2002 was the most violent year in our history. Which way in 2003?

BHAGIRATH YOGI

As we go into 2003 there are three main political forces in the country: the palace-army, the political parties and the Maoists. The king and the parliamentary parties should logically be on the same side, but they're not.

For many pundits in Kathmandu, the biggest riddle is why the king decided to open up two fronts in October and then effectively isolate himself. Did he underestimate the internal pressures preventing the Nepali Congress and the UML from joining the royal cabinet? Is he banking on public disillusionment with the parties, but this will not necessarily translate into support for him?

He is banking on public disillusionment with the political parties and the Maoists. The huge Panchayat-type royal rally planned in Biratnagar on 3 January is the scene. Said one senior source: “As far as I know, they’re not even talking about taking action.”

The result: in addition to the military stalemate in the countryside there is a political stalemate as well. The flurry of high-level visits by western officials to Kathmandu in the past two months shows that the international community is getting worried that Nepal’s problems now affect regional security.

“The international community including our neighbours, particularly India, see the seriousness of the problem and they are eager to cooperate with Nepal to solve this problem,” says Ram Sharan Mahat, former foreign minister from the Nepali Congress. But that support is conditional. The west and India have said publicly they prefer a constitutional role for the king in a parliamentary democracy. They are also getting nervous about human rights violations, the damning recent report by Amnesty International and their feeling that the army is in denial. If a handled properly, the promised hardline support to the army could be jeopardised.

The guns and helicopters are necessary to improve the army’s efficiency and could put pressure on the Maoists so they can start to negotiate. Despite overtures and recent soft language from the Maoist leadership, there doesn’t actually seem anything going on behind the scenes. Said one senior source: “As far as I know, they’re not even talking about taking action.”

Country descends into anarchy, Nepal becomes a failed state. The result: in addition to the military stalemate in the countryside there is a political stalemate as well. The flurry of high-level visits by western officials to Kathmandu in the past two months shows that the international community is getting worried that Nepal’s problems now affect regional security.

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ENDGAME

The only good thing we thought we could say about 2002 is that it was perhaps not as bad as 2001. After the royal massacre, street riots, and the army getting sucked into the conflict, we really thought that things in 2002 couldn’t get much worse. But they did. More Nepalis were killed in 2002 than have ever been killed in our nation’s history. As many people died in the past year as were killed in the previous five years of the insurgency. And, as the recently released report by Amnesty International points out: more than half of the “Maoists” the security forces claim to have killed were actually innocent civilians. As for the Maoists, their brutality, arbitrariness and targetting of the innocent only shows that “the peoples’ war” is indeed what it claims to be.

There are indications that the Maoists are now being forced into an endgame. The internal dynamics of the party, the need to keep the cadre occupied and show results means that it can’t go on like this. Matters are coming to a head. By deliberately timing their bandh on the day of the royal rally in Biratnagar, it is clear the comrades are now on a do-or-die trajectory. There are indications that the Maoists are now a serious threat to South Asia’s regional security. There are now hints that the Indian establishment is also beginning to get over its not-in-my-backyard syndrome to share this view. Ambassador Shyam Sharan turned allegations about Maoists’ India connection on its head last week by publicly alleging that Naxalite ultras from Bihar may be getting their training from Nepali comrades.

So, at least we all seem to agree this crisis has a cross-border dimension. Post-9/11 and post-Iraq, the region is now under the US security umbrella whether it likes it or not. And if Rocca declares “when you act like a terrorist, you are in fact a terrorist”, she is merely underlining the new rules of this global Great Game. Despite the bravado of Comrade Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai in their cyber-statement this week, it is clear the Maoist leadership has also started to feel the impact of the Rocca Doctrine. The supporting pillars of their armed revolution may not be tottering yet, but they are showing serious structural damage.

Intelligentsia have been the first to give up on the Maoists. All of a sudden, the issue of addressing the “root causes” of the insurgency has receded into the background. The new theme in the seminar circuit is “conflict resolution”. In any conflict resolution process, extremists are sidelined.

Then there are the royals. The extreme right initially found common cause with the extreme left because they both needed to squeeze the centre. But it was only a question of time before the royals got repelled by the Maoists’ hardline republicanism. Also, the global right sees the need to stick together in the global war against terror.

A section of Nepal’s urban middle-class once harboured the hopes of a benign revolution led by one of their own. But no one ever thought that urban planner Baburam, agri-scientist Pushpa Kamal and engineer Ram Bahadur would meet them towards the abyss. The middle class took one step down, and didn’t want to have anything to do with it. Maoist noises about the root causes of the Conflict must be for the likes of the pro-Maoist Pinay-American, Li Onesto. They move on and find another cause somewhere else in the world. Commitment is a luxury when you are sitting on the sidelines, at best must be for the likes of the pro-Maoist Pinay-American, Li Onesto. And last but not least, the seven year itch is sure to afflict the Maoist middle-class once it becomes plain that the dictatorship of the pro-Maoist in a ranting Prachanda Path is more of a cruel than an ideology, but can it keep the loyalty of half-educated youths who have already spent the better part of their prime in the wilderness? Had the answer been yes, the Maoists would not be looking for a safe landing. Impatience of their own cadre is a bigger threat to the leadership, especially when the safe havens aren’t all that safe any more.

More than logic and reason is it the raw emotion of a alienated population that causes a violent revolution. That fire of revolution seems to have been put out in Nepal because the explosion of violence sucked out all the oxygen. After the death of thousands of innocent victims, there is a silent torrent of tears flowing down our rivers.

There is a proverb in Maithili when women begin to weep, no force on earth can stop a cataclysm. The architects of this revolution seem to have finally realised that.

There are silent tears flowing down our rivers.
When the women begin to weep.

The grieving face of Nepal in 2002

A young woman in the small village of Pandusen in Bajura district after seven of her neighbours were killed during a security force operation in December 2002.
Pashupati Shumshere JB Rana: As we all know, the gap seems to be widening between His Majesty the King and parliamentary political parties. I will work towards bridging the gap. This has become urgent since the sovereign people want the restoration of peace as early as possible. But this can’t be done unless all forces within the constitution come together. Only then will negotiations with the Maoists be possible.

