most international magazines in Nepal, has started this new Internet-age print-on-demand service in collaboration with NewspaperDirect, a US company. The technology is very simple—as soon as a newspaper goes to press, a digital version of the entire edition is also sent in high quality format to NewspaperDirect servers at NewspaperDirect.com. Once it is there, it can be downloaded and printed at any of the company's partner's anywhere in the world.

What do the print versions have that a newspaper's online edition doesn't? Everything that a local resident—or someone planning to move the paper's home-base would need—vacancy information, adverts and classifieds pages. Many newspapers also do not put their opinion columns online, which alone sometimes makes it worthwhile to print on demand, not to mention the ease of reading and value of print editions.

Bazaar International has already installed a high quality tabloid-size laser printer, and since the entire operation is digital, you can have your personal copy of *The Wall Street Journal* with your name emblazoned across the top. It isn't cheap. Between Rs 195 and Rs 400, depending upon the number of pages, although subscribers will get cheaper copies.

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GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

It is that time of the year again. For the eighth year in a row, CAN Info Tech 2002 is in the city, opening to the public today at the Birendra International Convention Centre and runs until 29 January. There will be over 60 exhibitors and the organisers expect 100,000 visitors. Tomorrow, 26 January, the IT conference accompanying the show opens, with more than 30 speakers and 200 participants.

The organisers, the Computer Association of Nepal, seem to be as energetic as ever, not affected by the emergency or the global slowdown in IT. Interestingly, there will be executives from international brands than any previous CAN show. Brother and Olivetti are sending top-level executives to Nepal, and Canon's general manager for printing will also be flying in from Japan. Canon's local partner, EIC, is very excited and even sponsored the gate at the conference venue at the last moment.

But the biggest name we will see—something of a coup for CAN—is the chairman of Telecom, the world's top banking software company, George Koukris will deliver a keynote speech on the opening ceremony, which highlighted the trends in global banking software.

The International IT Conference series that started at last year's CAN Info Tech is also doing well this year, with some 30 speakers from 10 countries. Public participation at the conference will also be higher than last year, when people had to be pulled, pushed and cajoled to sign up for the conference.

Lasse Laakonen, president of the Finnish InfiOn Oy, which develops IT software in turkey projects and performs quality management consulting, will stress Nepal's potential to export software in his keynote address at



Get a glimpse of the inroads the 21st century is making in Nepal.

the conference. Also on the agenda this year is raising awareness about IT education in Nepal. That the government's decision to train 50,000 people in IT competence at different levels in three years, as well as the substantial increase in investment in the IT education sector in the past year have both contributed to this. Software colleges may even put up a stronger showing than most traders, who say that the strict implementation of VAT has hurt them.

The total turnover of the IT industry in 2001 is estimated at Rs 3 billion (about \$40 million), and though computer sales have

decreased, the sale of services, such as networking, has increased. Growth in the sector in the last year has been a whopping 25 percent compared with the same period the previous year. Most visitors to the last CAN Info Tech in 1995 were diehard enthusiasts who simply went to geek at computers. This time, it seems that anyone with the remotest interest in IT is going to be there. You may not want a Pentium 4, you may not be signing up for classes, but the show is worth a visit regardless—only if you get a glimpse of the inroads the 21st century is making in Nepal. ♦

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COMMENT

Pakistan's missed chance

Joining the US-led "war on terror" means ignominious choices for Pakistan.



ABDUL HAFIZ

Jumping on to Uncle Sam's lap in the "war on terror," it was thought, would solve Pakistan's problems. But her predicaments have only multiplied.

It is too early to assess the dividends Pakistan could have earned for loyal cooperation with the US-led war on terrorism. When the coalition surely needed Pakistan, President Bush promised Pakistan \$1 billion in aid. At the height of the conflict, the IMF announced a \$1.32 billion poverty alleviation loan—part of \$9.5 billion promised against a cushion the effects of the war. Despite this financial windfall, Pakistan has got hardly anything from her perfidious enterprise—no worthwhile assurance of just deal on Kashmir, no security of "nuclear assets," not even the trust of the US, with which differences are widening. Pakistan has not been able to win the west's political support for pro-Pakistan independence groups fighting in Indian occupied Kash-

mir, and failed to counter the strengthening US-Pakistan relations. Pakistan has few allies in the interim Afghan government cobbled up in Germany out of anti-Taliban ethnic groups and pro-US Pakis. Pakistan's plea for accommodating "moderate" Taliban was cold-shouldered by the allies, and political observers were quick to label Pakistan's role as a mere pawn in the US game. Pakistan's role in the "war on terror" has been merely compliance—her preferences were not worth a damn to the Americans, whether on the duration of the war or its modus operandi in Afghanistan. They ignored Musharraf's plea for a "brief, targeted" war over border Ramadan, and also consensually over the Northern Alliance entering Kabul before Afghanistan's future dispensation was agreed upon. Pakistan's desire to play a major role in the future Afghan government was brushed aside.

No one knows more than the US about Pakistan's role in the making of the Taliban, but the continuous reports about this in the western media are an embarrassment for Pakistan. The revelation that arms continued flowing as late as the second week of October is a blow to Pakistan's efforts to rebuild ties with the US. *The Washington Post* reported in early November that the US and its allies continued to flow from Pakistan to the Taliban even during the war. Islamabad said the report was "outlandish Indian propaganda," but the damage was done. Suspicions thickened after reports that Pakistani nuclear experts had passed on secrets to al-Qaeda. To placate western fears, Pakistan picked up two retired scientists with alleged links to al-Qaeda and bin Laden, infuriating Pakistan's pro-Taliban elements, who in turn accused the US of trying to steal Pakistan's nuclear assets. Musharraf's escapee in his efforts to convince the Bush administration, paranoid about the prospect of Pakistan's

"nuclear assets" falling into "evil hands," of its "footloose custodial control." Pakistan's exposed evacuation of some Pakistani Taliban, and her plea for the safety of those in custody was not taken well either. Yunes Qanuni, the interior minister of the Afghan interim government, has already alleged that bin Laden must be under US protection.

