



Biking
in the
time
of
bandhs



EXCLUSIVE

Un-united Marxist-Leninists

The Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) is holding its seventh party convention 1-5 February in Janakpur, where a contest is expected between Khadga P Oli and Madhav Nepal. The two have already sparred over making the party more democratic and transparent by scrapping the general secretary post and replacing it with a chairman. The two are neck-to-neck, although Nepal is supposed to have the edge.

The party may give itself an image makeover with a new flag and new name. However, members seem reluctant to give up the hammer and sickle, preferring to combine it with the sun from the Nepali flag in the background. The sun is also the UML's election symbol. The new flag would distinguish the party from a spectrum of other communist splinter groups, including the deep-red CPN (Maoist). Some party stalwarts also want to take off "UML" tag and shorten the party name to simply: Communist Party of Nepal (CPN). The move, they say, will enhance the party's standing as the main communist group in Nepal and also reduce Western scepticism about its democratic credentials.

"Our party is by far the most democratic party as we hold elections from ward units right up to the party's central leadership," standing committee member, Amrit Kumar Bohara told us. While the party bosses are receptive to changing the flag, there is reluctance to change the name. "It's up to the delegates to decide. We don't want to impose decisions from the top," Bohara said.



RAJENDRA DAHAL in BIRATNAGAR

Initial public apprehension has given way to keen anticipation in eastern Nepal to the massive civic reception planned for Friday in Biratnagar in honour of King Gyanendra and Queen Komal.

Fears that the Maoists may try to disrupt the rally during the bandh they have declared for Friday has been allayed by a massive security *bandobast* in and around this industrial town. News from Kathmandu that King Gyanendra will be making a royal address has raised expectations here of a dramatic new announcement for political rapprochement.

King Gyanendra was set to fly out of Kathmandu on Thursday itself, and spend the night at the army camp in Itahari before his address at the city stadium. Full details

of the king's itinerary have not been made public perhaps for security reasons, but he is expected to also visit Myanglung Bazar in Terathum which was devastated in a fire last month, and a tea estate in Jhapa. The procession will start at 1 PM and end by 3 PM with the royal address scheduled to be broadcast live about 2:30 PM. The queen is expected to return to the capital on Friday afternoon.

Conspicuous by their absence here are the main political parties. They haven't announced a formal boycott, but leaders of the Nepali Congress and the UML have flayed the public felicitation for the king, saying it harks back to the days of absolute monarchy. Even the centre-right RPP and the tarai-based Sadbhavana party have formally stayed away, but left it up to

Royal rally

The East is set to welcome King and Queen.

their local cadre to go if they wanted to. By declaring the bandh, the Maoists are exploiting the rift between the king and the political parties.

The vacuum left by the political parties has been filled by erstwhile Panchayat stalwarts like Dil Bahadur Shrestha, Dirgha Raj Prasai, Tanka Dhakal and other ex-panchas from the eastern districts who have descended on Biratnagar in large numbers. CDOs from many eastern districts have been told to travel down to Biratnagar with civil servants in tow. But lack of transport is and security is said to be delaying their arrival. In addition to the king, prime minister and security brass, nearly the entire government machinery is here.

The prime mover behind the rally is deputy prime minister Badri Prasad Mandal. "This is a rally by Mandal of *mandaleys*," Kishore Chandra Biswas of Sadbhavana from Sunsari district told us, referring to the label given to Panchayat supporters.

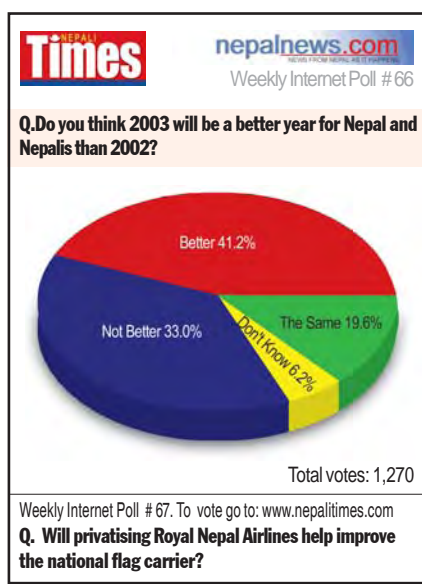
Although most people are politically indifferent, they are generally happy to have the king here. Biratnagar has so far been spared the worst of the Maoist attacks that have plagued other parts of the country.



"Thanks to the royal visit, Biratnagar is cleaner than it has ever been, we have never seen such denting-painting before," one enthusiastic shopkeeper said. Indeed, potholes have been filled overnight, electricity poles have been painted over, there are welcome arches, the city is festooned with Nepali flags and even the statue of King Mahendra is getting a face-lift (see pictures). The municipality has spent Rs 6 million, and local Marwari businessmen have contributed most of the money for the rally.

Several thousand extra security personnel have been deployed in the city and along the main highways for Friday's event. Plainsclothes police will be travelling in buses to thwart attempts by Maoists to stop people attending the rally. ♦

BOTH PICS: BINOD RAH



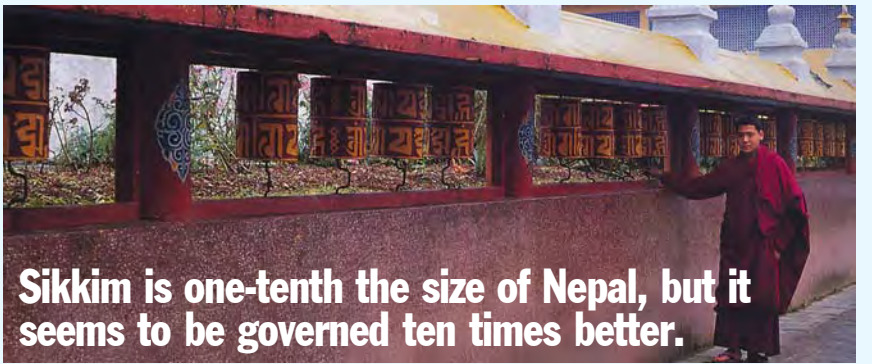
Why Sikkim works

KUNDA DIXIT in GANGTOK

Nepal's rulers and planners may not need to go on governance junkets to the West to figure out how to run this country. The model is right there across our eastern border in Sikkim.

The erstwhile Himalayan kingdom that once lagged behind Nepal in every development parameter is now surging ahead in literacy, child survival, health services and infrastructure. And not just Nepal, Sikkim is overtaking other Indian states as well.

Sikkim is one-tenth the size of Nepal and has one-fortieth our population, and that makes it easier to get results. In terms of ethnic diversity, topography, culture and traditions there is no other place more similar to Nepal. So, theoretically, what works in Sikkim should work in Nepal. But it doesn't. Sikkim's formula is good governance, grassroots democracy, and a strong, visionary leadership. The can-do state secretariat in Gangtok couldn't be more different from the officialdom one encounters in Singha Darbar.



Sikkim's Chief Secretary, Sonam Tenzing, receives us in his oak-panelled room, and seems well-briefed about goings-on in Kathmandu. Tenzing's wife is from Nepal, but that is not the only reason. "What happens in Nepal touches us," he says. "In Sikkim's development we're trying to do everything Nepal didn't do and should have done, and what Nepal has done and shouldn't have done."

continued ➡ p4-5





CARNIVAL TIME

Emerging out of the morning fog at Tripureswor one morning this week was an elephant in full regalia with mahout and pachuwa in attendance. Hoisted on three sides of a howdah atop the pachyderm were larger-than-life pictures of Crown Prince Paras. The elephant was leading a parade of Nepali athletes and sports people to wish His Royal Highness happy birthday.

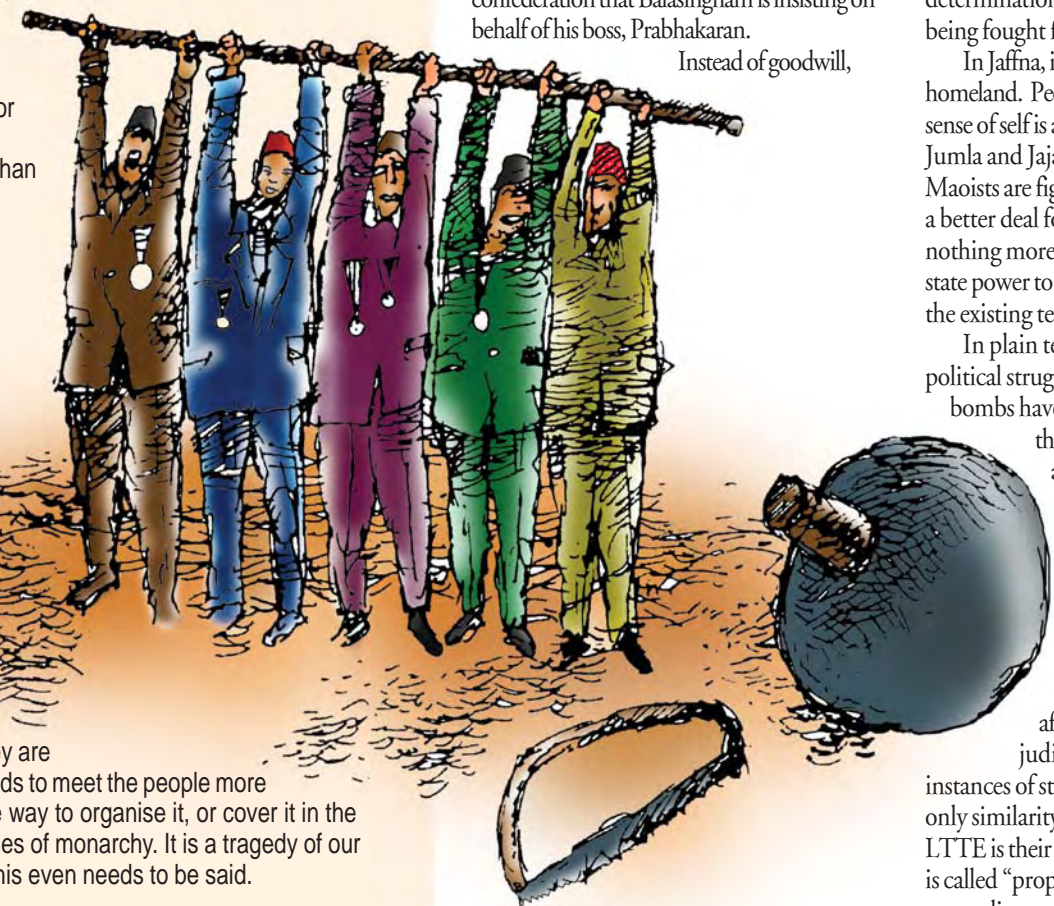
We welcome public displays of affection and respect towards our royal family. Despite the tragedy of 2001 and the current triangular confrontation between the king and the political parties and the Maoists, Nepal's monarchy and royal family is still a valuable symbol of our national unity, nationhood and their role is embedded in our culture and traditions. The political parties currently confronting the king seem to have lost track of who their real enemy is.

This public support for monarchy may be hidden, but it is genuine and spontaneous. It doesn't have to be whipped up. In fact, it is counterproductive to try to whip it up. A rent-a-crowd rally doesn't help the monarchy in these trying times when it is under attack from politicians flirting with republicanism and Maoists fighting for it.

Genuine supporters of the monarchy are nervous about these sterile rallies that lend an artificial flavour to a sensibility that is already wholesome and heartfelt. If there is a royal PR problem, this is not the way to address it. And we have it on good authority that it is making even headline monarchists squirm.

Once again, there is a strong sense of déjà vu. At least during the Panchayat years we knew what was what—these days every time you listen to state radio or television the treacly tributes and fanatic flattery from people who are more royal than the king make it all sound like a parody of Panchayat times.