But who should take initiative, the king or the parties? His Majesty has already taken the initiative in this regard by granting audiences to Girija Babu and Madhav. Of course, the situation seems exaggerated from the side of the political parties. They seem to be toughening their stands in the mass meetings. But we must find a practical way out. In fact, if we are really committed to peace, such a deadlock is against everybody’s interests.

So, what could be the meeting point?

First of all, we must put aside our prejudices. We must admit that the parliament failed to find a way out to the problem of Maoist insurgency for nearly three years. So, there is no guarantee that the restoration of parliament would help to resolve the problem. All of us must accept that restoration of peace is the main agenda at present. We should not try to promote our individual agendas. If we agree to do away with our baggage, we can certainly work out a common agenda.

Do you have a workable agenda to achieve this?

It’s not my agenda. Neither do I have a magic wand. The question is: what is the agenda that of good will and good intentions. We should find a common platform that is agreeable to all seven parties in the dissolved parliament and His Majesty. We have seen that the Maoists have been able to keep the establishment divided over the last three or four years. G P Koirala was their enemy number one till sometime back. Now, they are befriending him. So, if the establishment agrees to come together, the Maoists too would be forced to come to the negotiating table.

What could you think be the points of agreement as and when Maoists agree to come over for dialogue?

It is obvious that the parliamentary parties and government can agree on the bottomline of constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. We have to take into account that the Nepali establishment will also be getting the support of the worldwide front against terrorism. In that case, it will be possible to bring the Maoists to a point of agreement through dialogue.

How could this be possible when the political parties are protesting against the October Fourth royal move?
The parliament, political parties, have to represent the aspirations of the sovereign Nepali people. We must admit that the present situation came into being as we failed to do that. So, let’s honour the popular mandate.

Two years ago you went on record to say that Nepal is passing through one of the worst crises in its history. Has there been any improvement? Where does this crisis emanate from?

There is still persists. This crisis emanates from the very deep socio-economic problems that abound in the country for the last several decades and poor governance, especially over the last 12 or 13 years. Until we succeed in cutting out corruption and resolving major socio-economic problems including that of janajati, backward ethnic groups in the tarai, dalits and women, we can’t overcome this crisis. At the same time, our administration must be allowed to function in a neutral basis and on the basis of merit. Constant interference in administration will make it dysfunctional and not capable of dealing with new challenges.

Do you see any external dimensions to this crisis, especially the Maoist insurgency?

The Maoist insurgency does have a regional dimension in the sense that there are very similar movements in other parts of the subcontinent such as People’s War Group (PWC) and Nepal Communist Center (MCC). The Maoist parties operating in the region have also set up their regional network. The geopolitical affects us in the sense that if the situation persists, a security vacuum would emerge here. As we are located between two nuclear powers to the north and south, a very dangerous situation could unfold. So, it is not in the interest of either India or China to let instability in Nepal prolong itself.

Based on the latest situation on ground, how would you foresee the Nepali politics taking its turn in the year 2003?
The whole thing rests on whether all forces within the constitution come together or not. If they can come together then there is a chance. Otherwise, the situation could further deteriorate. What is important is all of us must work together to turn the unpredictable situation into a predictable one.

What is the basic tenet of your party?

It is based on four broad principles: multi-party democracy, constitutional monarchy, liberal economics and nationalism. By Liberalism, we mean protection of people’s individual freedom from state intervention. That means human rights and the rule of law has its roots in the foundation of any country. In the context of the communitarian, among others. These four principles are like four pillars of a table. Our party won’t be able to stand up if one of these pillars gets shortened.

But some suspect that you are in favour of an active monarchy?

That is not true. As well as my party believe in constitutional monarchy that is in accordance with multi-party democracy. It is because monarchy has contributed a lot in nation building as well as modernisation of this kingdom. All of us want to remain under the umbrella of constitutional monarchy for any foreseeable future. This is possible only if the monarchy functions within the sphere of the country’s constitution.

Has your party become righting after it adopted the line of a more influential role for the monarchy and the departure of Surya Bahadur Thapa?

Actually it was the central committee chaired by Surya Bahadur Thapa that adopted a statement on the issue just four months ago. The Pokhara convention merely ratified that decision. The political paper restricts that influential role within the confines of the constitution, so we haven’t deviated even an inch from the multiparty mainstream.

As a prominent politician, you must have an ambition to become the Prime Minister. How would you label yourself as a popularly elected prime minister or a prime minister appointed by the king?

What kind of a question is that? It may be natural for a politician to aim high. But at the moment, our party leader is already the prime minister, so I would focus all my energies on delivering as the chairman of my party.
Alcoholism is a disease, it is spreading rapidly across Nepal. But it can be prevented and treated.

The season of war

In Christiandom, disgust for Saddam Hussein is mixed with great skepticism about the utility and morality of this coming war.

Nepal's anonymous alcoholism

Alcoholism in Nepal is overshadowed by other addictions like injecting drug use and smoking. But because of its cultural acceptability, experts say, alcoholism has become the single biggest medical and social problem in Nepal society today. Most families are in denial about members who are alcoholic, or they hide it because of the shame and stigma. Yet, recent research proves that alcoholism is a disease, and recovery is possible. Another problem is the cost to the treatment. A standard 12-month therapy can cost between Rs 3,000-5,000 a month. Those who can afford to, go abroad for confidentiality. Neither is there any reliable figure of the economic cost of alcohol abuse. There has never been a study in Nepal about the social and economic cost of alcohol abuse. Restrictions on mass production and sale of liquor were loosened more than 30 years ago. That decision assured both the import and the manufacture of cheap alcohol in the country, which suddenly increased availability and prices. Within a decade of licensing liquor industries became one of the highest investment sectors and also the strongest lobby group. The huge investment, an average of Rs 70 million, and the huge revenues it contributes to, is impossible without the help and accentuates the dangers of abuse.

Alcoholics are stereotyped as binge drinkers, or have physical and financial problems because of their expensive addiction. Innumerable pop songs and music videos that glorify drinking as a form of escapism enforce the stereotype, while advertisements that present it as socially respectable make it acceptable.

Psychological, family and society issues of the addict.

Alcoholism today is understood as a chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its spread. In Nepal, we cannot attribute the addictions that existed in western countries more than four decades ago. Alcoholism here is still thought to be a self-abnegating problem of the emotionally weak-willed and immoral. Alcoholics are stereotyped as binge drinkers, or have physical and financial problems because of their expensive addiction. Innumerable pop songs and music videos that glorify drinking as a form of escapism enforce the stereotype, while advertisements that present it as socially respectable make it acceptable.