Meanwhile, the war has hit the country's economy hard. Billions of dollars of loans and grants can hardly compensate for the long-term damage. Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz estimates the crisis triggered by the war could cost the country up to \$2.5 billion. Pakistan is trying to get its \$37 billion external debt written off, but the prospects are bleak.

The terrorist attack on the Indian parliament has pushed Pakistan into an even more delicate situation. India's game plan of projecting Pakistan as a terrorist state has come to fruition. As expected, the US and India are exerting pressure on Pakistan to stop "cross border terrorism" in India and Kashmir. By joining the coalition, Pakistan is limiting itself to fighting terrorism. Soberly cracked down on extremists, pushed the armed forces, closed down the Taliban mission in Pakistan, scaled the border with Afghanistan, and the US on November 11, Pakistan is under no compulsion to join the war on terrorism. It is difficult to say what her fate would have been had she not joined, but she would have escaped the ignominy she now faces. ♦ (*The Daily Star, Dhaka*)

Line of Contention

NEW DELHI—As international pressure mounts on India to resume dialogue with Pakistan over Kashmir, New Delhi is likely to push for a conversion of the Line of Control (LoC), which now divides the disputed territory, into an international border. Both Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf and Foreign Minister Abidus Sattar have said publicly that the LoC is the problem, and not the solution to the 55-year-old dispute. India and Pakistan both see the merger of undivided Kashmir into their own countries as the only solution. The current military standoff on this border is the latest episode in a saga of uncompromising hostility. In 1949, India's parliament passed a resolution reiterating that "all of Kashmir, including the region beyond the LoC, now occupied by Pakistan, is an integral part of India." Musharraf has said that Kashmir is the unfinished business of the partition. Yet, each of the three wars the South Asian neighbours have fought over Kashmir, since partition and independence from British India in 1947, have only lent greater legitimacy to the LoC. The LoC first took shape as the ceasefire line (CFL), drawn up after both countries' armies fought each other to a standstill in January 1949 in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. India's army was superior, but stopped its advance along what became the CFL as it represented a natural divide between Kashmiri-speaking people and Mirpuris, who are ethnically and linguistically of Punjabi stock. Historian Ajit Bhattacharya says India's first prime minister, the Kashmiri Jawaharlal Nehru, was keenly aware of the ethnic divide which manifested itself politically in support for the secular National Conference party in the Srinagar valley, in contrast to the dominance of the Muslim Conference on the Pakistan side of the CFL. Nehru's military plan had the tacit support of Sheikh Abdullah, founder of the National Conference and father of present Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah. (IPS)

Argentinean "orthodoxy"

BUENOS AIRES—Argentina's President Eduardo Duhalde spoke out last week against the "asymmetrical" global policies he said have translated into trade protectionism for the industrialised North and trade liberalisation for the developing South. Duhalde said he would not follow the IMF's prescriptions for pulling his country out of its deep crisis, but would present the multilateral organisation with an alternative development plan. If the IMF does not offer the assistance Argentina needs, Duhalde said "we'll see how we manage." Shortly after Duhalde's comments, Claudio Loser, director of the IMF's Western Hemisphere Department, said that the concept of a coherent economic programme like that being discussed in Argentina, the support of the IMF would be a reasonable outcome. Loser said the Fund is going out on a limb to support Argentina, but didn't mention how much money such assistance might entail. Duhalde's spokesman Eduardo Arneso said the economic programme being drawn up by the administration is founded on strong "orthodox" lines. Duhalde believes Argentina should have modified its economic model three years ago, when there was a cash surplus, instead of following the IMF, which was "part of the problem." The present administration will delineate a development model similar to the Chilean one, involving features of an open economy in some areas, and a protectionist economy in others, particularly domestic production. Duhalde has been calling since 1996 for an end to the currency board that pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar at one-to-one parity, a law that was scrapped last week. Duhalde also said his administration is studying measures to roll back some restrictions on access to deposits in order to jump-start the economy. (IPS)

Upping the anti

The global citizens' movement opposes market-driven corporate globalisation—not globalisation itself.

behaviour in Genoa under the orders of a G-7 government. Movement people, particularly young people, are angry. Nowhere in the realms of power can they discern the slightest sign of serious recognition or responsible behaviour concerning the life-threatening problems faced by people and the earth—not on the part of the G-8 governments and the EC, nor that of multilateral institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, nor transnational corporations, the financial markets and their numerous lobbies that have assumed unprecedented sway over human affairs.

The movement sees unbridled greed, the undivided ring of capital over labour and of rich over poor, rules that ensure freedom of trade in all goods and services at the expense of every human value: rampant privatisation, the destruction of public services, the dismantling of welfare states where they exist and policies to make them impossible where they do not; massive and accelerating destruction of our earth, its climate and creatures. All this in the name of a fraudulent "efficiency," increased profits, and so-called "shareholder value".