But times have changed. The Nepali people are much more sophisticated, and see right through the rhetoric. You should hear what is being said in the tea shops as people watch the television coverage of the preparations in Biratnagar. The sycophants who masterminded these events may think that they are drumming up support for the king, but they are achieving the opposite. The monarch needs to meet the people more often and more closely, but this is not the way to organise it, or cover it in the media. Sycophancy only helps the enemies of monarchy. It is a tragedy of our times that something as self-evident as this even needs to be said.



STATE OF THE STATE

Jumla is not Jaffna

by CK LAL



The less talk there is about talks with the Maoists, the more chance there is of talks. Peace talks need political will and discreteness to succeed. In Nepal, both seem to be in short supply.

The lesson from Sri Lanka is that both sides wanted peace, there was an honest broker and they worked out of the media glare till they were ready to announce progress.

The third round of peace negotiations between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended on an optimistic note. No doubt, the warring parties of the teardrop island have come a lot closer to peace, but the chasm is still too wide to be bridged with simplistic political arrangements.

Despite the handshakes and hesitant smiles, neither Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe nor the LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham budged an inch from their publicly declared positions. Premier Wickremasinghe is ready for devolution of power within a federal structure, but it's a confederation that Balasingham is insisting on behalf of his boss, Prabhakaran.

Instead of goodwill,

The LTTE fought for an ethnic homeland, our Maoists are fighting a class war. There is a difference.

There is bad blood between the Sinhala and Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Norwegians need to work harder the closer they get to the final goal. That there has been an effective ceasefire for more than a year is itself an achievement. The Sri Lankans and friends of Sri Lanka here hope that the peace lasts, and peace in Serendib will presage peace in Shangri La.

Hope is infectious. Buoyed by the Sri Lankan peace process, a section of Kathmandu has started talking about replicating the experience here in Nepal, complete with Norwegian facilitators. Had it not been for the influence that these people have on public opinion, it would have been possible to ignore such noises as wishful thinking. But to prevent another false start in the name of talks between the government and the Maoists, it's necessary to emphasise the self-evident: the very nature of struggle for territorial self-determination is different from class-war being fought for social justice.

In Jaffna, it's a war of love—love for a homeland. People are ready to die when their sense of self is at risk. But the insurgency in Jumla and Jajarkot is a class-war. The Maoists are fighting their government to get a better deal for themselves, their goal is nothing more or less than appropriating state power to create a utopian society within the existing territorial boundary.

In plain terms, the "people's war" is a political struggle, in which pressure-cooker bombs have edged out ballot boxes. But the Maoists know more than anyone else that they can't ever claim political legitimacy because: a. peaceful avenues of political protest are still available, b. the state is neither colonial, nor dictatorial, even though it has started on the latter course after October the Four, and c. judicial redress is not denied for instances of state repression. In fact, the only similarity that Maoists share with the LTTE is their common strategy of what is called "propaganda of the deed" in terror discourse.

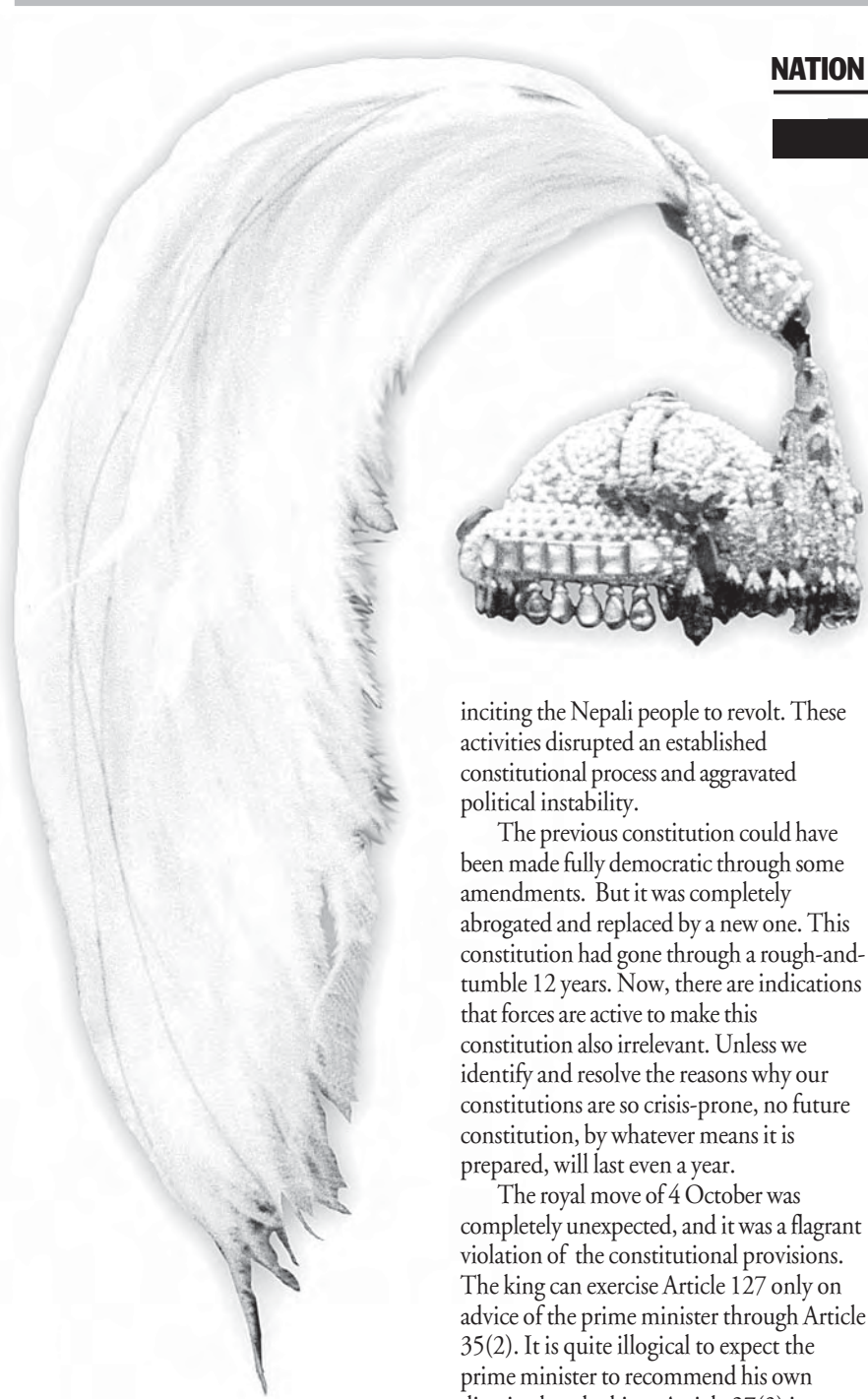
And unlike the Tamils of Sri Lanka, Nepali Maoists can't count on the loyalty of an influential diaspora. Quite the contrary, the "long distance nationalism" of many overseas Nepalis make them quite right-wing. Even the few non-resident Nepalis that support Comrade Prachanda (like the audience at the pro-Maoist meeting in Antwerp who applauded every time the video screen showed scenes of Mangalsen) do so as a matter of convenience rather than any commitment to the revolution.

It is extremely unlikely that people like the Washington-based Dr Chitra Tiwari will be willing to lay down their lives for the dictatorship of the proletariat in a base area somewhere in the mid-western sector. More likely, they will readily denounce the revolution once their livelihoods are even slightly threatened in their adopted land.

Come to think of it, most people didn't even know what it was that Maoists were fighting for till 21 November 2002, the day Agni Sapkota, Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Company unilaterally walked away from the third round of talks with the government. We now have their three main demands—a roundtable of all political forces, formation of an interim government, and elections for a constituent assembly. All very well, Comrade Prachanda, but please tell us—what is it in that couldn't have been achieved through a normal political process?

Perhaps finding an answer to that question itself requires another round of talks. Oslo offers some useful lessons in the technicalities of high-stakes negotiations mediated by impartial facilitators. But more than the public stance of the Maoist leadership, it's the cross-border angle of their rebellion that is more worrying. And there is no way that straight negotiations between two stakeholders can address the concerns of an invisible third party.

There isn't anything in the Maoist insurgency that a political leadership with will and determination can't handle. Even after seven years and 7,000 deaths, hope still lives in the hearts of common Nepalis. ♦



NATION

OPINION

A constitutional crown

A fully-functional executive, judiciary and parliament can work as constitutional safeguards to the monarchy.

by GANESH RAJ SHARMA



country would have to give in to the compromises and concessions that would entail. There are definitely forces within the country and outside, which want to fulfil their vested interests by aggravating the conflict between the king and the people.

But the king has not yet expressed his desire to produce an alternative to the prevailing political model as his father, late King Mahendra, had done after a drastic change in 1960. As the king has been in constant dialogue with the prominent leaders of the dissolved parliament, he seems to be in search of the solution within the framework of the present constitution.

It is up to Prime Minister Chand to figure out what the king wants. Having served the crown before, he is capable and honest to render appropriate advice to get us out of the deadlock. He could, for instance, decide on an appropriate date for holding general elections within a constitutionally visualised period of six months from the dates of the royal move of 4 October. The constitutional process can return to normal soon after the election is completed.

If elections can't be held immediately and the prime minister is convinced that it would not be appropriate to continue a situation without parliament for more than the constitutional limit of six months, he can render a binding recommendation to the king as per Article 35(2) to reinstate the dissolved parliament for the rest of its previous tenure.

Any exercise of power by the king under Article 127 requires the consent and advice of the prime minister and that clause enables him to remove such obstacles. The prime minister, and not the king, will therefore be responsible for the consequences. The parliament and the government accountable to it, are the

monarchy's shields. The monarchy commands enormous respect and undisputed allegiance of all sections of Nepalis. The prime minister can fulfil his historic role by making this recommendation.

Besides the king and the army, the other decisive force in Nepal's politics is popular opinion, which is expressed and represented by the political parties through the parliamentary process. It is not logical to expect them to recommend a leader or a program unanimously. Once the house is revived, the process of choosing and removing leadership democratically will be reinstated.

There are two alternative proposals from the political parties: the largest party of the dissolved parliament is demanding the revival of the house and the main opposition wants an all party government. In the absence of parliament, this kind of government may require extra-constitutional interventions by the king to run government. There will be problems when that government needs the legislative support. In the absence of the parliament, no new law can be promulgated, no annual budget can be procured and the question of the accountability of the government also remains uncertain. If the election cannot be held for some years, this kind of all-party will be unworkable.

If the parliament is revived, it will produce a government that will have the necessary mandate, have backing of all legislative functions and all major problems of the country will come under parliamentary purview and its scrutiny and it is possible to do this on advice of the prime minister to the king.

Some constitutions, like in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, have express provisions for

the revival of a dissolved house. As our constitution is very precise in drafting, a reasonable interpretation has to be found. The Supreme Court could not stand in the way if the king acts on the advice of the prime minister. And, it is high time for them to decide.

Twelve years ago, Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand had helped the king to lead an extraordinary consensus in favour of multiparty democracy. Destiny has put him in an almost identical situation. He could recommend to the king the revival of parliament, bring the democratic process back on track, and help avoid a fatal confrontation between the king and the political parties.

Since King Gyanendra's coronation is expected to be completed soon with full Vedic rituals, the restoration of a fully functional constitutional process by then would only enhance His Majesty's stature. That will be an occasion when a large number of heads of state as well as governments with a world wide media coverage will have an opportunity to see a popular king with a complete democracy.

It is known to all that the Nepali people have pardoned politicians from time to time for committing mistakes considering their utility. The king's dignity would be enhanced if the prime minister helps him with correct advice.