About 300 professionals spend a year in Kathmandu. None of the existing organisations deal with alcoholism. Counsellors say that most people don't know that alcoholism is a disease, and recovery is possible. Another problem is the cost to the treatment. A standard 12-month therapy can cost between Rs 3,000-5,000 a month. Those who can afford to, go abroad for confidentiality. Neither is there any reliable figure of the economic cost of alcohol abuse. There has never been a study in Nepal about the social and economic cost of alcohol abuse.

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Saddam Hussein is mixed with great skepticism about the utility and morality of this coming war.

How few people—even those well aware of Saddam’s wicked deeds over the years—accept the need to ridiously unite him at this moment, as opposed to any other. Could it be that a little residual Christian spirit still resides in the bosoms of those who still follow the faith of Jesus here? If so, how then to explain the many Jews, Hindus, Muslims and atheists who swell the ranks of the peace movement. No, this is a matter of politics and distrust of the political elite, more than any other. Could it be that a little residual Christian spirit still resides in the bosoms of those who still follow the faith of Jesus here? If so, how then to explain the many Jews, Hindus, Muslims and atheists who swell the ranks of the peace movement. No, this is a matter of politics and distrust of the political elite, more than any other.

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Even more orthodox thinkers who usually support the actions of conservative governments, especially US administrations, find the war mongering distasteful and frightening. Abraham Lincoln decided the giving of war powers to presidents, despite exercising them himself. There’s an element of this in war opposition here. There’s also a sentiment that it’s impossible morally to support Saddam Hussein’s nasty regime. People are troubled, this whole exercise is causing deep unease.

The case for war has not been made, far from it. America’s anti-Iraq coalition will march under a perilous banner, that of soft public support and uncertainty of outcome. Christians is over, as are all the major religious holidays until Louras or Holy. The gods—it seems—have deserted us as we enter this season of war. Who could blame them?
A startling 15-30 percent of inpatients at hospitals in Nepal come with problems directly or indirectly related to alcohol abuse. The ratio of males to females average 60:40 and most of them are between 20-40 years. “Drug addiction has a high profile appeal for social organisations, but in the Nepali context alcohol abuse is almost 15 times a bigger problem,” says Dr Manish Zimmerman, medical director at Patan Hospital which is Nepal’s first to start an alcoholic support group. But even here, the problem is so vast that doctors are stretched too thin to provide adequate counselling.

Over the last decade, the Nepali chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has tried to reach more Nepali alcoholics but without much success. Says Krajnik, “There is only so much the support groups and rehabilitation centres can do. We must take the social stigma out of alcoholism and recognise it as a disease that can be treated.”

Alcoholism goes far beyond hangovers and liver damage, and therefore does not just have medical consequences for the drinker. It is a progressive disease, and a social one that claims primary and secondary victims. The family, especially the women and children, bear the brunt of it.

The European Union expressed concern over the deterioration of security, law and order, and human rights in Nepal. A statement issued by the Danish Embassy, presidency of the EU in Kathmandu, condoomed the ongoing Maoist violence and called upon them to “immediately stop the systematic campaign of killings, harassment and destruction”. The EU regretted that killings of party activists and toppling of physical infrastructure has continued, even after the recent Maoist call for a halt to these atrocities. They also expressed concern over “the evidence of human rights violation committed by the security forces with impunity”. The government has been urged to take immediate action conforming with its international obligations, and to implement the recommendations made by the National Human Rights Commission.

In the last fiscal year, these distilleries produced more than 5.9 million litres of liquor, approximately 3.8 million litres were exported. Alcohol commercials have been banned on radio and television, but liquor manufacturers are sponsoring socially valued activities like popular sports and public gardens. They have also started putting up street hoardings highlighting the health hazards of drinking.

A drug addict who claims his substance abuse started with alcohol says, “The government is happy with the revenue from liquor. I think it should stop and rethink its policies. It should realise that the nation’s youth and families are paying a high social and emotional price to generate those revenues.” So far, the only group that seems to be listening are the Maoists who have declared parts of rural Nepal dry, and have threatened liquor manufacturers.


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A sure likelihood as it may seem, Maoist supremo Prachanda and Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala seem to have the same speech-writer. Both are now demanding that the Royal Nepal Army be under control of a same speech-writer. Both are now Prasad Koirala seem to have the parties away from the palace, has gradual drift of the parliamentary Statements like these and the king grows, so it seems to narrow between the Maoists and the parties. Prachanda and Nepali Maoist supremo

by

COMMENTARY

Talks? What talks?

Most independent analysts now believe that Nepal’s monarchy is on an autocratic path despite negotiations to the contrary by the king himself and by members of his nominated cabinet. Smelling blood, the Maoists have hardened their anti-monarchist stance. They are therefore pushing their three-point agenda for an all-party roundtable conference, the formation of an interim government and constituent assembly elections. They also want to show the outside world an image of a reasonable outfit to bolster those abroad who oppose military action against Nepal. The aim here is to either stop or delay western financial and military help. But the federal parliamentary parties haven’t been able to present a united front. They can’t seem to come up with a common alternative to present to the king. Their public meetings have failed to deliver any meaningful message to supporters. Aside from blowing their own trumpets, and calling on the king to correct his “mistakes”, renounce the dissolved parliament, all they have managed to do is prove to the people one more time that all they are interested is to use a “democracy” façade to climb back on the saddle.

The task of finding a common democratic solution may therefore fall upon the king. Though the parliamentary forces failed to conclude successful negotiations with the Maoists for the last seven years, they have the power to disrupt it by opening from behind a thick façade of democracy.

And lurking in the background, as always, is the India factor. When asked about perceived Indian high-handedness in Nepal, senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai said cryptically in his interview with a US paper that there was “no need to talk about each and every leaf and bush when you have described the whole forest”.

The Maoists have remained enigmatically silent on every major controversial issue between India and Nepal in the past two years. Many Nepali have started to notice that the Maoists have mostly spared Indian-owned industries, business establishments, and taxi-based smuggling rings from “people’s actions”. Although all other political parties have been targeted at one time or other, the Nepal Sadbhavana Party has emerged largely unscathed.