This is why the movement won't go away and why State-corporate power is becoming more desperate to repress dissent, to curtail the freedom of citizens exercising democratic rights. Repeated calls of its desire to "free the poor" ring increasingly hollow. The Genoa G-8 proposal of \$1.5 billion to deal with AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis was particularly disgraceful given that Kofi Annan had, only weeks previously, asked the "international community" for \$7.1 billion to deal with AIDS alone. This "freedom of trade" is being led by the G-7, has respected every opportunity for remedy, and listened only to a minority. This is why a new generation, not all of it young, a "trans-generational, trans-class, trans-gender and trans-national generation" is rising in opposition. ♦ (IPS)

(Susan George is vice-president of the Association for Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens, France.)

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Marxists or fascists?

Prem Budathoki in Sanghu, 21 January



At one time, the Maoists were populist. Citizens, intellectuals and politically conscious people supported their actions, and wished that their total revolution would be swiftly achieved. Today, the same people have nothing but disgust and hostility for the way the Maoists' methods have degenerated into murder and mayhem. There is no reason for this other than the indiscriminate murder spree of unarmed citizens that they have undertaken.

Not a day goes by without the Maoists murdering someone in some part of the country. They blow up peoples' homes, and looting and plunder have become commonplace. There are no clear indications that the Maoists are behind these inhumane acts, but they are being carried out in the name of the Maoist cause. Teachers have been dragged out of their classrooms and shot, people observing the funeral rites of their parents have been spat at and killed, elderly people who were baby-sitting grandchildren at home have been killed, teachers walking to school have been taken to a secluded spot and killed, the Maoists are behind these inhumane acts, but they are being carried out in the name of the Maoist cause. Teachers have been dragged out of their classrooms and shot, people observing the funeral rites of their parents have been spat at and killed, elderly people who were baby-sitting grandchildren at home have been killed, teachers walking to school have been taken to a secluded spot and killed, the Maoists are behind these inhumane acts, but they are being carried out in the name of the Maoist cause.

The Maoists attacked army bases and took on the Royal Nepal Army. But killing unarmed civilians is not victory, it is a sign of defeat. It is cowardice for an armed person to kill an unarmed person. How many people are they going to kill in the offensive they declared on 23 November? The killing of unarmed civilians—for whatever cause—can never be excused. Civilised society will never support the murder of citizens, it will despise it.

The international communist movement saw the first indiscriminate assassinations in the Indian subcontinent during the Naxalite movement of the 1970s. In other countries, such murders were either banned or never tolerated. But even the Naxalites limited their targets to class enemies. Rich people were not killed for their political beliefs. But our Maoists are killing everyone who does not agree with them, not just class enemies. They have totally forgotten the Marxist tenet that you cannot change ideas by force and intimidation. Ideas are changed through debate and discussion, knowledge and philosophy. Changing beliefs by force and intimidation is the fascist way. Either Nepali Maoists do not understand this, or even if they do, they don't want to accept it. The Maoists are behaving like fascists, not Marxists.

Most Nepalis do not want the emergency to be extended or the terrorism ordinance (Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Ordinance) turned into a law. The main opposition parties are working towards this end. Even a faction of the ruling Nepal Congress agrees with this. But it is obvious that the Maoists want an extension of the emergency, otherwise why would they declare a national strike on the day that the emergency is supposed to end? The Deuba government is also for extending the state of emergency, and the Maoists are helping him along. What we do not know is whether this political convergence is a coincidence, or whether the two are being manipulated by invisible forces.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

About 1,08,000 people are employed in the civil services. Add those employed in the army, the police and public corporations, and the number reaches 400,000. Fifteen to twenty percent of the employees in corporations alone have fake certificate. That is definitely a lot.

—MP Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, Coordinator, Fake Certificate Investigation Sub Committee in Budhar, Saptahdi, 17 January, 2002



Left graph: Tax revenues collected in one day
Man: And this graph shows the leakage from the exchequer's coffers in one day

Budhar, 17 January

Death toll

Jana Ekata, 21 January

The human rights organisation INSECH has put out its latest tally of the death toll since the state of emergency was declared on 26 November unit 13 January—the rights group says 679 people have been killed in action by the security forces, and 178 have been killed by Maoists.

Among those killed by the Maoists were 65 policemen, 35 soldiers, three Maoists themselves, 19 political workers, five students, five labourers, six teachers, 31 civilians, one prisoner and two social activists.

Among those killed by security forces were 620 Maoists, two political workers, two students, three labourers, 11 farmers, one teacher, 26 civilians and five social activists.

As of 16 January, the group says, 6,440 Maoists had surrendered and 2,258 suspects were taken into custody.

Food for thought

Budhar, 17 January

In an attempt to cut off the food supplies of the Maoists, food can only be transported into Puthan, Dang, Rolpa, Bhum and Salyan districts of the Rapti Zone with the permission of the Chief District Officer. This arrangement has inconvenienced locals because it has driven up the prices of essential commodities. The problem has begun to take a serious dimension, because security officials at the Bhabang and Satharia checkpoints have begun to confiscate trucks carrying foodstuffs if they don't have the required papers. After the new arrangement came into force last week, the price of rice in Sulchaur, Rolpa, shot up from Rs 1,250 per kilo to Rs 1,650. The restriction on entry of foodstuffs is understood as a part of the security forces' attempt to put the Maoists at a disadvantage.