The problem of violence, terrorism and lawlessness in the country will be the challenges for a reinstated parliament and the government accountable to it. What is needed now is the courage, in proportion to the stature of persons, to get rid of compulsions seen and unseen. ♦

(Ganesh Raj Sharma is a senior advocate who served as counsel for Sher Bahadur Deuba during the Supreme Court debate following his ouster. This column is a translated version of the article that appears in Himal Khabarpatrika.)

LETTERS

MUSSARAFSHIP

CK Lal's "Musharrafship" (#124) delves into fundamental concept of human and democratic rights. Are democracy and human rights universal? Who made them universal? This is a Western concept that is deeply rooted in individualism and materialism ill-suited for traditional society like Nepal that still is rooted in "inner worldly" quests. Who is to say that one particular civilisation, philosophy, race or nation is superior to another, eg the ardent belief in the universality of democracy, human rights and global

capitalism? These self-evident truths mask an ethical superiority complex of the West. All civilisations and their system of thoughts are a product of that particular civilisation's experiences. We need to be aware of the "colonisation" of our thought-process. From the 1940s to the 60s, people of the physically colonised world, threw off the yoke of tyranny. Now it's time to be aware of an even more potent danger, a colonisation of the mind...Nike, McDonalds, Coke, MTV, CNN...

Subarna Bhattachan, Lawrence, Kansas, USA

PRIVATISE, OR ELSE

I appreciated Bhagirath Yogi's article regarding privatisation of government-run enterprises ("Going to the dogs", # 124). My concern is that the debate was limited to the state's (in)ability to successfully carry out privatisation and did not address whether we as citizens are better off with privatisation to begin with. I am not opposed to privatisation per se. It could work in the case of Bhaktapur Brick and Tiles Factory since its efficacy is primarily restricted to the Kathmandu Valley and has competitors that prevent it from gaining monopoly. From a

layman's perspective, the same could be true for the cement factories and other industries including the Janakpur Cigarette Factory (a despicable example of government ruining the health of its citizens). However, the situation is different for service entities like Nepal Bank, Rastriya Baniya Bank, RNAC and NTC. I believe the primary objective of the two commercial banks was to provide banking service to the Nepali people. At a time when there are a dozen or so private banks, it may be difficult for the residents of Kathmandu and other urban centres to see the relevance of these two. But it's worth considering that although private banks have been in operation for the past 18 years, their services are restricted to about 15 out of 75 districts. So, what's there to ensure that privatisation of these two banks will not essentially rob the majority of the Nepalis (who happen to live in the other 60 districts) of any banking facility?

The most egregious of all is the proposal to privatise the Drinking Water Corporation (DWC). The very outlandish notion that the state is willing to

privatise as fundamental a natural resource as water, which is owned by its citizens, should fill us all with indignation. Even if Melamchi is the only solution to the scarcity of drinking water in Kathmandu, shouldn't there be concern regarding how privatisation of DWC could affect affordability of drinking water? By definition, private companies are accountable to their shareholders, not the general public and their objective is profit making, not public interest. In a scenario like this, isn't it conceivable that a significant proportion of the population may not be able to afford drinking water? Are there other options for those who can't? In most western countries including the US, municipalities, not private companies, regulate drinking water. Yet, we're presented with two stark choices—privatise or perish—as if there's no third option.

It should concern us that both the government and the donors are emphasising two solutions (privatisation and decentralisation) that are contradictory in numerous instances. How can you develop a place when you take away its

only financial institution and make it further inaccessible? What's to guarantee that most of the districts will still have basic communication services when NTC is privatised? It's true that a number of state entities have problems that need immediate attention. However, proposing privatisation as the only solution in all cases is analogous to a physician prescribing antibiotics to any and all ailments. If mismanagement, inefficiency and corruption are grounds for privatisation, then I'm afraid the case is made for privatising the entire government machinery.

Kalyan Pande, University of Wisconsin, Madison

WORST OF TIMES

Reading "The red windmill in the valley of the gods" (#125) I really felt like it is the best of times and the worst of times in Nepal. When will our heads work in unison with our hearts? Are we a nation of insensitive imbeciles that we dance the can-can here in Kathmandu when the rest of the country is burning? Let's have a moratorium on these tasteless festivities, celebrations, and

donor-driven seminars till our basic problems and basic needs are addressed.

S D Gajraj, by email

SIR MICHAEL

I really appreciated the interview of Sir Michael Jay ("Cross-party approach to conflict a must", #122) with regard to the solution of the Maoist problem in Nepal. Of course, the solution through negotiation is a superb idea to avoid a longer and bloodier conflict. Military means as a solution cannot win the hearts and minds of the population. For this, the present government should create a conducive atmosphere to sit around the negotiating table to revitalise peace and security. In the inception of dialogue, the Maoists' demands might be higher, but after the talks begin, hopefully both will come to a substantial agreement to find an honourable way out of this problem.

Name withheld, Royal Nepal Army

CRÈME DE LA CRÈME

Phudorjee Lama's referral to the graduates of Budhanilkantha School as the cream of the

society in "A nation's call" (#121) is not justified. Lama deserves credit for being specific in explaining circumstances that most students who are abroad for studies face. However, being a product of Budhanilkantha School myself, I fail to see why we, or products of any other schools in Kathmandu for that matter, should be called the "cream of our society". What have we done that makes them different from some MaBi in Dadheldhura? Does sponsoring a few economically poor students from supposedly remote areas of Nepal through a Nationwide Scholarship Program for their education make us the cream of our society? Or, can we claim to be the best and the brightest by simply counting the heads of Budhanilkantha products in Ivy League and first tier colleges in the US? True, Budhanilkantha School stands out from the rest of the schools in the country in that it provides scholarships to bright but needy students from all over the country. However, how much return the country gets from that investment remains a mystery.

And unless we prove that

we have given back enough, we should let society judge our contribution and not do that ourselves.

Name withheld on request

BOOZE AND BUTTS

Thanks to Hemlata Rai for emphasising that alcoholism is a disease that can be contained ("Nepal's anonymous alcoholism", #125). But the Nepali public is also seeing huge billboards enticing them to identify unrealistically with a generation of high-fliers. The alcohol and cigarette industries have latched on to youth interests in sports and entertainment to launch tremendously successful campaigns that erroneously link booze and butts to success and achievement. I curse the day universities started giving degrees in advertising. Joining the latest research in subliminal psychology with marketing is unethical because it uses information about unconscious recesses of the mind to stimulate desire for a product. People don't even know they're being had. The consumer is turned into a captive customer. To make matters worse, donor funding for recovery program is non-existent. Whatever happened

to the right to choose between hard reduction or complete elimination?

Mike Krajniak, Kathmandu

As Hemlata Rai points out, there are various factors that contribute to alcoholism here. But the biggest factor is that it is cheap, very widely available and sold to anyone. A 10-year-old could walk down to the corner shop for a bottle of vodka. But I am glad to see that AA type of organisations are now working to tackle the problem. Prevention is better than cure, and we need to focus on underage drinkers so they don't become alcohol dependent in future. The media also needs to target youngster to stress alcoholism is an illness with fatal consequences.

Dr A Thapa-Hamal, UK

PASHUPATI SIB

Reading Pashupati Shumshere JB Rana's interview ("I will work to bridge the gap between the king and parties", #125) reminded me of Prof Northcote Parkinson's dilemma in selecting a suitable prime minister for the Republic of Ruritania in his book "Inlaws and Outlaws". Mr Rana meets all the

criteria for premiership: great-grandson of Sri 3 Chandra, grandson of Mohan ("the last of the Mohicans") and son-in-law of the Scindias (the role models for the transition from princely state to potential head of state), Oxford educated, etc.

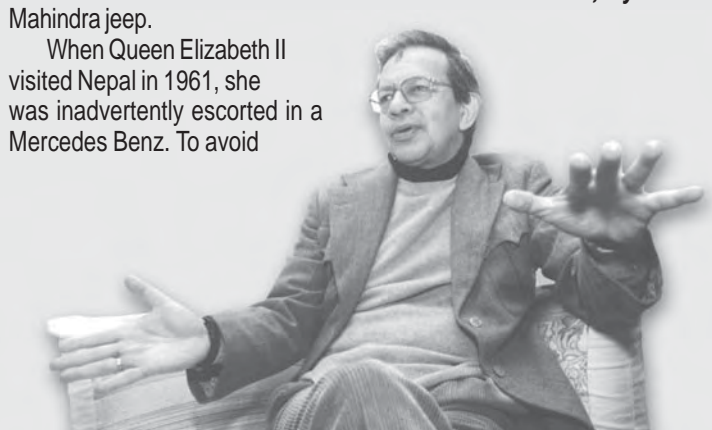
Field Marshal Kaiser too had the same ambition of Lord Curzon, one of them was to become the prime minister of England. He brought a Rolls Royce on his way back from London after his tenure as ambassador in the Court of St James. He hung it from the ceiling of his garage covered with a mosquito net at Kaiser Mahal. But after 2007 BS, he moved around Kathmandu in a Mahindra and Mahindra jeep.

When Queen Elizabeth II visited Nepal in 1961, she was inadvertently escorted in a Mercedes Benz. To avoid

another faux pas when Pandit Nehru came visiting, the Field Marshal offered his Rolls. When the car was taken to the Palace for a rehearsal, Kaiser's driver drove the Rolls, while he followed in his jeep. The car was later sold to an Englishman and was shipped back where it came from.

Kaiser himself was conferred the title of Field Marshal though he never actually participated in any battle. The reason for recapping all this trivia is to remind Pashupati, the "Nati General", that history is making a full circle and the analogy should be quite clear to him.

Sushil Kumar, by email



“In Sikkim we’re trying to do everything Nepal didn’t and what Nepal has done and shouldn’t have done.”



Chamling at a Janata Mela in western Sikkim in mid-December.

➡ from p1

Sikkim’s formula for success is appropriate planning, good governance, true devolution of power and decision-making to elected grassroots councils, and an idealistic and accountable leadership.

Sonam Tenzing gives full credit to his boss, Chief Minister Pawan Chamling. “It is the vision of one man who believes in delegating responsibility but expects results.”

We are ushered into the Chief Minister’s official residence on a ridge overlooking Gangtok, and Pawan Chamling speaks in colloquial Nepali, not the Sanskritised officialese one is used to hearing in Kathmandu. He exudes the confidence of a man who knows where he wants to go, and what to do to get there. (See interview, p5).

It has helped that this former monarchy and Indian protectorate is one of ten special category states which receive central assistance from New Delhi. But things haven’t been easy for Chamling. After ousting his mentor, Nar Bahadur Bhandari in the

1994 state assembly elections, he had to battle for political survival. After being nearly voted out himself, critics say Chamling used the ethnic card to divide the opposition. This, they say, has irreversibly harmed Sikkim’s communal harmony. But his critics grudgingly admit that Chamling’s strategy worked, and he is now an almost unopposed leader. Today, Chamling’s SDF party has a virtual run of the 33-member state assembly, the lone opposition MLA is Bhandari himself.

Chamling exudes the down-to-earth charm of a self-made grassroots leader. He never went to college, and a conversation with him does not go into high-flying political theory or nebulous concepts of democracy. It is about what is do-able, how long it will take to do it, and how much it will cost.

“What the man has is a lot of common sense,” says PD Rai, an engineer-turned-politician whom Chamling convinced to head SIDICO, a one-stop shop to entice investors to Sikkim so new jobs could be created. “He has a group of

managers who implement his vision, and he has deliberately staked his political career on the promises he made to the people.”

And what is this vision? Chamling counts them out on his fingers: “Ethnic harmony, sustainable development, security and environmental protection.” The fact that the ethnic issue still looms large is an acknowledgement that the divisiveness of the 1994 elections bruised ethnic relations between the Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali-speakers, who are collectively known as “NBC” (Newar, Bahun, Chhetri).