The Maoist leadership abuses the monarchy in every statement, but spares New Delhi’s pressure tactics from criticism. The spirit called indirect “unity-in-action” of the Maoists with the late King Birendra, their suppositional silence towards India, their recent peace overtures, and their call for a constituent assembly are all stepping stones towards their strategic objectives. And since they are not able to change tactics to suit the times, they often appear to contradict themselves.

In their obsession with analysing every Maoist tactic, western observers as well as Nepali rights activists seem to fall into the trap of losing sight of their long-term objectives.

Having skilfully drawn a wedge between the king and parliamentary parties, the Maoists are now working to widen the gap between the Nepali state and the international donor community. This so they can concentrate on military planning, and buying time so that foreign military support for the security forces is delayed. No one really gives much weight to the present cabinet. It has neither the political clout nor the standing to initiate negotiations with the Maoists. So, unless King Gyanendra himself can use a dramatic surprise breakthrough we cannot expect much from the government side. And since the Maoists see the post-October 4 developments going in their favor, there is really no compulsion for them to sit down with the king. That is why the four-point precondition laid out by Prachanda this week were just sweeteners intended to show flexibility, paint the government side as war-stoners in an effort to delay western military help.

Baburam Bhattarai in his interview says his group is “ready to hold talks with the new leadership of the old establishment”—words that hark back to the ancient regime of the French Revolution. Talks can’t realistically take place until one or both of the warring parties get weary of war. The bloodshed and misery, it seems, hasn’t reached the critical mass that is needed for a genuine desire for peace.

It took more than 65,000 deaths for the peace constituency to cross the threshold in Sri Lanka. As many lost their lives in the Sendero Luminoso insurgency in Peru, the Philippines has the longest-running insurgency in the world. Wars inevitably wind down. The only question is: How can we accelerate that process?

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(Puskar Bhusal is on leave and will return in two weeks.)
The events in Nepal over the couple of months have left the Beef with few options but to look to the future. It is important to reiterate that if the present is not good, it is not necessarily true that the future is hopeless. A country of 23.5 million people should find inner strength to get through this period of uncertainty and rise above petty politics, ego’s and ‘isms’. The year 2003 will begin testing the efficacy of the current cabinet and how well the transition will take place. In business—speak this is purely project management, not an operations team. If the cabinet were to drag its heels, it would defeat the purpose of its creation. The emphasis on holding elections both central and local is paramount, and the credibility of the current government is on this issue. The anti-corruption drive should not lose momentum. As the budget is got through, the net will begin to harden. We must not lose sight of the objective—a corruption free Nepal. Our commitment to fight corruption is the only way to win back the support of the people. And, we might add, of donor nations and development agencies. The process must be continuous, vigilant and independent to remain effective. The business sector has an important role in resuscitating the economy. We already have an advantage—a cabinet that understands the business of doing business. Unfortunately, the reports and studies have been overshadowed by various Action Committees with commendable regularity are increasingly proportionate to the enormity of the economic problems that the country is run. What better time than now to tackle problems that have long plagued us? As the first step, the Beef recommends the reports be actually read and implemented. Advice, no matter how sound, is worthless if it remains tucked in the filing cabinets. While restocking of a paramilitary issue, we must not shrug our shoulders or allow other responsibilities and use the pursuit of peace as an excuse for poor performance. We have enough people in the government machinery to get moving. To have effective state, we need to stop making excuses and get moving. To have effective peace, we need to stop making excuses and get moving.

(Readers can put their views or comments at arthryskukuy@yahoo.com)

Beyond the Hindu rate of growth

Everyone nowadays seems obsessed about the question as to whether or not India can be recognized as a market economy. In discussing this issue, what constitutes modernisation is often confused with westernisation. Understanding the difference is vital. India’s encounter with the West over the past three centuries underscores the distinction between the two processes—modernisation and westernisation—that are often assumed to be synonymous. In fact, modernisation does not entail westernisation, as the example of contemporary Japan demonstrates. Whereas modernisation entails a change in lifestyle, the way the industrial world operates, westernisation entails a change in cosmopolitan belief about the way the industrial world lives.

Like China and unlike India, Japan, minds changed in its ancient beliefs about the way the world works (and should work) with which modernisation coincides. Instead, like many Islamic countries today, India strongly believed Gandhi’s doctrine that modernisation necessarily means westernisation. Unfortunately, and under the influence of the British Raj, parts of the economy and society were modernised during the second half of the 19th century of laissez-faire and free trade. Some of the traditional literary casts also embraced westernisation. British policy turned India into a pioneer of Third World (de)nationalisation, with an economy increasingly based on domestic capital and entrepreneurship combined with imported technology. But modernisation stalled when protectionism pressure from Lancashire and the exigencies of Imperial finance led the British to abandon free trade and laissez-faire. At the same time, westernisation failed the test of nationalist movement.

The introduction of income taxes and UK labour laws in the late 19th century led to nearly a century of mounting state intervention in the economy—a process that accelerated after independence. This damaged India’s growth prospects and hopes of alleviating its ancient scourge of mass poverty. The breakdown of the global economy in the first half of the 20th century was a wake-up signal for the world. Further, it contributed to India’s incipient integration into the world economy during the British Raj. Finally, beginning with the economic reforms of 1991, India embarked on a cautious and bold new looking policies, returning to where it left off at the end of the 19th century.

We now have a fairly clear quantitative picture of the performance of the Indian economy throughout this period. Using the 130 years from 1868 through 1999-2000, per capita income more than tripled, a national income increased by a factor of eight while the population grew nearly five-fold. This suggests that the age-old combination of economic stagnation and cultural identity that I call the “Hindu Equilibrium” seems finally to have been broken. But on closer inspection, it turns out that this was largely due to the economic performance of the last two decades.

The sub-period from 1868-1890 saw the beginning of industrialisation and India’s partial integration into the world economy under the Raj. National income did not stagnate, as national historians once maintained, but grew modestly, at an average annual rate of 1.3 percent. Growth was fastest from 1878-1890, followed by large fluctuations in output. A fairly low rate of population growth ensured a modest rise in per capita income of about 0.7 percent during this period.

The second sub-period, 1900-1945, saw the breakdown of the global economy and the start of India’s population explosion. Growth of per capita income decelerated between 1882 and 1930 and declined further in the 1930s. A total of about 45-year sub-period, output grew at just above 1 percent annually—the same rate as under the Raj—but nearly population growth slowed to 0.9 percent, causing virtual stagnation of per capita growth.