UML proposal

Budhar, 17 January

Excerpts from the unity proposal put forward by the UML to the M-L:

1. There will be a commitment to take the party forward on the basis of the Janata Ko Bandhara Baryawata (People's Multi-Party Democracy) approved by the Fifth National Convention of the party.
2. There will be a commitment to abide by the policies, decisions and resolutions approved by the party's Sixth Convention.
3. Following re-unification, all activities of the party will be conducted under the UML banner and the documents approved by the M-L's national convention will be secured and stored as party property.
4. Comrades would be fitted into all UML party committees from the centre to the cell level, as needed, by re-organising the committees, responsibilities will be handed



over to individuals based on their qualifications, capabilities and participation.

5. Those M-L central committee members not appointed in the new (unity) committee will be made national council members and be given responsibilities in central and local level party committees.

6. There will be a commitment to not allow a further split in the ranks, the police and army don't go to his village, so the Maoists are very active.

Many innocent villagers like Khatri have been caught in the battle between the Maoists and the security forces. After the emergency was declared, a separate treatment programme has been set up at the Bheri District Hospital in Nepalgunj for victims of Maoist actions.

Living in fear

Samacharpatra, 21 January

Following the emergency, people living in the remote villages of Nepal are still having trouble with the Maoists. They feel that the army doesn't come into their villages, and the Maoists refuse to leave the villages. The Maoists have increased their pillaging, killing and looting in rural areas. Despite the emergency and the mobilisation of the army, locals feel more insecure than before. Binod Prakash Shah, chairman of the Royal Bardia National Park Buffer Zone Development Area, has been accused by the Maoists of being an army informer. Shah, who lives in Sinhar village of Bardia, Village Development Committee, which lies about half-a-

kilometre away from an army camp, was beaten and robbed by the Maoists. The army was unable to do anything even as the Maoists fired into a fire control zone.

"There's no security in the villages. The army patrols during the day. It's as if they are taunting the Maoists. At night, hundreds of armed Maoists come and do whatever they like," says Shah, who is being treated at Bheri District Hospital. He's worried about returning home, since there's no security. Shah's family says the Maoists have threatened to kill him if some Maoist cadres in jail are not released. Says Shah: "As I recover, my worries increase. How can I live in constant insecurity?"

A teacher for 32 years, Sam Prasad Choudhary, a resident of Manpur Tapau VDC, is also a victim of the Maoists. They broke both his legs and an arm. Two weeks after the incident, he continues to feel insecure at home as the Maoists continue their violent activities in his village. "The security forces haven't provided any security. Just patrolling the main thoroughfares is not enough," says the injured Choudhary. The Maoists have accused Choudhary of inciting the local youth against them. "Why would I have done that? It's like disturbing a nest of snakes," says Choudhary.

Villagers say the security forces limit their activities to regular patrols while the Maoists roam around freely, creating havoc in villages. Locals are scared to inform the forces of Maoist movement, as they fear retaliation. In the meantime, the Maoists are showing up their strength in the villages. As a result, innocent villagers have been caught in booby traps laid by Maoists on main village roads. "I was injured by a booby trap laid on the main thoroughfare about an hour's walk from the district headquarters," says 15-year-old Gore Khatri, a wood-seller.

According to Khatri, the police and army don't go to his village, so the Maoists are very active. Many innocent villagers like Khatri have been caught in the battle between the Maoists and the security forces. After the emergency was declared, a separate treatment programme has been set up at the Bheri District Hospital in Nepalgunj for victims of Maoist actions.

The UML and M-L have already agreed not to appoint a party chairman, and the other issues relating to re-unification are now being discussed.

Development talk

Deshantar, 20 January

The government might perhaps find some way out of the bloody six-year-old Maoist insurgency to save face at the meeting of the Nepal Development Forum to be held in Kathmandu and Pokhara between 4-7 February. Representatives of donor agencies and countries will not find it hard to figure out the impact of the deteriorating law and order situation of the country—the absence of tourists—the visibility on Kathmandu streets, and in



unoccupied hotel rooms and airplane seats. The concern over terrorism will perhaps bring the other agendas at the development meeting.

At The Paris meeting of the Nepal Development Forum, then Finance Minister Mahesh Acharya had promised big achievements to lure the donors into investing about Rs 1.25 billion for 2000-2001. Nepali representatives had presented various immediate, short-term and long-term plans at the meeting, identifying as major areas of work—controlling the insurgency and improving the law and order situation, implementing corruption control measures, revamping the bureaucracy, increasing investment in the prioritised sectors etc. Similarly, the government promised to implement poverty reduction measures such as increasing employment opportunities, increasing investment in social development areas such as education, drinking water and gender development, developing rural infrastructure and decentralising public services within a year.

At that meeting, the government also assured donors that it would strengthen tax and customs collection, improve financial management, have mid-yearly budget evaluations and timely evaluation of donor-funded projects, encourage the participation of civil society and create a friendly environment for foreign investment in the banking sector and so on.

Right now, officialdom is busy making preparations for the upcoming donors' meeting. The government will focus on getting support for the finalisation of the tenth five-year plan document and also nail down specifics of the administration's poverty alleviation strategy. Nepali officials will also work to garner donor support for the annual budget revision and foreign aid policy.

The government has already constituted a permanent committee under the chairmanship of the Finance Minister to discuss the proposed official agendas with parliamentarians. In order to facilitate the discussion procedure, a co-ordinating committee and a technical committee will also be formed. Various ministries will get involved and prepare papers on decentralisation, administrative reform, financial sector reform, private sector and civil society participation, rural development, agriculture, education, health, privatisation, infrastructure development and water resources development. The government will also organise an exhibition on the theme of development at the Nepal Development Forum meeting.