Chamling’s long-term development goals are ambitious, but not unrealistic in a state with a population of only 500,000: universal literacy, eradicating poverty and near-zero unemployment by 2015. By that period, he wants Sikkim to be a hydropower exporter and wean itself away from special subsidy packages from the federal government in New Delhi.

Chamling has no illusions that development is linked to security, and says to his visitors: “Just look at Nepal.

The security problem is actually a result of a failure of development, the lack of jobs and opportunities.” Chamling’s instruction to the bureaucracy is to implement development goals on a war footing.

Sikkim’s literacy is higher than Nepal (see table, p5), but like in Nepal female literacy has lagged behind. The government’s priority is girls’ education and it has a unique program of financial incentives: the state deposits Rs 2,500 into a bank account of every girl student every year from the moment she enrolls in high school. She gets a bonus Rs 2,500 when she graduates. But she can only take out the money when she is 21, and only if she is still single at that age. If she drops out of school or gets married, she forfeits the money.

“The idea is to keep girls in school, and to delay the marriage age, and when she does decide to get married she already has some money of her own and is more independent,” explains the speaker of Sikkim’s state legislature, Kalawati Subba. “Women don’t need affirmative action, they need support to stand on their own feet and be treated equally,” she says, citing that nearly 40 percent of all elected village leaders in the last local elections were women.

Subba is convinced the demand for development must come from the grassroots, and says this is what the chief minister is trying to do with his pro-poor programs. “Politics must come from every household, every Sikkimese must feel powerful enough to demand these services and get them from the people they elected.”

When Chamling stood for re-election in 1999, his campaign slogan was: “Janata ko raj ma janata nai raja” and “Afno gaun, aphai banau.” (Speaking to visitors from Nepal, Chamling spontaneously crafts a slogan for Nepal’s own future: “Maharaja

euta, raja dui karod janata.”) This strong emphasis on devolution and self-reliance may just have been a slogan elsewhere, but Chamling seems to mean it. He called 2002 “The Year of Implementation” in which all projects were rushed to completion.

To outsiders, it appears as if Chamling is still on election-mode. PD Rai agrees: “As a matter of fact, he is already campaigning for the 2004 elections, by proving to the people that he has kept his promises to them.” The Chief Minister has been going around the state attending a series of Janata Mela, development jamborees where the people get a chance to ask their elected representatives and bureaucrats about progress on health, education, roads, rural housing, or their old age pension. They can even grill local officials where the money for development projects is going, or why a road project is still stuck.

To be sure, Chamling faces a lot of hurdles. Not the least of which are opposition politicians who think he has an autocratic streak, has a history of hanging out with questionable figures including some Nepali Maoists and is someone who doesn’t hesitate to use the ethnic card. Corruption is still said to be rife.

Admits one senior government official: “Our biggest bottleneck is the delivery mechanism for development. The bureaucracy is still too laid back, and motivation levels are not as high as we want them to be.”

Sikkim’s development has always been driven by populist-minded politicians with pork-barrel funds, and Chamling came from that tradition.

But he has tried to change course and do it systematically by commissioning economists and sociologists to write the Sikkim Human Development Report released in 2002. JNU professor Mahendra P Lama helped write the report, which is now the state’s

development blueprint. “There was very poor understanding about the needs of mountain people, and a belief that the same development model will work everywhere” recalls Lama. “This report is completely indigenous and looks at baseline local parameters for the first time and makes recommendations.”

Lama concluded that past subsidies were used as government handouts and had spoilt the people by killing local initiative and traditional self-help. The state is implementing Lama’s recommendations, and is now focussing on loans for entrepreneurship, skills-building and microcredit for farmers.

In the village of Rong, three hours from Gangtok, the roofs of Darjeeling can be seen glinting on a ridge across the valley. There is evidence that the plans are being translated into real development on the ground. The secondary school in Rong has a new building, well-kept facilities, a drinking water system. A nearby health post vaccinates all children and keeps records, most basic medicines are free. Children of poorer families go to a nearby day-care centre which provides a daily free meal, while their parents work in the fields. Health worker SB Gurung knows almost every child by name, and tells us: “There is nothing more satisfying than working in your own village to motivate people, and see the effect of your work.”

Back in Gangtok, Tourism Minister, K T Gyaltsen says there are lessons for Sikkim in the way Nepal has handled tourism—some worth emulating, others not. “We don’t want to rush headlong into mass tourism,” says Gyaltsen. “We are satisfied with the present level of traffic and we will let it grow slowly.” Sikkim gets 300,000 Indian tourists annually and 50,000 international tourists for whom it has relaxed the requirement of

do and should have done,



Chamling’s election poster.

interline permits. Many tourists in Gangtok today are those who cancelled Nepal and came here instead. Many tourists in Gangtok today are those who can celled Nepal and came here instead.

A new airport at Pakyong, expected to be completed in 2004, will handle ATRs and connect to Calcutta, Bagdogra and even Kathmandu. At present the only alternative to driving up from the plains is to take the daily Jetranger ferry from Bagdogra, and the helicopters also operate mountain sight-seeing flights. But while mountaineers can climb

Kangchendzonga from the northern Nepal side, climbing the world’s third-highest peak is banned from the Sikkim side. Many holy mountain lakes are out of bounds for tourists, and the state is promoting rural tourism by giving villagers loans to convert parts of their homes into pensions for trekkers.

Sikkim’s location on the border with China and Nepal, and astride the Chumbi Valley makes it an area of great strategic importance to India, a fact that is evident in the heavy military presence along the mountain highways which are maintained by the army.



	SIKKIM	NEPAL
Male Literacy	77%	66%
Female Literacy	61.5%	35.4%
Infant mortality	44	66
Under-5 mortality	71	91
Life expectancy at birth	66.3	59
Human Development Index	.532	.466
Per capita income (Nepali Rs)	19,840	17,100
Doctors/100,000 population	40	5

AT SIDICO’s office in Gangtok, PD Rai’s staff is busy conducting courses for young entrepreneurs (many of them women) keen on starting businesses through a project called the Chief Ministers’ Self-help Scheme. “New kids are coming into the job market, and we need to create opportunities so they are kept busy,” he tells us. “Preference is given to women and families below the poverty line. So far there hasn’t been a single defaulter.”

A generation after its annexation by India, Sikkim is being promoted as a model state.

Its rulers want to develop without the separatist violence and security problems that plague other northeastern states. “The only way Sikkim can absorb the tensions of modernisation and a multi-ethnic society is by focussing on genuine human development in its own unique way,” says Mahendra Lama. So far, it looks like there is a lot the rest of India, too, can borrow from the way Sikkim has gone about ensuring peace through development. That is why Chamling likes to say: “India is learning a lot from Sikkim. India is merging with Sikkim, not the other way round.” ♦

“We have a radical democracy”

Nepali Times spoke to Sikkim chief Minister Pawan Chamling recently about his vision for development and the Maoist problem. Excerpts:

.....

Nepali Times: Can democracy bring development, or is it an impediment?

Pawan Chamling: I can speak for Sikkim, I think we are developing because of democracy. Development doesn’t just happen, it has to be nurtured. Sikkim will never develop if we depend on money from the central government. We have to invest in our own human resources, develop their capacity and knowledge. We’ve just had local (panchayat) elections, and I am glad to say that our party won. Now, it will be much



easier for us to implement our development programs from the grassroots up. We will work on making people at the village level aware of their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. We want to turn the Sikkimese people away from being a part of the consumer culture, to become productive citizens. Once we become more productive, there will be more jobs for our unemployed youth.

Your programs have been criticised for being populist. Isn’t that just a short cut to win popular support?

You may call it populist, but just because some measures are populist doesn’t mean they are not needed. Look, my priority is to meet the basic needs of the Sikkimese people. Call me people-oriented, not populist. And we may be a small state in India, but we are the only state that is carrying out such an effective pro-poor program.

We are the only state that has free education up to college level, free uniforms for school children, 17 percent of our budget goes to education. We are working on improving our doctor per population ratio. By 2015, we want to have a poverty-free state, 100 percent literacy and zero unemployment. We want to develop in a sustainable way, we will never sacrifice our natural resources for short-term economic growth.

Isn’t it easier for a small state like Sikkim to achieve these results?

True, we have only 500,000 people, but our overheads are high: we need a governor, high court, accountant general, like all big states. Also, the grants from the central government are pegged on per capita basis, so if you are smaller state you get less. But in the end it boils down to leadership. The reason some larger states like UP haven’t been able to develop is not because they are large, but because they have a leadership problem. They say you have to drive livestock from behind, but people you have to lead from the front. We joined the Indian union late, but we are ahead in terms of development, environmental protection, and in peace and security.

Speaking of security, how is the insurgency in Nepal affecting Sikkim? Are Nepali Maoists taking refuge here?

There is talk of that, but so far we haven’t come across any. We are vigilant about this, and what happens in Nepal has an indirect effect on us. We look at what is happening in Nepal and feel sorry. But we have to ask ourselves, why did the Maoist problem come up? Why aren’t there any Maoists in Sikkim? That is because this is not very fertile territory for them. There is little economic disparity, people have opportunities, they don’t have to lead a hand-to-mouth existence, there is democracy and enough political space for every citizen. So I am learning from the Maoist problems in Nepal and India. We want to create conditions so they’ll never come here. To do that I practice what I preach and we implement our brand of radical democracy.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Metro Channel by June

A new feature has emerged on the Kathmandu skyline: a 72m television tower within Singha Darbar for a new NTV channel. The Chinese-aided project will be completed in June next year. The Metro Channel facility will have two studios, two control rooms in a four-storey building. “Unlike the national program of NTV being broadcast through satellites, Metro Channel will be broadcast terrestrially to begin with,” Dipak Mani Dhital, chief at the engineering department of the NTV told us. The Chinese grant came with OB vans and other technical equipment.



Top it with peace

Everest has been climbed for many reasons—profit, adventure, records and because it’s there. Now we can add peace to the list. Among the many climbers headed for the top of Everest this spring, the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of the world’s highest peak, a group of apostles representing the world’s major religions will also attempt to summit the 8483m peak. While they’re at it, they’ll be praying for peace and tolerance. The commemorative climbing mission aims at promoting Nepal’s image as a peaceful nation and has the blessings of the Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Mountaineering Association, Asian Trekking, the Everest Peace Project and the Pacific Asia Travel Association. To symbolise tolerance, the climbers include an atheist.

Safety at a cost

Pillion riding in the Valley may become expensive for the unprepared. Anyone not wearing a helmet will get slapped with a up to Rs 200 fine by the Valley Traffic Police Office who have made helmets compulsory.

But this safety is coming at a cost. Nepal has about 230,000 motorbikes. If 200,000 bike owners were to spend Rs 400 each for a new helmet, it would cost the country Rs 80 million. Add the cost of a storage sidebox, ‘dickie’, and we are looking at Rs 200 million in imports. Every year an average of 50,000 Nepalis buy new motorbikes. Can we afford this, some are asking.



Clean fuel

Nepal Oil Corporation is mulling a ban on petrol and diesel vendors selling kerosene too. This is an effort to cut fuel adulteration, and will be implemented in consultation with the Nepal Petroleum Dealers Association. Several NGOs have been campaigning for this move as a way to reduce the rampant adulteration of petrol and diesel with subsidised kerosene. Petrol currently sells at Rs 52 a litre and diesel at Rs 26.50 a litre, and kerosene is priced at Rs 17 a litre. Kerosene worth more than Rs 1 billion is mixed with petrol and diesel every year in Nepal, according to a recent estimate.