The third sub-period, 1950-1980, marked the heyday of economic planning. Infrastructure and industrialisation, undertaken by the Rajiv Gandhi government in the mid-1980s, and the more substantial National Solar-Rashtreacha Nepal Singh economic reforms in 1991, boosted national income growth to an average annual rate of 4.5 percent. But the demographic explosion that began in the 1950’s had by now driven the rate of population growth up to 3 percent per year, so that actual per capita income growth only by 1.5 percent.

A departure from what the then Raj Khadka dubbed the “Hindu rate of growth” came only in the fourth sub-period, 1980-1999. Partial economic liberalisation, undertaken by the Rajiv Gandhi government in the mid-1980s, and the more substantial National Solar-Rashtreacha Nepal Singh economic reforms in 1991, boosted national income growth to an average annual rate of 4.5 percent. But the demographic explosion that began in the 1950’s had by now driven the rate of population growth up to 3 percent per year, so that actual per capita income growth only by 1.5 percent.

ECONOMY
**Love at first strike**

Amar Dil Lama, better known as A D Lama, three-time Burma champion had bagged a couple of men’s singles titles and was twelve years older than Hem. His contemporaries were Singha Bahadur Basnyat and Shail Kumar. With his precision ground strokes, Basnyat dominated tennis, representing Nepal internationally in Singapore, Iran, and Thailand.

Today, anyone looking for a good tennis lesson will undoubtedly be directed to Sharad Lama, Subha Rana Shahi or Krishna Ghale. Their’s is a generation with humble beginnings. “I started as a ball boy and I am not ashamed of it,” says Ghale. Encouraging each other along the way, they represented Nepal internationally in the Asian Games, South Asian Games, and throughout the SAARC nations. Sharad Lama became the first Nepali player certified as a US Professional Tennis Registry professional.

The trio dominated men’s tennis in the 80s and 90s. Subha Rana continues to secure one of the top four position at the age of 43 and Krishna, 41, admits, “I am still playing. I should have retired but there are not enough young players coming up.” You can find Sharad, Subha and Krishna, all coaches certified by the Professional Tennis Registry, through the All Nepal Lawn Tennis Association Tennis Complex. Sharad Lama, undoubtedly one of Nepal’s most enthusiastic proponents of what he calls “grassroot level tennis” assures all players will be accommodated. To increase youth participation in the sport, juniors are encouraged to join as members or for lessons.

Over at Hem Lama’s Academy you will find some of Nepal’s rising stars. Hem’s objective is to produce champions but the motivation, he insists, must come from the kids. And 14-year-old Utsav Rizal, with five years of tennis under his belt, is on his way. In his age bracket he holds an International Tennis Federation (ITF) ranking of 15 for South and Central Asia. Utsav aims to play college tennis in America or England, and says: “I have learned discipline, improved my tennis and I still have a lot to learn from the academy.”

On the ancestral lands of Juddha Samshere Rana in Jawalakhel, Madhukar Rana has established the Shaligram Tennis Academy. An informal non-registered training program especially to encourage junior players, the academy awards certificates of proficiency to beginners after completing 90 to 120 hours of lessons. However, Madhukar insists:
“Players must demonstrate the ability to play singles and doubles to qualify for the certificate.” Rana is also working to establish inter-club competition, particularly in the veteran women’s category. Sri Ram Magar, winner of the men’s singles draw at the third annual Hyatt Winter Tennis tournament last weekend, moved to Pokhara three years ago. There, in the foothills, he runs Parsyang Tennis Club. With help from his sponsors, Sri Ram hopes to expand the facility into a club where he will bring up a new generation of players from the lake town, Kumar Adhikari, a 17-year-old resident of Pokhara trains with Sri Ram. He won the under-18 at Jaaykar Tournament this year and has been selected to go to India in January to play the Indian circuit.

Kamal Bhandari came to Kathmandu from his village school, and when he picked up the racquet he put down the books. Now at 24, he makes a living as a marker at Phora Durbar and gives private lessons on his days off. It is the only way he can afford to play. Bhandari feels he has not fulfilled his potential in tennis.

Girls and women’s tennis is seriously lagging in Nepal. Eleven-year-old Prit Rizal finds tennis very exciting and wants to turn professional, but there are not enough girls to train with and compete against. Rizal won the under-12 at Hyatt. Clinching the under-18 and women’s doubles partnered by her mother at the winter tournament, Vindiya Dayananda is the leading lady player in Nepal. Vindiya is Sri Lanka’s number two lady player and number one junior and has an ITF ranking in the top 500 for under-18s.

With no dearth of talent or facilities what’s the hitch? The call is unanimous: the infrastructure for tennis in Nepal remains weak. Until ANLTA lays foundations for youth programs, regular coaching workshops, and organises enough tournaments annually, the players can do little more. “As coaches we are here and we have always told the association we will be happy to work with them, but we cannot always work for free or on a salary that cannot support the game,” says Krishna Ghale.

For most of us not in the competitive mode, it is still love at first strike. Says Sharad Lama, “Tennis is a game you never master completely. It is on a life scale. The best person wins for the day, not for yesterday, nor for tomorrow, and then you go on. There are so many elements involved yet it is a game that is tolerant and forgiving...that is the magic of tennis.”
How not to
As another year goes by, a Harvard professor contemplates the molecular basis of longevity.

LEONARD GUARENTE

S
ince the dawn of human consciousness, we have contemplated our own mortality and dreamed of ways of overcoming it. Until recently, achieving control over our own longevity was the stuff of fairy tales, dismissed from actual scientific progress. But now research suggests that the molecular basis of aging may soon be understood in detail. Applying this knowledge could be doldrums.

Recent scientific breakthroughs have come from research on not on humans, or even on rats and mice, but on simple laboratory organisms like yeast and roundworms. These primitive life forms have yielded important, generally valid clues that have forced a comprehensive re-evaluation of the nature of the aging process.

Traditional evolutionary thought viewed aging as a process that occurs by default in the post-reproductive phase of life. But Darwinian natural selection cannot prevent the wholesale decline of an individual whose genes have already been passed on to the next generation. According to this view, many cellular and organic processes that degrade concurrently, and aging has many causes. As a result, the post-reproductive shortening of a great many genes would have to be remedied to slow the aging process.