Back at Sundarjal >3

"The sameness with sameness"

Sundarjal today



This is the third instalment from the unpublished diary of BP Koirala which the Nepali Times is serialising in this space every fortnight. The diary covers the period immediately following BP's return to Nepal from exile in India with a call for "national reconciliation" between the monarchy and pro-democracy forces. In these entries, BP is trying to get over his depression and loneliness—especially his remorse at not saying farewell properly to his wife, Sushila. The diary, written in English is available on microfilm at the Madan Puraskar Library in Patan and the Jawaharal Nehru Museum and Library in New Delhi. It was donated by senior advocate Ganesh Raj Sharma.

Monday, 3rd January 1977

Sundarjal

I will not more write about my loneliness—this utter loneliness which can be compared with the choking void that only death can leave behind. But if I don't write about it, then I don't know what I can write about. Everything is submerged under this sense of utter loss. Really it is, other things are make-believe. There is no substance to these, I mustn't permit myself this weakness. But it is weakness really, if it is so powerful? Well, well, remember "If, and try like a man."

As I lay brooding in my cell, I suffer from pangs of regret—upset that I couldn't properly say farewell to Sushila. At Patna airport there was a big crowd of people who had come to see me off. I was taken up by them. Sushila was among the ladies—wives of my friends. When departure was announced people thronged around me—some pressed my hand, some garlanded me, some touched my feet, some offered flowers, some just wept, and JP [Jayaprakash Narayan, Indian politician] hugged me; but Sushila was far behind. As I was about to cross the custom barrier Sushila came forward, some friends helped her to find a passage—and I said "Hello, Sushila", and then I patting both her cheeks. That was not a proper farewell. As a matter of fact except with JP, I didn't bid proper goodbye to anybody much less to Nanu, Prakash, Ruchira, Srinharsha, Girija, Nona, Manisha, Bhai. Perhaps I was too overwhelmed, a little bewildered, deeply anxious, perhaps I was embarrassed by the demonstration of such unrequited affection and love for me. Can you imagine the new driver, Jawahar, was weeping and those men of the security guard in tears, and their officer sub-inspector was shedding tears uncontrollably. As I remember the scene that day, I feel I haven't lived in vain. Perhaps the past that I have trodden and will tread is a correct path, but today I am filled with regret that I couldn't say some comforting words to Sushila, some words of cheer to Nanu and Prakash and words of encouragement to the newly married couple Ruchira and Srinharsha, words of love and gratefulness to Girija and Nona. I haven't them all unprotected. If I could only meet them once and instruct them if only I could get their news—how they are faring!

4th January, 1977

Sundarjal

We take our bed tea in my cell. GM [Ganesh Man Singh] prepares it in the room attached to his cell, and brings the whole paraphernalia to my

room. It is real bed tea for me because I like it in bed. GM says that in Banaras also it is the bed tea time—Sushila must be presiding over it, the entire household gathers there and discusses every topic under the sun while tea goes round the conjugation by turn and repeatedly. Everyone takes at least two glasses of tea—Sushila takes minimum 3 glasses. Many say that we Koiralas have developed the morning tea function into a kind of an institution. GM who partakes in the ceremony, even by way of curiosity, starts sharing the Koirala myth and gradually turns into being a Koirala himself. Koirala is not a family name. It is a psychological, moral, spiritual, phenomenon—it is an attitude of life. When in the solitary cell at Sundarjal, GM remembers Sushila and the group who are sipping tea at Banaras—this recalling at the time of our own solitary tea taking is an unconscious extension of the Koirala myth by us in our cellular world at Sundarjal. I get a stab of remembrance at the mention of Sushila—a stab that reopens the healing wound of memory.

At lunchtime they brought some apples, oranges, betel nuts, tin of fish, butter, jintan. The officer told me that some people from home had brought them. They had come in a taxi. Rosa was there, perhaps Sujata too, Indira and who else? Rosa has given to them the telephone number in case we need anything. The slip of paper in which she had written the telephone number was with the officer. I could recognise the handwriting. Then they know that we are detained here. We are kept in strict isolation. How long will this last?

We are supplied with table linen. But there is no writing table. There is a small table in my room. I place it on my wide bedstead, and use it as a desk while I sit crosslegged on my bed. It is the same old substantial huge bedstead which I had used for eight years during my last incarceration here. It is so formidable that it can take on any head, the low table which I used as desk, then a side table and still have a wide margin of space. The sameness is overwhelming—the camphor tree—is there, perhaps a taller and the spread of its branches a little wider, pairs of mynah birds, solitary shrobin bird, a pair of doves, the greedy sky crows, and the invisible but shrilly hooting owl at the onset of the night—the setting is the same and when today at the early of the evening a full moon rose across the big dark mountain over an infinite sky I even remember the innumerable times when I had seen the moon exactly like this in the same corner of the verandah. The sameness with sameness.



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EXHIBITION

♦ **Life of Boudha Stupa...** and beyond Exhibition of photographs by Susan Stebbins of the people and everyday activities around Boudhnath Stupa, and highlights of Nepal. Until 5 February, 9AM-4PM, Sarmelan Hall, Shangri-La Hotel, 435741

MARTIN CHAUTARI

♦ **Manjushree Thapa's *The Tutor of History*** Pandit: Bishnu Sapkota, Tribhuvan University, 3PM, 29 January, Martin Chautari, Thapathali. Tea will be served. Participation open to all. Discussions will be in mosh. chautari@mos.com.np, 256239

EVENTS

♦ **Himalayan Enfielders Nepal Peace Rally** Kathmandu-Kurintar-Pokhara-Bandipur-Kathmandu, 9 & 10 February. For details contact himalayanenfielders@hotmail.com, 40462

♦ **E-commerce and e-business** Three-day workshops 28 January through 1 March. Contact Infocom P Ltd.