Conflict listings

The National Defence Council Foundation of United States identified Nepal as one of the serious conflict zones of 2000 in a report released on 31 December 2002. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are other South Asian countries on the list. The council has added 15 new countries in 1999 and twelve have been delisted. Conflict in 2000 was up to 68 from 65 in 1999—one of the highest in the history of the report. It claims the level of conflict globally is far higher than at the end of the Cold War, when the total was about 35. The report also says the distribution of conflicts around the world has stayed mostly stable. The most conflict-prone areas are in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, which together account for nearly half of all conflicts. The most significant change in geographical distribution is the rise of conflict in South and Central Asia, which has gone from six in 1997 to 10 in 2000.

HERE AND THERE

Predicting the worst

Calendar pages flutter by at an accelerating rate, the older you get, the more pronounced this phenomenon. Years merge seamlessly into each other, however you measure the passage of time. Yet the habit of using the New Year, Western, Nepali, Tibetan or other, to measure progress and predict the future dies hard. In fact, it staggers about like a drunk on New Years Eve, refusing to go to bed or stop drinking, despite the damage done to oneself or others. So here goes, for what it’s worth...

- 1) War in the Middle East will begin but not end this year. America’s high altitude electronic war gaming will render key bits of Iraqi infrastructure irreparable, but for unforeseen reasons—be they biological, chemical, nuclear, or conventional—the reconstruction effort will not begin in earnest over the next year. This will disappoint many, not least large construction companies in the United States and Europe, and sound-bite politicians in Western capitals who will face growing public disquiet. The damage to the Iraqi people will matter least.
- 2) Terrorists will attempt another spectacular strike, perhaps succeeding in part. It won’t be another World Trade Center but it may be another Bali. Over the same period, there will be countless dire warnings from harassed looking officials, security and civil rights restrictions on easy targets like the vast majority of honest, well-intentioned people will continue to tighten. It won’t matter. Many entrepreneurs will identify opportunities in the new paranoia that will continue to spread outward like cancer, from the killing fields of West Asia, to our own backyards.



- 3) The government and the Maoists in Nepal will continue to play word games with the notion of peace talks, terrorism, revolution and accusations of atrocities. Some of the latter will be covered more boldly than ever before in local media. Messengers will come under pressure while their message is ignored. It’s happening already in the rape fiasco and it will happen again and again until some lessons are learned here. Meanwhile, Nepal’s killing terraces will pass through another season of death and decline, until increasingly distant Kathmandu finally starts to feel some pain from insurgency. Whether this adds urgency to official efforts to resolve the crisis remains unpredictable.
- 4) There will continue to be talk of holding “elections” in Nepal, and “constitutional reform”. Both these crucial notions will be bludgeoned into further irrelevance by the continuing mayhem and economic decline. Nepal’s valuable and hard-won institutions of modernity will continue to be hyped by a combination of hypocrisy and design.
- 5) International agencies, bilateral and multilateral, will continue to read from the same mealy-mouthed

by DANIEL LAK



The habit of using the new year to measure progress and predict the future dies hard.

- script as the “conflict resolution” gravy train gets up a good head of steam. No relief from conflict will be provided by any of this but many consultants will be amply rewarded for running workshops and “building capacity”. Sadly, along the way, the significant number of truly committed and effective individuals working in development here will leave—driven off by the cynicism of colleagues or a collapse in funding.
- 6) Remittances from expatriate Nepalis in other lands will become ever more economically significant as tourists stay away and foreign aid dries up. Sadly, few in authority will do anything to assist those who remit. Some will even hinder, or try to profit unjustly from it. It won’t matter. People will still go abroad to work.
 - 7) The *Nepali Times* will continue to be a star but in an ever-widening galaxy of local media, newly emboldened to cover all manner of wrongdoing, and to celebrate indigenous success when appropriate. Bring on the competition, it’s the best thing we have to look forward to.
 - 8) I’ve been wrong before, so let’s hope that I am about the more dire predictions.

Biking in the time of bandhs

Biking right across Nepal from Kodari to Mahendranagar is a breeze when the roads are empty.

GARRYK HAMPTON



After spending the last few months riding with views of majestic snow capped peaks rising high up into the deep blue skies of Tibet and Nepal, I've been bitten by the climbing bug. I have to summit a mountain over 8,000m, just not today. It was the first day of a bandh declared by the Maoists and I was biking my way to Pokhara. It felt great to be back on the road. Riding at lower elevations with plenty of oxygen accompanied by beautiful views is a pure pleasure.

To get out of Kathmandu Valley I had to bike over a small pass—small in comparison to the

5,000m monsters on our way from Lhasa to Kathmandu. After cresting Thankot I could see the road winding all the way down the other side. I was met with the astounding sight of not a single vehicle on the road. This place is usually a snarled honking mass of cars and buses. As I took the first bend and started my descent, I looked to my right and saw some of the higher peaks jutting up from behind the shorter mountains. Halos of clouds circled their peaks. Even though I hadn't seen any traffic I was still cautious when going around the turns but that caution decreased as I sped faster and faster downhill. The rush of wind

against my face stretched my grin from ear to ear.

It seemed as if everybody was taking advantage of the bandh—kids used the road like a blackboard drawing pictures with coloured mud, others played soccer and street cricket while adults strew hay across the entire road, I'm not sure why. More than once I stopped to let herds of cattle, goats, and buffalo pass.

Kids are always eager for a ride and as a Peace Pedaler, getting them to join me is part of spreading a little joy. It was easy enough taking them where they wanted, usually short distances down the road. Twice I offered old men rides but they either

didn't know how to ride a bicycle or they jumped on for a free ride. When I noticed they weren't pedalling, I'd stop, point at the pedals and make with a pedalling motion with my arms. Not that it did much good. In the end I had to give them both the boot. I'm no rickshaw.

Around noon I got hungry and looked for a place to eat. After finding nothing in three different small towns, I began to think it wasn't such a great idea to ride during a bandh day. Finally I found a place that served dal-bhaat and despite having to wait half an hour, the food was not too bad.

Thankfully I didn't run into any Maoists, but everytime I saw men in camouflage with guns, my heart skipped a beat or two. Much of the fear stemmed from rumours—someone always knew or had heard of someone who was robbed by the Maoists. We even heard they gave receipts for items taken so the tourist could later claim insurance, or if by chance they were to meet another group of Maoists, prove they had already "given" to the cause. The story has been circulating long enough for there to be some truth in it. So I always kept my speed up and yelled a cheery "Namaste" as I rolled by. I was stopped at one checkpoint, but they were very friendly and wanted to know if I'd seen anything. They declined a ride. At least I tried!

At 98 km I ran into some boys who took turns riding with me before taking me to a couple of hotels because I had to stop for the night. The first was a dive and wanted twice what I was paying in Kathmandu. The second was more of a resort and would accept nothing less than \$15, which seemed unreasonable because they had no guests and weren't likely to overbook all of a sudden. The third place was the charm. I said my budget was Rs 200, and the manager said that'd be fine—a much wiser businessman than at the previous

resort; some money is better than nothing. One of the boys looked disappointed because he had offered to let me stay at his house.

As I walked up the resort steps with three porters carrying my bags, I noticed the garden had a surprisingly mix of cacti with seasonal blooms. My intention was to go to Pokhara the following day, but as I got more comfortable, I realised there wasn't any reason for me to get there before Jamie, my friend and fellow Peace Pedaler, who was to reach a day after me. I'd let the food make the decision. Dinner was great. That was one decision taken care of. After dinner I hashed out a few songs on my new Martin Backpacker guitar, but the staff's performance put mine to shame. The next day I did little more than type in my journal and bask in the sun with a spy novel. That night there was a downpour but luckily the skies cleared by morning. After a big breakfast I set off with farewells from the staff, a small bouquet of flowers and a Nepali ceremonial scarf tied around my seatpost.

It was a long day with some serious climbs. I was constantly on the lookout for kids to recruit because they don't weigh much and have lots of energy. They also have friends who want to have a go, so you get fresh legs every few kilometres. The best part is hearing them laugh and watch them get excited when they see people they know as we ride by—their few minutes of stardom.

Again, there was hardly any traffic on the road. I saw a few cars and buses in the last 15 km. Other than that, only two military vehicles and one ambulance whizzed by. The scenery from the resort to Pokhara was even more spectacular. As I rounded a bend, I saw a waterfall spraying about 10 feet like a waterslide into the river below. Above it the Himalaya stretched across the entire skyline. I had to stop and

take it all in—the peace, the view and the solitude.

After that somewhat spiritual interlude, I had to attend to more bodily concerns like food. Unfortunately, every restaurant was closed, like on the first day of my ride from Kathmandu. I settled for some crackers from a roadside stall and a few bananas from an old man. I don't think he really wanted to sell them, but a young girl came up and made the transaction with him looking on bewildered.

By the time I was within 25 km of Pokhara my stomach was really empty and I felt tired. My saving grace was a pack of kids on bikes. They took turns helping to pedal and some of them spoke enough English to hold a simple conversation, which distracted me from my growling stomach. A magnificent view of the Annapurna range also helped to keep hunger at bay. I was fortunate enough to see nearly all the peaks, that late in the day the range is usually shrouded in clouds. From the road they looked massive juxtaposed against lower forested hills. Those mountains are giants, marvels of tectonics.

Garryk reached Pokhara without mishap but the real adventure for the Peace Pedalers was to begin on their six day ride from Pokhara to Bardia National Park. They passed blown bridges, slept next to Maoist camps, ate breakfast a stone's throw from their campfire and even unwittingly picnicked on the very spot where two police officers had been killed. ♦

(Garryk Hampton, is co-founder of the Peace Pedalers along with Jamie Blanchin. They are on a five-year mission to ride through more than 100 countries and over 80,000 km. They began on 13 April 2002 from the US and have pedalled in Japan, Korea, China, Tibet and Nepal. India and Sri Lanka are next on their route. They tour on two tandem style bikes, ideal for "guest riders". www.peacepedalers.com)



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Sex Work & Male Invincibility

ANALYSIS

by JEFFREY D SACHS



President Bush seems poised to wreck America's budget for years to come. When Bush came into office, the outlook was for budget surpluses as far as the eye could see. Today, through a combination of irresponsible Republican-led tax cuts, a slowing economy, the bursting of the stock market bubble, and a massive increase in defense spending, huge deficits dominate the fiscal horizon.

Worse is coming, because the Bush Administration and the Republican-led Congress are preparing to deepen the fiscal mess. The damage they will do will likely weaken the US and add instability to the world economy.

Traditionally, America's Republican Party stood for balanced budgets. This changed with the Reagan Administration, when conservative Republicans favoured tax cuts even at the cost of large budget deficits. President Reagan told the American people that they could enjoy tax cuts, a military build-up, and continuation of their favourite spending programs all at the same time. The result—no surprise—was a series of vast budget deficits that took years to clean up.

Both President George Bush Sr

and Bill Clinton had to raise taxes to clean up the Reagan-era mess. Those tax increases probably contributed to President Bush Sr's defeat by Bill Clinton in 1992. Yet Clinton bravely decided to complete the process of restoring fiscal balance, in part to protect the long-term financing of the Social Security retirement program. When Clinton left office in 2000, the budget situation was the best in decades.

Then along came President George Bush Jr to replay Reagan: large tax cuts, a big increase in military spending, and continuation or even expansion of popular spending programs. The result was predictable. In January 2001, the cumulative budget outcome for the years 2002-2011 was projected to be \$5.6 trillion in surplus. By mid-2002, those projected surpluses had vanished.

In view of these changed economic conditions, and the shadow of war in Iraq, you might expect the Bush Administration and the Republican-led Congress to be cautious in

Taxing the poor

Will the rich walk away with more?

advocating new tax cuts. But no, their highest priority is to enact more tax cuts that will mainly benefit the rich. At the same time, the Administration is calling for big increases in military spending. With the November 2004 presidential election now coming into view, you can be certain that no meaningful cuts in non-military spending programs will be made.