Recent research on yeast and roundworms suggest otherwise. It turns out that mutations even in single genes can lead to a substantial lengthening of life span and an accompanying slowdown in the aging process. But how can this be possible if aging has many concurrent causes, as evolutionary theory maintains?

The answer can be found by examining the molecules that make up the genes in which mutations extend life span. For example, a universal gene called Sir2 determines the life span of both yeast cells and roundworms. In both organisms, if an extra copy of Sir2 is added by genetic intervention, the life span is extended. Conversely, if the Sir2 gene is deleted, the life span is shortened.

In both yeast and worms, LEONARD GUARENTE
SIR2 appears to sense the availability of food and stall the aging process in times of deprivation by stimulating the formation of specialized body types—spores in yeast and dwarfs in Drosophila—so that they can survive for extraordinarily long periods without nutrition. When conditions improve, the dormant life forms resume and reproduce.

The survival function that SIR2 exerts is to serve—forestalling aging and reproduction during famine—is adaptive and therefore exists to serve—forestalling aging and reproduction during deprivation by stimulating the aging process in times of scarcity. The survival program for organisms. But in times of plenty, the survival program is modified. In times of plenty, the survival program is modified, it makes little biological sense for a gene that promoted survival in a time of scarcity, the survival program to be triggered in the presence of a surplus of food. Even more intriguingly, a single gene can promote this survival mechanism across a wide swath of nature’s creatures.

Does SIR2 also promote survival in mammalian? Interestingly, in cultured mouse or human cells, the mammalian SIR2 gene determines a cell’s response to DNA damage. When faced with damaging agents, cells have the ability to commit suicide. The mammalian SIR2 gene modulates this process, and higher levels of it dampen the cell death response. Just like in yeast and worms, mammalian SIR2 promotes survival, in this case of cultured cells.

Does this mean that mammalian aging as it lastly caused by the gradual loss of cells and the accompanying failure of organs? Possibly, but we must bear in mind that the cell death response is a way to call genetically damaged cells before they progress into tumors. So increasing SIR2 activity in mammals may actually cause cancer by keeping bad cells alive too long.

Yet this uniquely tells for two reasons. First, as an evolutionary arm, it makes little sense for a gene to sense the availability of food and stall the aging process in times of deprivation by stimulating the formation of specialized body types—spores in yeast and dwarfs in Drosophila—so that they can survive for extraordinarily long periods without nutrition. When conditions improve, the dormant life forms resume and reproduce.

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There has been a sharp polarisation of views among nationalists, parliamentaryists and the Maoists. All three powers have changed character. The power of the king is becoming more concrete—many feel it is regressive. Looking at the situation following the royal declaration on 4 October, the political parties appear to be playing a more democratic role. But their party interests have become narrower. Rather than looking for a way out of this crisis, parliamentary powers are intent on fulfilling their own agendas.

The role of the Maoists, who have emerged as the third power, is also changing. A party that has managed to mobilise the public to a great extent, cannot make such an abrupt U-turn. If it is told to stop the current crisis from being defined as a three-point power equation, it will be reduced to a two-point power equation. Who will benefit in the end remains to be seen. Regarding the monarchy, the Nepali people respected the king and held him in esteem. But given the changing circumstances and based on the role the monarchy played in the past, the king cannot expect this to continue unquestionably.

Parliamentary elections, Article 128, politics, whatever we talk about—the sole truth is that the present constitution has failed. What can we expect from a constitution that is unable to provide solutions to the political crisis?

It is now necessary to draft a new constitution. In the past 12 years there were complaints that the king was not given his proper place. But in the past year and a half, the king has sought his place. So it is foolish to think that the royal declaration on 4 October was the outcome of the current crisis. Rather, it is the materialisation of the palace’s wish to see a more definite role. If the political parties are unable to keep the people happy, then we can’t ignore the rise of an alternative power.

The Maoist party, the People’s Liberation Army and the Joint Revolutionary People’s Council will also be co-ordinating a series of protest programs, including a public agitation campaign till 14 January. From 15 to 28 January, the Maoists have planned public meetings, processions and various public mobilisation drives. From 29 January to 12 February, they have called for a people’s resistance campaign and a bandh on 13 and 14 February to celebrate the party’s 23rd anniversary.

The Maoists have repeated their demands for a sustainable meeting, an intergovernment and a constituent assembly. They have warned an action against corrupt individuals within and outside the palace. They have accused the government of being autocratic and not paying taxes. The strongly worded and comparatively long press release states that taxes collected from the general public have been misused for purchasing weapons and endorsing corrupt deals and commissions instead of being used for the economic and social good of the people.

There is a strong possibility that the other political parties are either not being protesting the civic reception program but haven’t made plans to undertake it—will silently support the bandh. The palace has put itself in a tricky situation since it has neither rectified the royal declaration of 4 October nor been able to create an environment conducive for talks with the Maoists.

--Jaya Adhikari, 25 December

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Jagat Gauchan

Interview with Jagat Gauchan, newly elected Central Working Committee member of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP): Editcript

How can you be so confident you’ll achieve what the political leaders could not?

What no the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML claim, the political changes have not laid down the basis to do it with them than with King Birendra who instituted the multiparty system following the Shah tradition of respecting the people’s desires. The incompetence of our political parties has become obvious in the last 12 years. The likes of Girija Praudha Koirala and Man Mohan Adhikari they are labelled leaders. Yes they are inept and incompetent to be true leaders. If they had any degree of sincerity, the country may have been in a better situation today.

The leaders are responsible for the deterioration of Nepal.

Would you say the Congress and Communist leaders are totally unconcerned about the people’s welfare?

That seems obvious to me—the Nepali Congress claims to be synonymous with democracy, but cheats the people to garner lunatics for itself. Meanwhile, the UML claims to commitment to the people but have yet to put it into practice. They told lies and now the people have rejected them.

Leaders are not god-sent and they cannot be imposters. The people will accept only those who work for them. I have always been proud of my nationality, I could not stop my Wireless to Nepal’s deterioration. We have a responsibility to this country to the Nepali Congress and Nepali leaders entry into politics was not done out of any personal political ambitions. We have a duty to devote our life to the service of this country.