♦ **St Augustine's Alumni Association of Nepal** Lunch get-together at Hotel Nirvana Garden, Thamel, Rs 200 for singles, Rs 350 per couple, Rs 550 for couple with two children under 12, 26 January, 12 noon onwards, 439322

♦ **Guitar workshop** by two classical guitarists. Hotel Yak & Yeti, 27 January, 10.30AM-12.30PM. Rs 250 per head, 248999

♦ **Beetle Mania, tribute to George Harrison:** Poolside party with live band, D.J. Come in a Beetle, pay Rs 2,222 for as many as will fit in the car. Rs 450 per head with drink and snack. Hotel de l'Annapurna, 25 January, 3PM onwards, 221711

MUSIC

♦ **Songs by Corinne Arcuri** blending French, English and Nepali music. With musicians Anant Dongol, Arjun Shrestha, Alok Shrestha, Nirmal Gartaula, Prakash Sapkota, Chiran Basnet, 31 January, 6.30PM, Alliance Française, Thapathali. Free entrance.

♦ **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. Nepal folk tunes Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6.30PM onwards, hotel restaurant. Hotel Vajra, 271545

♦ **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

EATING OUT

♦ **Singaporean and Malaysian food** Satay, rice, soy milk dishes, curry puffs and more. Between Jawalakhel fire station and St Mary's School. Sing Ma, the Food Court. Foodcourt@winlink.com.np, 520004

♦ **Dimsum Daze** Dimsum, momos, Mongolian hotpot, Tibetan delicacies all year round. Hotel Shangri-La, 435741

♦ **Strawberries go bananas** Strawberry desserts in every restaurant. Hotel de l'Annapurna, 221711

♦ **International Duck Festival** Lunch and dinner duck recipes from around the world using imported duck. Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti, until 31 January, 248999

♦ **Steam Away winter blues** Piping hot appetizers, soups, noodles and momos. 11AM-6PM daily at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, 411818

♦ **Winter Specials** Hot mulled wine, rataouille-filled pancakes, Chicken hoisin. Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel, 250440

♦ **Traditional Sekewa** with live music from Himalayan Fusions fusion band and bonfire every Friday night. Dwarika's Hotel, Rs 555 per head, 479488

♦ **Between the Folds** Folded pizzas, dosas, kathi rolls, pita pockets and more. 11.30AM-midnight at The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234

♦ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant, 425510

GETAWAYS

♦ **Taste the difference** Cosy Nepali-style house on an organic farm in Gamchha, south of Thimi. Up to Rs 1,200 per person per night including meals. aaa@winlink.com.np, 631766

♦ **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



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

NEPALI WEATHER

DSR:23/01-20/02/2002/GM2

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Just as predicted, that frontal system last week dumped copious amounts of snow in northwestern Nepal. Mugu got three feet of it. In central Nepal, the snow came down to 3,000 m but melted quickly. The northwesterly wind will keep the air fresh and visibility good in the coming week. This satellite picture taken on Wednesday afternoon (left) shows another mild westerly over Afghanistan which will make its way to central Nepal by the weekend bringing feathery high clouds, but no precipitation. As a result, the maximum temperature will drop a notch, and expect frosty mornings and morning smog in the Valley.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
18-02	19-01	20-00	19-01	20-02

YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU

BOOKWORM



Kamaiya: Slavery and Freedom in Nepal Peter Lowe
Mandala Book Point and Danish Association for International Cooperation (MS Nepal), Kathmandu, 2001
Rs 700
Lowe captures in photographs and first-person testimonies the development of the Kamaiya Freedom Movement, which emerged around the tenth anniversary of democracy. In three sustained months of campaigning—marches, sit-ins, cases and petitions, demonstrations, press conferences—the movement forced the Nepali government to cancel the kamaiya's generation-deep debts.

Cultures and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives Jane K Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte

Dembour, Richard A Wilson, eds
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001
Rs 1,380

Do people everywhere have the same, or even compatible, ideas about multiculturalism, indigenous rights or women's rights? The authors move beyond the traditional terms of the universalism vs cultural relativism debate and through detailed case studies from Nepal, Hawai'i, France, Thailand, Botswana and Canada, explore the concrete effects of rights talk and institutions on people's lives.

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

CLASSIFIED

Expatriates' Handbook Guide to day-to-day living in Nepal with pocket calendar. Available in handicrafts shops and bookstores.

Special Chinese language classes for tourism entrepreneurs. Orient Centre for Learning, Dhobi Dhara, 441275

Vacancy UK charity in Nepal seeks outgoing, motivated and self-directed individual, fluent in English and computer literate, to assist in promoting the charity's activities among partner organisations. Applications by e-mail (Word attachment) only to ukcharity@nepalmail.com.

Reflexology Technique of applying pressure to the feet, reduces stress, promotes relaxation and good health. buddhasfeet@yahoo.com.

Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace at Saurharanah Stupa. Well-appointed restaurant and terraces with views of stupa and Himalayas. International vegetarian specialties, pizza from clay oven, ice cream, soft guitar tunes on Fridays. Saturdays. Sundays from 5PM on. Special events on full moon. Open daily 11AM-8.30PM. 480262.

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• info@borderlandsresorts.com, www.borderlandsresorts.com.

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A House for Mr Rai

Why do most Kathmandu home builders think foreigners want to rent houses that look like they have been transplanted from Beverly Hills?