So massive budget deficits seem here to stay. If domestic spending simply stays constant as a fraction of national income, the cumulative budget outcome for the next ten years will be a combined deficit of \$1.5 trillion. But this figure may be optimistic, because it probably doesn't adequately factor in the costs of a possible war in Iraq, another round of tax cuts or the risk of higher interest rates in the years ahead.

Why are Republicans so unconcerned about this mess? Some Republicans care more about tax cuts for the rich than they do about almost anything else. Others believe that deficits will force major cuts in domestic government spending, thus shrinking the state, which is their heart's desire. The problem with this latter view is that most taxpayers like domestic programs, and will not readily support major spending cuts.

A more intriguing question is why do Americans vote for such policies, when they should know that trouble would probably result. One answer is that many voters do not see the looming budget troubles. A better answer is that most Americans did not actually vote for these policies.

Voter turnout in the 2002 election was only around 40 percent of which around half went to the Republicans, or around 20 percent of eligible voters.

Of course, the outlook need not be so bleak. War in Iraq may be avoided. Proposed tax cuts may be watered down or abandoned. But I predict large budget deficits for years to come, and a growing sense of unease within the US and abroad about America's macroeconomic situation. Foreign investors may decide to cut back financing America's budget and current account deficits on favourable terms. The dollar may weaken, and fears of inflation may become more pronounced.

All of this will make US policymakers less confident and less flexible in their responses to economic shocks. The poor, both inside the US and abroad, could suffer the most, as President Bush and the Congress tell the American people and the world that, due to the large budget deficits, there is no money available to address problems of poverty, disease, and education. Unless ordinary Americans wake up to these fiscal risks, the rich may walk away with another multi-billion-dollar gift as the country and the world bear the harsh consequences for years to come. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.)

Scarf as symbol

ISTANBUL - When Turkey's President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and his wife, both staunch secularists, left for a recent overseas trip, they were seen off at the airport by the speaker of Parliament and his wife in what seemed like a routine exercise in protocol. But the country was in for a shock. Munever Arinc, wife of the new head of Parliament from the Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party (AKP), wore her headscarf, which is banned at schools and public offices and often identified with religious resistance to established secular values, if not a symbol of fundamentalism.

To many secularists Mrs Arinc's headscarf was a sign that AKP, despite disclaimers, was planning to undo Turkey's staunchly secular system. The ruling party said it sees wearing headscarves as one element in increased freedoms. The headscarf issue has also haunted authorities in Europe. In France, wearing headscarves in secondary schools led to a fierce debate. In Germany a court recently ruled that a Turkish woman was wrongly dismissed after her German employees fired her for wearing the scarf at work. The issue also ended up in court in Denmark and became a cause celebre in Spain. (IPS)

Decriminalising drugs

OTTAWA - The government of Prime Minister Jean Chretien is examining the option of decriminalising possession of small amounts of marijuana, while the city of Vancouver is leading the country in establishing safe injection sites for heroin addicts, despite pressure from the US to maintain its zero-tolerance federal drug policy. Canadian courts have issued a series of rulings that allow AIDS sufferers and those with chronic illnesses to smoke marijuana to alleviate their pain.

John Walters, the director of the US Office of National Drug Policy, said a relaxation of Canada's marijuana regulations would expand the inflow into the US and worsen the US addiction. Robert Maginnis, a drug policy adviser to US President George Bush, warned that Canada/US border trade faced disruption if Ottawa amends its criminal code, even hinting at a possible boycott of Canadian products.

But Eugene Oscapella, an Ottawa lawyer and a co-founder of the Canadian Foundation for Drug Policy, talked of a backlash if the US attempts a "war on drugs" ideology on Canadians, who are increasingly sceptical of spending about \$500 million a year to prosecute addicts and drug traffickers. (IPS)

Going nuclear

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations appears unable or unwilling to react, caught in the middle of a new political showdown between the United States and North Korea over weapons of mass destruction. North Korea openly defied the US last week by declaring its intention to revive its long dormant nuclear weapons program. A UN spokesperson said there were no indications for a formal Council meeting to discuss the emerging crisis.

North Korea said that it was restarting its nuclear reactor for badly needed electricity following a decision by the US and other Western nations to cut off oil shipments. The cut resulted after reports that the country had been making secret efforts to continue its nuclear weapons program in violation of its 1994 agreement with the US.

Unlike its stand against Iraq, the US has refused to threaten North Korea with military action because of a possible retaliation by Pyongyang against two close US allies: South Korea and Japan. Recently however, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the US was militarily capable of fighting and winning two wars simultaneously—one against Baghdad and the other against Pyongyang. The US has about 37,000 soldiers on South Korean soil. (IPS)

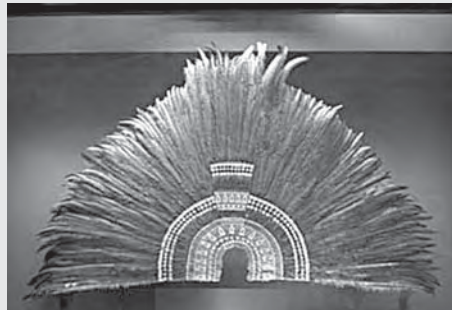
Disputed crown

MEXICO CITY - For the last 15 years, Mexico has been demanding the return of the headdress or "penacho" that belonged to Moctezuma Xocoyotzin (1466-1520), the last emperor of the Aztec dynasty, from Austria. Austria claims to be the sole and legitimate owner of the artefact.

The piece, made with feathers of the "quetzal", a bird native to southern Mexico and Central America, and currently in danger of extinction, was taken from Mexico during the Spanish Conquest, some 500 years ago. Austria purchased it in 1880, and it has been on exhibit in Vienna since 1929.

Efforts to win the return of the historic headdress gathered force after anthropologists, biologists and other experts from both Mexico and Austria drew up a plan to determine whether the artefact is authentic and to assess the state of its preservation. The Austrian Ministry of Education and Culture gave the scientists permission to study the piece only under glass because of its fragility.

Historians and indigenous organisations say its recovery would be the beginning of efforts to win the return of dozens of valuable pre-Hispanic objects they say were taken illegally from Mexico. (IPS)



ASIA

ANALYSIS

by JEAN-PIERRE LEHMANN



Land of the setting sun?



Japan is sick, but once again people are becoming hopeful that it may at long last recover, mostly because a committed reformer named Heizo Takenaka now seems to be running the economic policy. But what policymakers and pundits fail to recognise—or refuse to recognise—is that economic policies per se will not reinvigorate Japan. Their crisis is systemic, not cyclical. The causes are a combination of institutional sclerosis, social anomie and gerontocratic governance.

For several decades after WWII the Japanese system worked remarkably well, not only in generating growth, but in providing high levels of education, long life expectancy, security and other welfare benefits to its citizens. This system rested a cohesive political-industrial establishment, the mobilisation of resources to achieve national economic ends and America's defensive shield.

Almost immediately after defeat in WWII, Japan metamorphosed from being America's enemy into its pampered protégé. This was "real geopolitik" in action. The Cold War, the rise of Maoist China and the Korean War all made Japan indispensable to America. The US provided military protection and vast economic assistance, including massive technology transfers. Most importantly, it opened its market to Japanese exports while allowing Japan to protect its home market.

Japan developed an "outward looking protectionist" strategy and structure. Select sectors of Japanese industry actively participated in international markets. Far ranging efforts were deployed to obtain technology transfers. The domestic market however was protected by a combination of industrial policy, cartels and a "Buy Japanese" mentality. It worked fantastically well.

By the mid-1980s Japan had more than caught up. The 1985 New York Plaza Hotel meeting of US, European, and Japan's finance ministers—a meeting where the yen was considerably re-valued—should

have set in motion new policies in Japan. The problem lay in its corresponding ideological orthodoxy. Japan had developed a dirigiste closed mercantilist nationalism. This was reflected in an aggressive industrial machismo and in various forms of chauvinism, illustrated by the book, *The Japan That Can Say 'No'*, (1988) co-authored by the current Governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, and Sony founder Akio Morita.

By the late 1980s the world was changing fast, but Japan refused to change. Institutions were archaic and pursued mistaken economic strategies and structures. The illiberal nationalist ideological ethos brooked no genuine debate, let alone heterodox positions. Indeed, among Japan's most moribund institutions are its universities and media.

There was no new leadership and the seniority system continued to prevail. This ossification was driven by the rigid and conservative nature of governance. So even as the Japanese tidal wave appeared poised to overwhelm the world economy in the late 1980s the country was nearing collapse at home.

Collapse it did, in 1991. Japan wasted a decade. Policymakers, business leaders, academics and journalists did not recognize their country's problems.

A day of reckoning came with the Kobe earthquake on 17 January 1995. As thousands died, the government froze, proving itself

Can a new Japanese sensibility renew economic credibility in 2003?

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A day of reckoning came with the Kobe earthquake on 17 January 1995. As thousands died, the government froze, proving itself

incapable of an efficient rescue operation and refused the assistance of the US 7th Fleet.

Today's deflation arises from the state of anomic in which Japan was plunged in the mid-1990s. The Japanese have no confidence in the future because the establishment has lost credibility and legitimacy. Yet the establishment remains entrenched in power, its reforms little more than cosmetic, "re-arranging of deck chairs on the Titanic-Maru."

The Japanese tend to be patient and disciplined but when social eruptions have occurred, they have also been very violent. There is also a strong extremist political minority and a not-too-difficult to tap latent national chauvinism.

But a different scenario is possible: a reinvigorated, open post-industrial, globally-oriented Japanese society can be established on liberal political foundations. Such a scenario will require thorough institutional renewal, rejuvenation of leadership at all levels, a radical change in national "mindset" and the opening up of Japan's economy and society to foreign influences and participation. There is a young generation of Japanese who need every encouragement. Today's trends are frightening for Japan, for Asia and for the world. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Professor of International Political Economy, IMD, is a Founding Director of the Evian Group, Lausanne, Switzerland)

by BYUNG-JOON AHN



The North's nukes

North Korea's decision to expel UN atomic energy inspectors is but another reason to view Roh Moo Hyun's election as South Korea's president as a watershed. The beginning of his term coincides with one of the most dangerous episodes on the Korean peninsula in decades and will test South Korea's relations with the US to a degree that has not been seen for many years.

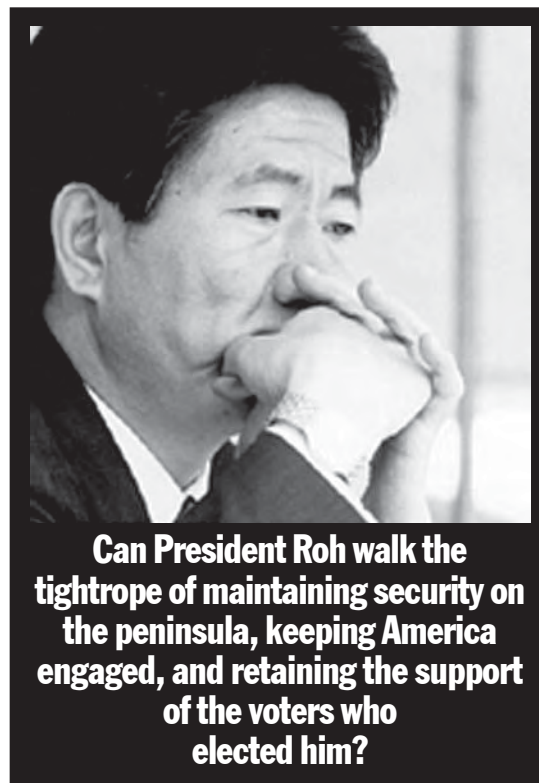
Roh's victory over Lee Hoi-Chang signifies a generational shift in Korean politics, with the young determined to gain a freer hand in Korea. Indeed, generational differences were the deciding factor in the race, replacing the regional sentiments that dominated every presidential race before this one. According to one report, over 60 percent of people in the 20-30 age group voted for Roh to produce a margin of 2.3 percent in this first two-man, head-to-head presidential race in 31 years.