How do you propose to deal with the Maoist problem?

Presently there are three powers in the Nepal. The first is absolute monarchy, which is respected as the symbol of national unity. The second is the Maoists and the last, the multiparty powers. The latter has been despised and criticism by the people. This is the only political system that failed all over the world. They should understand that their demands is impossible. They should change their demands for a constituent assembly and a communist state. There is no solution within the constitution of 1990. Of course, power sharing would be an option for them. What I don’t understand is where will be the transfer of power—the chief secretary? Until the next election, executive power will automatically lie with the monarch.

Dann Nepal

Interview with Girija Pradha Koirala in Kathmandu, 20 December

In the old and blackened shops at Lalit Road in Mumbai, you can see the young women, with heavy make up on their faces waiting for customers. Their eyes, however, do not convey any emotions. Their drab lives lacking feeling. Some 1,000 Nepali women are said to be serving as sex workers in Lalit Road alone. When a group of visiting Nepali journalists visited them recently, they got agitated and began to curse the country that sent them here.

"Why have you come here! Talk to us!" one of them asked us in a condescending tone. Her face was contorted with anger and disgust, “God only knows what kind of people running the government. Don’t they know how life is for men and women are living and their families are dying?”

Another woman said that she had been trafficked when she was only 15, “I didn’t know where I was being taken and for what purpose,” she said, “At least in Dreins, we don’t have to take advantage of us.” Few years back, some trafficked women had been repatriated from Mumbai as the initiative of a group of NGOs. But the initiative failed. Walk into any big city in India—Mumbai, Kolkata or Delhi—the plight of Nepali women is no different. After losing their freedom and their dignity, they have come here to give up their hope of it coming to terms with their existence here. Another woman shouted, “We labourers in Dreins have no home. We have come here to serve as sex workers in India. It is all they can earn. We are forced to come here. But at least here we have food. If we can’t earn, we can work for us, give us jobs back home, then take us back. Otherwise, why have you come here?"
23 February, 1977

Sundarijal

Our present line incorporates also a conviction that the king is compelled by critical development of the relationship between India and Nepal and also by the stagnation in the development of the country and by an awareness that this has not produced expected desired results to respond to our gesture. If this analysis of ours is proven correct—for no indication—then the king will soon open a dialogue with us. What should be our stand, what line of argument and strategy should we adopt in our dialogue with the king? Of course over time is quite clear. Restore parliamentary democracy, i.e. restore ante-1960 status quo. That this will be for the king some kind of ultimatum, at least a...demand which by virtue of our strength we are not in a position to make. Moreover if the talk is intended to achieve a compromise then we too will have to take into consideration the position and difficulties of the king. The spirit of compromise means that both sides should take into consideration, when advancing their respective proposals and suggestions, the difficulties dignity of the parties concerned. If a compromise is achieved both the parties will be the partners in a difficult undertaking of leading the nation to progress. In this context we must, therefore, be guided by two considerations which is difficult to reconcile and would tax the ingenuity and diplomatic capabilities of the parties to the maximum: 1. The objective ideal of total restoration of democratic functioning should not be diluted, but at the same time should not be rigid to the point of breaking the prospect of compromise. A very tall demand. OM wants me to start thinking out ideas for eventual dialogue with the king which he sees coming very soon. I think the first prerequisite is mutual trust. I will appeal to the king to be frank and fully trusting and trustworthy. We have established our bonafide by returning unconditionally and thus placing ourselves at his disposal and mercy. 2. Full democracy should be the mutual objective. 3. First process is to grant total and unconditional amnesty and restoration of property, etc. 4. Immediately or after a gap of three months restoration of fundamental rights. 5. Six months thereafter permission to parties to function and at the same time or again three months after that declaration of a date—say one year later—for elections to the national parishad by adult franchise and at the same time prospective granting of authority to the elected national parishad to make appropriate amendments to the constitution and this arrangement the king will not have to appear to have conceded substantially or yielded considerably, at the same time we will have been assured of restoration of full democratic process within a specified period.

24 February, 1977

Sundarijal

Washed a bucketful of clothes. Feeling very tired. Didn’t do anything.

25 February, 1977

Sundarijal

It with bronchitis.

26 February, 1977

Sundarijal

Not well.

27 February, 1977

Sundarijal

Not well. Have asked for medicines which I used in India on Dr Vash’s. (BHU) (Banaras Hindu University) advice. The doctor said in the evening that a doctor would come to see me tomorrow.

Another series of entries in Koirala’s prison diary gives us a hauntingly relevant analysis of Nepal’s present political predicament and we see a striking similarity to the current polarization between the parties and the monarchy. BP’s analysis is applicable today as it was in 1977: “If a compromise is achieved both (the king and the parties) will be the partners in a difficult undertaking of leading the nation to progress.” BP is writing in English, and the next few entries are blank, as he falls sick with bronchitis.

Back to Sundarijal >24

“The king will soon open a dialogue with us…”

27 February, 1977

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS
- Forest Based Products Development Exhibition (Birhhuli) Mandap. 10AM-4PM from 27 to 29 December. Free entry. Nepal Foresters’ Association, Babarmahal, 268193
- Snow and other adventures: "Poems in Frames" by Mark West at Laximapat Gallery Cafe, Laximpat.
- Woodturning in Kathmandu by Dan Hogan, and Unspoken Words: new Tibetan Calligraphy by Dhumkhaing at Indigo Gallery, Kathmandu. 9AM-6PM from 13 to 14 January. 413580

EVENTS
- Weekly dialogues on Life and living: Borrow books and audiotaapes at K Study Centre, Swoyambhu. 2PM-6PM. Saturday. Arti Kumar at 227704
- Winter Day Camp ECCA for students (Class 4-9). 29 December-January 4 ECCA, Thapathali, Kathmandu. 268371, 268328 email: ecca@mos.com.np
- Reiki (Healing) Level One Workshop at Everest Bookshop, Babar Mahal Revisted, 28 December. 541613

MUSIC
- Live music by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar. Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- 1974 AD Exclusively at Moksh, Pushkrosh organized by the Grahames Association of Nepal in aid of Dr Grahames. Kaimping. 6.30 PM on 27 December. Rs 750 (includes dinner). Limited tickets. bitarak.com. 529726