ALOK TUMBHAHANGPHEY

On a hilltop overlooking Kathmandu, a few minutes uphill from the sleeping Vishnu at Bodhanilkantha, is a house that Bharat Rai calls his dream house. You don't see it until it is right in front of you, and even then it looks like a typical Nepali hill house. So what's so special about it?

It is cosy, airy, bright, elegant and comfortable. And get this: it cost only Rs 500,000 to build. So why are people constructing mammoth constructions in Bhaspati with corinthian columns and Greco-Roman arches in Beverly Hills-style villas that cost Rs 50 million? Ask them.

Bharat Rai is an enthusiastic lover of tradition and culture. Twenty years ago when Bodhanilkantha was the



Bharat Rai flanked by his daughter and wife.



Minimalist style and common-sense function create a simple, yet elegant, living space: the view from the east (clockwise from above), the beautiful balcony and the traditional hill home grey of the brick facade.

boondocks, the son of a Gurkha soldier had the nerve to buy just over one hectare of land at an unbelieveable Rs 125,000. The land was too rocky for agriculture and the farmer sold it for a song.

Rai dreamed that he would build a modern house that had no pretensions of being Nepali, just a nice comfortable house with full modern amenities. Using locally available labour and materials, he began building a house with the help of a German architect. He used the abundant stones in his property, employed the south-facing slope for maximum sunlight. It was a spacious and bright house, and with his interest in gardening and horticulture, Rai raised an orchard in the slope below the house.

But something was still missing. "We come from the hills and we need to have a bit of the culture around us, and the house just wasn't Nepali. I still wanted a Nepali house." Eventually, Rai's family moved closer to the town because of his daughter's education, and he rented out his house.

The tenant turned out to be a god-send: a former Peace Corps

volunteer who had spent five years in Gorkha in the early 1970s who shared Rai's passion for traditional Nepali houses. The two got together and started plotting. Consulting their architect friends, Rai and his tenant went out to the hills on the fringes of the Shivapuri reserve taking pictures of traditional houses from all sides. They drew the plan: a simple rectangular house that took advantage of the slope for a split-level two storey house with Nepali tile roof. The beams and floor are made of wood, the outside is coated with cement mixed with mud to give it a durable look that is also durable. Everything except the cement was made from locally available materials, and the elegant building is now a guesthouse for Rai's tenant, Nick Langton, who is director in Kathmandu of the Asia Foundation.

Both Rai and Langton are ecstatic with the result. "This is exactly like I had visualised it: a low cost house, that blends with the surroundings, is simple and comfortable." Listening to the laments of Kathmandu-based

expats about the lack of spacious, comfortable and traditional houses it is a wonder why more people do not follow Bharat Rai's example. He asks: "Why do Nepalis who want to rent their homes think that foreigners want to live in those ugly ostentatious buildings?"

In fact, it would make perfect business sense for Nepali home builders to invest more on traditional houses with modern amenities—there is a better chance of renting it out. For Rai, who has always been an old-fashioned traditionalist, this is just common sense. He has now got together with some partners to set up a private forest in Chitwan to grow hardwood sisau trees. "It is a long term investment but to take care of that we have let people cultivate herbs, and cash crops such as ginger on the forest floor," he says. "We have to keep asking ourselves, is what we do good for the land? Will it last? Will it set a good example?"

Rai, for one, has certainly found the right answers to all these questions and is setting an example by doing. And using his common sense. ♦

HAPPENINGS



WARM WELCOME ON A COLD MORNING: Prime Minister Shree Bahadur Deuba and Annu Rana Deuba welcome visiting from Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto at Baluwatar on 17 January.



COLIN KNEELS: US Secretary of State, Colin Powell goes down on his knees to receive a ceremonial silk khada at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, while general manager Martin van Kan looks on.



BIRD FESTIVAL: The Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve celebrated the second annual migratory bird festival 18-24 January. Seen here is a flock of lesser adjutant storks at the sanctuary within sight of grazing livestock.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Watching Baywatch

Many of you have taken me aside at parties in the past few months to ask me deeply personal questions about my TV-viewing habits. This is very bad manners. What I watch in the privacy of my own den, and for how long, is a matter between me and Rupert Murdoch alone, it is none of your business. That information is also worth a lot of money to ratings agencies, I am told by those in the know, and they have advised me never to give out such classified information for free. Uhh-huh. But if you make me an offer I can't refuse, I may be tempted to part with that intelligence.

OK. Deal. We will be saving ourselves a lot of bother by answering all your queries at one go. So, totally off the record and on deep background, here is my strictly confidential and deeply personal Top Three programmes on cable these days with a short blurb to guide you through the intricacies of the plots:

1. Bold and the Beautiful. STAR World, Weekdays, 1300

Sally is horrified when Lauren considers going to Eric's wedding. Thorne and Taylor are also humiliated, but they have to get back to Chicago during a blizzard. Ridge refuses to be made love to by Brooke, and vice versa. Ruthanne arrives in town for the wedding just as Brooke is telling Katie she is going to win Ridge back before Thorne and Taylor get to LA to meet Amber so that they (Thorne and Taylor) can work with Stephanie to get Darla reunited with Ridge. All this would have been fairly straightforward had Thorne not got dad drunk after catching Brooke and Ridge making love in the jacuzzi. That is why Sally and Darla had no other recourse but to send Lauren and Eric's sex video to the local TV station. The rest, as they say, is historical.