Roh's populist and nationalist stance will be swiftly and sorely tested by reality when he assumes power in February. But couple the generational changeover that put him in office with a strong popular desire for continued engagement with North Korea—notwithstanding North Korea's growing nuclear brinkmanship—and the recipe is complete for disputes with the US.

Roh, a self-made man who passed a bar examination without going to college and law school, succeeded in convincing voters that he would usher in a new brand of politics reflecting South Korea's growing wealth and middle class sentiments, thereby sweeping away insider-dominated politics, regional bickering, and factional struggles. His style and rhetoric projected the fresh (for Korea!) image of a common man committed to eliminating the ossified networks of cronyism and corruption.

For the first time in modern Korean history, the presidential campaign debated central issues rather than focussing on parties and personalities. Candidate Roh called for a new relationship between South Korea and the US, one based on the principle of independence and equality. He said he would not kowtow to the US. He also promised to continue President Kim Dae Jung's "sunshine policy" of engagement with the North.

Remarkably, Roh won the election despite North Korea's decision to reactivate nuclear reactors that had been frozen since 1994. That he overcame this obstacle



Can President Roh walk the tightrope of maintaining security on the peninsula, keeping America engaged, and retaining the support of the voters who elected him?

without changing his stance on engaging North Korea means that times have radically changed. A yearning for change is now the overriding concern of ordinary Koreans.

Roh's campaign also took advantage of a rising anti-US tide. The acquittal by a US military court of two American soldiers who accidentally killed two Korean schoolgirls with their armored car last June triggered street demonstrations across the country. Demands continue for changing the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) that governs the legal treatment of US troops stationed in South Korea. Ordinary Koreans insist US soldiers who commit crimes should be tried in Korean courts.

This expression of wounded national pride was enabled by South Korea's tremendous performance in the World Cup football tournament last summer, which helped convince ordinary Koreans they might be able to stand without the presence of 37,000 US troops. Indeed, many ordinary people now view the US presence, and not North Korea's communist regime, as the biggest obstacle to unification. According to a recent poll, 31.7 percent oppose the stationing of US troops in the country.

These sentiments will test Roh's presidency from the start, for he must re-engineer relations with America at the same time that the Bush administration is fretting about North Korea's nuclear ambitions. For now, Korean voters—apparently impervious to the North Korean nuclear threat—support Roh's policy of maintaining dialogue and economic exchange with the North.

Under President Roh, South Korea's domestic politics and relations with the US and North Korea will require an almost total overhaul. Can he walk the tightrope of maintaining security on the peninsula, keeping America engaged, and retaining the support of the voters who elected him? Reconciling those goals would test even the most experienced and cynical of politicians, so it is anyone's guess as to whether President Roh can succeed. Failure, however, offers such a horrific prospect that no one can possibly hope for it. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Byung-joon Ahn is Visiting Professor of International Relations at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo and a Member of the Korean National Academy of Sciences.)

Economic woes

JAKARTA - In the last four months, at least 19 foreign companies have pulled out of Indonesia, mainly for reasons of security and law, and relocated to places like Vietnam, China, Cambodia and Australia, signalling continued economic headaches for the country. The ranks of the unemployed are presently 8.1 million and is expected to increase to 9.7 million people in 2003. Unofficial figures say the number is closer to 20 million.

Analysts say the creation of new jobs is an impossible task for the government of Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, which is desperately looking for financial sources other than loans from the IMF and the World Bank. Indonesia has been allocating 15 percent of its budget to pay its foreign debt and 35 percent to maintain its collapsing large companies.

Relocations by foreign investors greatly affects the government's ability to sustain its economic program, because most of these firms are export-oriented and help bring much-needed revenue into Indonesia. Meanwhile, Indonesian industries have to compete with cheaper goods from other South Asian countries. But despite the problems, Indonesia's GDP grew by 3.39 percent in late 2002. (IPS)

Replacing labour

SINGAPORE - Nearly 27,000 foreigners have left the recession-hit island in the year up to June, affecting highly paid financial sector and information technology professionals but hurting foreign domestic workers the most.

Singapore employs an estimated 140,000 foreign domestic workers, most of them from the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Burma. They earn between \$112-196 a month and the employer pay a government levy of \$194 a month for every foreign domestic worker he or she has. Now the government is trying to wean residents off their reliance on foreign domestic help.

An official suggestion to increase the domestic worker levy to encourage employment of locals in domestic jobs was met with protests by the population. The government needs to find jobs for some 100,000 locals who have been left unemployed. Many of them are former factory hands who have no formal educational qualifications. The National Trade Union Council (NTUC) Income's chief executive officer Tan Kin Lian believes that many unemployed Singaporeans could be trained to do the work done by foreign domestic workers if locals are persuaded it is 'respectable'. (IPS)

True globalisation

NEW DELHI - Peace and security as factors to counter neo-liberal globalisation will dominate the Asian Social Forum (ASF) to be held in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad this week, as a prelude to the World Social Forum (WSF) in Brazil later in January. The ASF has emerged as the rallying point for those opposed to globalisation and the 'Washington Consensus' on economic liberalisation.

This six-day conference will include leading human rights activists such as Asma Jehangir from Pakistan, Walden Bello, commentator on globalisation from the Philippines and Samir Amin, the France-based authority on western imperialism. There will be testimonies from Nora de Cortinas of the Argentinean group Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Sahar Saba of the Revolutionary Association of the Women in Afghanistan (RAWA). Former Indian president K R Narayanan, Nouri Abdulla Razzak Hussain and Francisco Whitaker are scheduled to speak at the conference.

Jeevan Reddy, chairman of the WSF, said the meet is a "true globalisation of people". More than 10,000 delegates from over 300 organisations will participate in an open forum structured into eight major conferences, smaller seminars, workshops and discussions. (IPS)

Under scrutiny

BANGKOK - Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's third year in office is going to come under severe scrutiny in the new year. A network of 50 NGOs plans to host a "people's parliament" at a university here in March 2003 to give the Thai public a venue to criticise the kind of development that the Thaksin administration has pursued in its two years in office—one that sceptics say does not heed the voices of affected communities.

Activists recently launched a campaign to collect 50,000 signatures in order to oust Thaksin from office, a move sanctioned by Thailand's 1997 constitution. The signatures in support of dismissal have to be submitted with a petition to the Senate to institute an inquiry. These actions by activists were triggered by his government's stance on two controversial projects—the Thai-Malaysian gas pipeline in southern Thailand and the Pak Mun dam.

But Thaksin may have little reason to panic. His administration has seen an economic growth this year of more than 5 percent and there continues to be wide support for some of his universal health care scheme and poverty reduction program for villagers. Most significantly, Thaksin commands an unprecedented majority in parliament. (IPS)

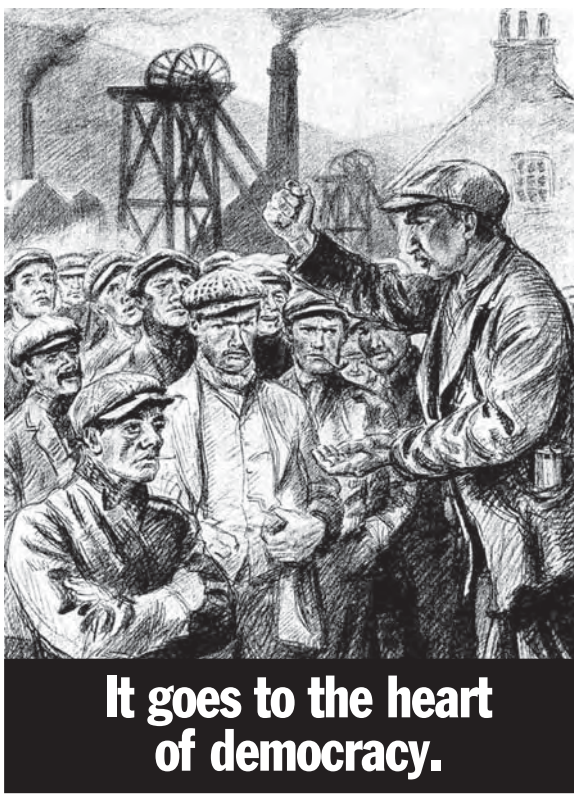
Those who desire to treat politics and morals separately will never understand anything of either." So wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and I agree. The practice of politics can and must be reconciled with the imperatives of honesty. But what is honesty or dishonesty in a politician? Is it possible for a politician to be honest at all?

The question goes to the heart of democracy. When voters write off politicians, anti-democratic movements thrive. All politicians know ambiguity and compromise tend to prevail over universal truths. Sometimes one must choose the lesser evil. Our ordinary standards of decency and righteousness cannot always be applied—but not because cynicism and hypocrisy are all that matter in politics.

Political dishonesty takes different forms. One who is dishonest to begin with, will be a dishonest leader, ideologue or diplomat in any circumstance. Another type is the well-meaning dilettante. Clumsy and amateurish, he harms the interests he aims to advance. Political "gamblers" put competence to bad use. They are skilled, ruthless, lack humility and eschew reflection. A close kin is the political "troublemaker", who pursues his soaring ambitions by any means, whatever the risks. The political "fanatic" is also dishonest, blinded by the conviction that he is always right. The fanatic is a steamroller ready to flatten everything in his way. By contrast, the political "wheeler-dealer" is no less dishonest. He is spineless, lacks principle and retreats from responsibility.

There are more general political postures, led by cynical forms of pragmatism. It is embodied in the principle that the end justifies the means whenever moral imperative conflicts with political interests. At the other extreme is a naive, utopian, and moralistic stance. It deplores the grit and relativism of politics. History is not an idyll and politicians' biographies do not read like the lives of the saints.

This does not mean that we cannot identify honest politicians. Immanuel



It goes to the heart of democracy.

Kant described two types. The political moralist who wants to "hammer out morality" and the moral politician, who rejects cynical pragmatism but does not succumb to naive moralising. He will not lose sight of higher objectives in pursuing even partial goals with patience and compromise.

An honest politician pursues pragmatism built on principles, on the courage to say unpleasant things, but always with a constructive attitude. Indeed, the eagerness to expose and publicise a problem without proposing feasible solutions, is perhaps the most common form of dishonesty in politics.

This is why actual governance is so often the best test of political honesty. In democratic countries, voters can and often do punish their dishonesty at the ballot box. The toughest test of an honest politician comes when defending ideas that are unpopular but right. Not everyone passes such a test, particularly when elections are approaching. While the dishonest politician equates politics only with popularity, the moral politician cannot succeed in ensuring the common good single-handedly. Only when politicians support one another's decency can

they rise above their political divisions.

But political honesty is not the sole responsibility of politicians. Public opinion must play a part. Honesty is more likely to take root in a society marked by a culture of tolerance, solidarity and the equal rights.

I am a political practitioner, first and foremost. So I know that no theory, no amount of analysis, can free a politician from bouts of soul-searching, from troubling his or her conscience with questions about what is and what is not honest when confronting political choices. Above all else, the honest politician willingly shoulders this burden. ♦ (© Project Syndicate)

(Aleksander Kwasniewski is President of Poland. This text is based upon his recent speech to Project Syndicate member editors in Vienna.)