DRINKS
- New Year’s Eve at Roo Bar with Mumbai’s Sonia Sagal and Harinet Menotta performing jazz, pop and R&B, with in-house Teesta. Rs 1200 single, Rs 1800 couple. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu
- Paddy Foley’s Irish Pub a wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416936.
- Friday Indulgence Taste 12 Scottish single malts for Rs 999 at the Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 248999

FOOD
- Moulin Rouge New Year’s Eve at Hotel Yak & Yeti French Can-Can dancers, dinner and free entry to Sinners in Heaven. Rs 7777 couple. 438979
- New Year’s Eve at Roo Restaurant Five course dinner, complimentary wine and free entrance to Roo Bar. Rs 3000. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu
- festive Season Menu of ‘Cosmi’ cuisine at Cafe Mitra. 259015
- New Year Groove at Dwarka’s features Caderica Collective. Bonfire. BBQ, 30 percent beverage discount Rs 1500 single, Rs 2500 couple. 479488
- K-tooth Beer and Steakhouse Free muddled wine or Irish coffee with every meal. 433043
- Kirky’s of Kathmandu Traditional New Year’s Eve fun tour Rs 1200 + tax. 250550
- Multi Cuisine at Nango’s Deli, relocated to Durbar Marg. 224707
- Jazz by the Pool Weekend BBQ lunch with Chris Masard and the Jazz Commission. Rs 600 per person free beer or a soft drink. Soalite Creawa Plaza
- Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee at the Roadhouse Cafe. Thamel.
- Taste of Beijing Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Sindhu International Convention Centre. 469589
- Tukche Thakali Kitchen Bickeheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Durbar Marg.

NETWORKS
- If you want to escape Kathmandu’s New Year Eve frenzy, you probably couldn’t do it better than Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. This four-star establishment has everything from an indoor swimming pool and a helipad to luxurious rooms with private balconies, all the better to enjoy an uninterrupted view of the Himalaya. Greet the new year with a sumptuous breakfast while watching the first sunrise of 2003 from behind Mt Everest. The historic towns of Bhaktapur, Saktu and Changu Narayan Temple are a short commute away. You could mountain bike down from Nagarkot, a fun and easy activity, and then have the resort pick you up for the return trip. Club Himalaya Nagarkot Resort. 680045 48 80 83. Email: club@mos.com.np Website: www.nepalhotel.com
- Adventure Tented Camp cradled among thick forests of magnolias and rhododendrons, is far from the madding crowd on Pokhari Thumbki Hill, 15 km south-east of the city. It commands an impressive view of the mountains and Kathmandu Valley, and is a treat for nature lovers and hikers. An easy walk will take you down to the bustling Newari village of Panauti, renowned for its 16th century Bhratramay Temple. If you want something more rigorous, try the uphill route to Phulchoki. Their cozy mountain safari tents

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

BBC on FM 102.4

Another dry December with every westert so far bypassing us. There was some hope that this week’s moisture front would come our way, but alas no such luck. As this satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows, the cold has intensified the tarai fog, bringing down the maximum temperature considerably, as the sun fails to heat the ground. The Valley will have misty mornings, but the mountains of Nepal will be crisp, sunny and clear through the New Year’s holiday with just the occasional high clouds and chances of snow flurries in the higher valleys.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS
MOTHERS AND THE FATHERS OF LAND

James Bond’s 20th cinematic outing, Die Another Day, keeps things fresh. Bond is leaner, meaner and eager especially when MI6 strips him of his double-O status after his imprisonment in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi- ments in a North Korean prison. Pierce Brosnan’s fourth move as the suave secret spy has more to do with Gutierrez than the usual signature action chases, requi-
Paris 1900: Of all Parisian music halls one stood out. Moulin Rouge—literally “Red Windmill”, a holdover from the time of Louis XIV in Montmartre—was where the otherwise jaded French crowd stood six-deep around the stage to see the Can-Can. The dance was an elaborate production with lithe performers who wore outrageous costumes, often exposing more than was concealed. Translated, the daring Can-Can means tittle-tattle, and it became an instant sensation. It turned Moulin Rouge into a legend that has been immortalised in theatrical shows, Hollywood movies and today is something of an icon.

Kathmandu 2002: The Moulin Rouge is still alive and magnificently vibrant. That special Parisian magic will be recreated at the Hotel Yak & Yeti on New Year’s Eve for the first time in Nepal. Don’t be fooled into assuming this will be a gentle retreat into sepia tinted nostalgia—not with true French Can-Can dancers and a program to tantalise even the most blasé, world-weary reveler.

The grandeur would be incomplete without a menu to match the opulent ambience. Leave it to Executive Chef Victor Holla to create a different symphony of flavours and tastes to complement the festivities in an extended international gourmet buffet. Rest assured there will be no mundane matter-paneer or mashed potatoes, unless reborn in a more glamorous avatar. After wallowing in the decadent past till midnight, patrons are welcome to join Sinners in Heaven, the best dance party in town featuring hip DJs and today’s fresh young things. The Yak, as regulars know it, always delivers and if there is to be a Moulin Rouge in our neck of the woods, no one will do it better. So ladies and gentlemen, bring out the formulas and brush up the French—Moulin Rouge is coming to town!

Tickets will be sold from Hotel Yak & Yeti only. Ticket price will include a bottle of sparkling wine per couple, dinner and free entrance to Sinners in Heaven. 248999 Ext: 2865
Prime minister climbs Mt Everest
From Our Mountaineering Correspondent

NAMCHE BAZAR, May 25 — A government team led by the prime minister has successfully climbed Mt Everest to mark the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the world's highest mountain. The prime minister lead a large rally from the South Col, marched up the south-east ridge chanting pro-monarchy slogans, and the rally was converted into a mass meeting when it got to the top. Addressing the gathering in a brief speech, the prime minister said: "Great view. Didn't think I'd make it. Better call Kathmandu and tell them I'm ok. Ladies and gentlemen, I am breathless with pleasure to be here today. I remember that historic day 50 years ago when Mt Everest was still a virgin peak. Thank you all for coming. Let's get out of here."

Before declaring the function over, the chairperson of the Sagarmatha 50th Anniversary Celebration Publicity Sub-committee proposed a vote of thanks to the prime minister for taking time off his busy schedule to be on top of the world, and awarded him a certificate for being the first head of government to climb Mt Everest without the aid of bottled oxygen.