2. The X-Files. STAR World, Sunday 1830

In "Transgenic", Scully and Mulder are called in to

investigate the strange case of hermaphrodite extraterrestrials who reproduce by parthenogenesis and are replicating like mad. If something isn't done, they may soon move into the White House and rule the world. Which may not have been such a bad thing, since this is a Canadian serial. But Mulder suddenly finds that hobnobbing with aliens has started turning him into a woman. "Do something, Scully!" he screams as he begins to spout a chest. Meanwhile, Scully is grappling with her own problem: she is turning into a he-man.

"Do something Mulder!" she screams,

"I'm growing a moustache." Both suspect this may be the handiwork of aerosol-borne hormones from Planet Voith, but it is too late and there is nothing they can do about it till the forthcoming episode at the same time next Sunday.

3. Discovery, Animal Sex Channel (X-rated)

In last week's episode we left Cheetah on the branch of a baobab tree scouring the Serengeti Plains for meat and mate. Carnal carnivore that she is, after a brief chase she found the meat: a large hunk with nice fat assets

and rippling shoulder muscles who could bear the land speed record in the Chase-the-Gnu category. Oops, sorry, that was the mate. Good thing she didn't mistake him for prey. Anyway, in this episode, Cheetah is chasing a particularly yummy gnu named Jenna who never wants anything other than a revealing red one-piece leotard. Meanwhile JD and Jason (dressed in red boxer shorts) go on a guys-only trip to the South Bay Lifeguard Annual Ball and meet Nedy and Caroline. Stephanie is so jealous they left her behind that she sets fire to the lifeguard station. Wait a minute, who's fiddling with the remote? Why didn't you tell me I was watching Baywatch?



NEPALI SOCIETY

Robin's Nepal

Outspoken 6'5" Robin Tamang of the cult rock band Robin 'n Looza sees no contradiction in his many avatars: mechanical engineer-turned-psychologist-turned-nightclub owner-turned-NGO worker-turned-activist—and today a rock star. Says the singer-songwriter

"Music is how I convey my message, especially to the youth of Nepal." And messages he has aplenty.

The band's first album *Nepal*, the title track in particular, created a sensation when released about two years ago. As much as the band's hard rock sound hit the spot, it was the in

your face lyrics that really had them hooked. The lyrics, which compared Nepal to a rose—thorns and all—made everyone pause, scratch their head, nod and sing along in agreement. It seemed that someone was finally voicing the frustration of the Nepali youth. Hearing Robin speak, you get a sense of why he is something of a prophet to so many young Nepalis. "You just can't escape it," he says, "Nepal is supposedly riding this wave of so-called democracy but where is it? All

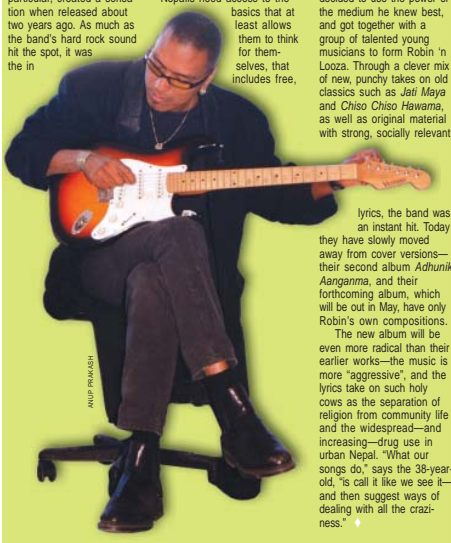
Nepalis need access to the basics that at least allows them to think for themselves, that includes free,

compulsory education for everyone until a certain age. As for the challenges well, the whole social system is loaded against the Nepali youth."

Robin's first moves on returning to Nepal in 1996 after 17 years in Canada and nearly as many in other places with a father in the British Army, was to set up an HIV/AIDS focused NGO.

NGO-dom's loss was one of the best things that have happened to contemporary Nepali music. Robin decided to use the power of the medium he knew best, and got together with a group of talented young musicians to form Robin 'n Looza. Through a clever mix of new, punchy takes on old classics such as *Jati Maya* and *Chiso Chiso Hawama*, as well as original material with strong, socially relevant

lyrics, the band was an instant hit. Today they have slowly moved away from cover versions—their second album *Adhunik Aanganra*, and their forthcoming album, which will be out in May, have only Robin's own compositions. The new album will be even more radical than their earlier works—the music is more "aggressive", and the lyrics take on such holy cows as the separation of religion from community life and the widespread—and increasing—drug use in urban Nepal. "What our songs do," says the 38-year-old, "is call it like we see it—and then suggest ways of dealing with all the craziness." ♦



NEPAL
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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Finance, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, is pleased to announce that the draft Background Issues Papers relating to the upcoming Nepal Development Forum 2002 (NDF 2002) are now posted for e-consultations on the website www.ndf2002.gov.np. The Background Issues Papers will form the groundwork for HMG/N presentations and deliberations with Nepal's development partners during the main NDF 2002 events on February 4-7, 2002 in Kathmandu and Pokhara.

The Ministry of Finance takes this opportunity to invite interested members of the general public to provide their valuable comments on the draft papers. All comments will be fed back to the appropriate authorities.



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Nepali Times is now available on PEPC Worldwide PRESSPOINT™ vending machines in Bangkok (at the Sofitel Central and Novotel Siam Square) and Hong Kong (New World Renaissance). This innovative newspaper distribution concept is already available at 1,000 points across Europe and the Americas, and will soon be extended to 200 stations in major Asian cities. PRESSPOINT™ is a self-contained interactive kiosk which prints on demand the latest edition of 65 newspapers from 35 countries around the world, including Nepali Times.