Honest politics

OPINION

by ALEKSANDER KWASNIEWSKI



Of the people

Deshantar, 29 December

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The strongest message to come out of a six-month research conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESOD) is people across the country are terrified but are still holding onto their faith in a democratic system. A whopping 72.36 percent of the respondents side squarely with a democratic system and a constitutional monarchy. The research, conducted between February and July 2002, does not incorporate opinions regarding the royal move in October. About 11 percent favour a Panchayat era single-party political system, while only 9.4 percent of respondents support a people's republic proposed by the underground Maoist party.

Elements destabilising the country	%	What can mitigate the effects of the insurgency and improve living standards?	%
Maoist insurgency	26.41	Infrastructure development	45.32
Corruption	21.18	Improve peace and security	21.88
Unaccountability	12.82	Employment	13.33
Insecurity	11.74	Cottage industry	5.20
Weak government	6.18	Education	4.12
Unemployment	3.43	Fulfillment of basic needs	3.87
Illiteracy	2.73	Establish skill-training centres	1.48
Poverty	2.30	Good governance	1.46
Lack of unity among parties	2.11	Others	7.00
Democracy (for Maoists)	1.65		
Inequality (for Maoists)	1.64		
Non-Communist institutions (for Maoists)	0.51		
International interference (for Maoists)	0.24		
Dowry (in Terai)	0.02		

Political system of choice	%
Multiparty system with constitutional monarchy	72.36
Single party system	11.27
Communism (the Maoist brand)	9.41
Military rule	2.94
Don't know	4.02

Situation of the village	men (in percent)	women (in percent)
Terrifying	70	67
Easeful	6	5
Don't know	15	28

Source of terror	%
Maoists	26.4
Government institutions	4.8
Both	60.2
Others	3.7
Don't know	4.9

Elections in April

Dipak Bhattarai in *Space Time*, 30 December

स्वेसटाइम डैनिक

By April 2003 the government is preparing to hold elections for local bodies in areas that are not extremely affected by the Maoist insurgency. The government is expected to present its proposal in an all-party meeting likely to be convened by Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand soon. Official sources said in the first phase elections for local bodies could be held in 30 out of 75 districts in the country. The former Deuba government had authorised government employees to run local bodies after the tenure of the popularly elected representatives expired in mid-July 2002. His government had also expressed its commitment to hold elections within last year. Various donor agencies have agreed to provide Nepal a grant worth Rs 13 billion over the next decade after the elections.

King's move

Yubraj Ghimire in *Kantipur* 30 December

कान्तिपुर

A public felicitation is just a formality. Before going into any such exercise it is necessary to work towards building confidence between the king and the public. Neither Badri Prasad Mandal nor the palace secretariat are in a position to build that trust because they either don't have a feel for the pulse of the people, or the people simply don't believe them.

That is why His Majesty himself must analyse the pros and cons of participating in the public felicitation program [in Biratnagar on Friday]. Even if it is to save one person whose life may be in danger because of his or her participation at the event,

why shouldn't His Majesty make an effort? It is important to cast aside the legal and constitutional questions and ask: who wants to mobilise the crowds in the name of the king, and why? Are they doing it for the protection and continuity of the monarchy, or for their own short-term gain?

Given the limited time, only the king can analyse this. An aloof palace secretariat that is divorced from the will of the people cannot do this. The urgent necessity now is to bridge the gap between the king and the political parties, since only that will bolster the strength of the constitutional forces and in turn give legitimacy to future negotiations with the Maoists. Such an alliance of constitutional forces will also convert the Maoists' current modus operandi into an imperative for talks. If the king, can in the next two or three days, take the necessary steps to defuse the situation, then there will be spontaneous public felicitations for him all over the country.

Make peace

Baburam Bhattarai via email in *Saanghu*, 30 December

साङ्गु

Our party strongly believes that there is no alternative to a joint people's movement comprising all the leftist and non-leftist democratic forces. Only such a nationwide movement can make bourgeoisie democracy complete. If the present ruling forces agree to make the people sovereign and find a permanent solution to the problem through peaceful talks then we are ready to take part in such a dialogue. We have already formed a dialogue committee for this purpose.

We hope that our immediate demands—including holding a roundtable conference, formation of an interim government and elections to the constituent assembly—are acceptable to all



SHRIS RAJ

three forces in the country, namely the monarchy, parliamentary and proletariat revolutionary, to find a way out. We have constantly said we are ready to carry out either talks or military actions to this end. The other sides have not been able to internalise our demands that we put forward in a very responsible way considering the sensitive geo-political situation and present power balance in the country. We are not talking about carrying out a "New Democratic Revolution" but are only raising the issue of completing bourgeoisie democracy. It is very unfortunate and paradoxical that parliamentary forces failed to respond to our proposal in a manner we expected.

If the elections to the constituent assembly are held, the 'state authority' and 'sovereignty' said to be inherent in the monarchy will be formally transferred to the people. It will also facilitate the movement of parliamentary and proletariat forces. This may, in turn, resolve problems that have plagued us in the past.

As far as the issue of involvement of international forces is concerned, we want our domestic conflict resolved internally without the intervention of foreign forces. If the situation demands otherwise, we will have to accept a genuinely true, independent and impartial force or an institution in the role of a facilitator or mediator.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

FICTION

by NAYANTARA KAKSHAPATI

Up the drains of Kathmandu

Third in the British Council Short Story Competition (18-35)

To: mstoles@earthlink.net
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: Interview
Date: 5 July 2002

Dear Dr Stoles,

I believe Mrs Khatri from The Valley Times mentioned to you on the phone yesterday that I wished to interview you. I would very much appreciate half an hour of your time, at your convenience next week. I am a Journalism student at the University of Bhaktapur and an intern at The Valley Times. I am doing some research on for the cover story on the drainage system in the city. I read your book, Urban Planning or the Lack of it in Kathmandu. It always fascinates me how people like yourself, come to Nepal from oceans away, and manage to learn and publish more about Nepal, than us who live and work here all our lives. I hope to further this line of thought with you in person soon.

Sincerely,
Pareli Shrestha
Intern Journalist
The Valley Times

To: subeertthapa@vtimes.com
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: Greeeeen! Eeek!
Date: 5 July 2002

Subeer,

The page 14 ad DID come out horrible. And after all those hours I spent with Deepak ji on the computer! How our dandy "creative director" can be so colour blind is beyond me. And how the Boss is so nonchalant about the appearance of his product, well that I suppose is none of my concern. Like he so eloquently put it the other day, I am but an intern here. Sigh. The charms of wanting to be the Princess of the Print world are slowly fading I'm afraid.

The not-so-Princessy Pareli

To: deepakojha@vtimes.com
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: pages 2-6
Date: 6 July 2002

Deepak ji,

Please keep pages 3 and 4 open for the Dr Stoles interview. And yes I need pages 2,5 and 6 too. It's the cover story Deepak ji, of course I will need space.

Thank you,

Pareli

To: shrestha@multigains.net
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: Pick up- sorry
Date: 8 July 2002

Hi Ma,

The tests are clear! *Bhaguwaan* be praised! Now that all your medical worries are taken care of, try and have a good relaxing holiday okay? Give Ba my love. Take lots of pictures! I am looking after Maya. Don't worry we are not fighting. You guys just have a good time and give *Mama* and *Majju* our love.

Oh and Ma, I have an important interview for the cover story scheduled for 11 on Tuesday. If it isn't over on time, Maya will pick you up at the airport. It's the first time they have agreed to give me a chance to work on anything bigger than two columns Ma and I want to be as thorough as possible and prove it to them that a young female Nepali CAN be an effective journalist. See you soon and have a safe flight back.

Love,

Chori

To: mstoles@earthlink.net
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: Thank you
Date: 11 July 2002

Dear Dr Stoles,

Thank you so much for your time on Tuesday. I had a truly inspirational 45 minutes. After our discussion, some research on my own, and walking down my flooded stretch of pot-holed street for the sixth time today, I am convinced it is about time the Kathmandu Municipality begin to review the current state of the city drainage system and some public indignation be expresses in the media. Your interview will be printed as part of the cover story for Friday's issue. I hope the dual timing of your recommendations and the fresh memory of daily downpours will result in some substantial public reaction. I hope to compile a concrete collection of public opinions for the following week. Let us hope we can keep this discussion heated for at least two if not three weeks in a row, and then submit it to the government. Something will come out of this. I send you a copy of the proof and once again, a load of gratitude for all your help.

Pareli Shrestha

To: subeertthap@vtimes.com
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: party-sorry
Date: 12 July 2002

Subeer,

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the party last night. I was up till 3 reading letters we received in response to the drainage system piece. Please congratulate your sister and *Bhenaju* and little Subeerab (why do I sense the new uncle is all puffed up with pride?) for me. As for your sister's curiosity with regard to when I'm 'catching a man', I'll definitely let her know when I'm open for business. For all PhD wisdom, she can be very one tracked. No offense. See you at work on Monday.

Pareli

To: shrestha@multigains.net
From: parelishrestha@vtimes.com
Subject: Puja
Date: 13 July 2002

NEPALITERATURE

by MANJUSHREE THAPA

TIME IS PASSING

Shailendra Sakar

Having steadily put Losar, 1 Baisakh and Bhintuna behind us, we have now arrived at the last new years of the year—and let us hope it marks a change in our fortunes; for the past year, by any calendar's mark, has been singularly destructive.

Shailendra Sakar's poems have the emotional gravity and intellectual weight—as well as elegance—to make us feel by turns unstrung and incensed about the rush of time that leaves us all behind. The first poem below matches today's mood, though it was, like the poem that follows it, published in 1990 in Sakar's poetry collection *Sarpaharu Geet Gaundainan*.

NEW YEAR

This new year too in those same eyes
the same stamp of theatricality
I wanted to learn and I'm going to see
each moment of time passing by a unit of time
I wanted to understand and I'm going to hold onto
the melting snow mountain of lifespan
How will the sun place its strange footsteps
in people's eyes
How will it recall its own presence?

I wanted to touch each face of time as it passed
I truly felt greedy to see the face of the coming day
room wall street fetid alleyways
in the papers in shops the premonition of coming days
eager to learn who's hammering relentlessly at the granite of time
Shattering shattering will it then emerge
in a whole new form?

Who's shaking the tree of time to drop the bodhi seeds
New years

Ripping up and tossing away those same days opening those
same peels
uncloning those same pupa breaking those same mirrors
standing at the door wiping those same mouths—aspirations on loan
the butterfly comes in season books in time night and day in
time
the butterfly comes in season casting off pupa

A new day has come through the back door—a new year
Without my knowledge its sunlight has reached my bed
Even as I close the window
as I go on strike as I refuse
without my knowledge someone's opened the back door of
the room of unawareness of the semi-awareness wrapped over
the brain
the day has entered like a thief like a wrongdoer
I'm not ready to accept it

How greedy am I how eager?
Still, somehow, suddenly they keep arriving—
each new year being forced upon us

The second poem is a simpler meditation on the same theme: our inability to control roughish time.

TIME

Hanging an x-ray of a friend's fractured hand
like a frame in the center of a room's clean wall
I look at it and see an illusion—
It's a carved lattice window
It's possible to see the open sky through it
If I examine the x-ray against bright lights
I'll see in it broken, bent and shattered bones
scattered so that they can't be joined
Otherwise, glancing quickly—
It's a design for an attractive window

Like this x-ray time is hanging
all over the clean wall of my life

Meditating upon impermanence—or just feeling it acutely—is said to motivate us to make the most of every moment of our short time on earth. Perhaps our decision-makers should read Sakar's poems in the original Nepali? ...And allow us to have a constructive new year.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The king can be publicly felicitated for his work at the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation and for his contributions to the industrial sector. His hotel is operating well and the employees there receive good salaries and benefits. But he cannot be felicitated for what happened on 4 October.

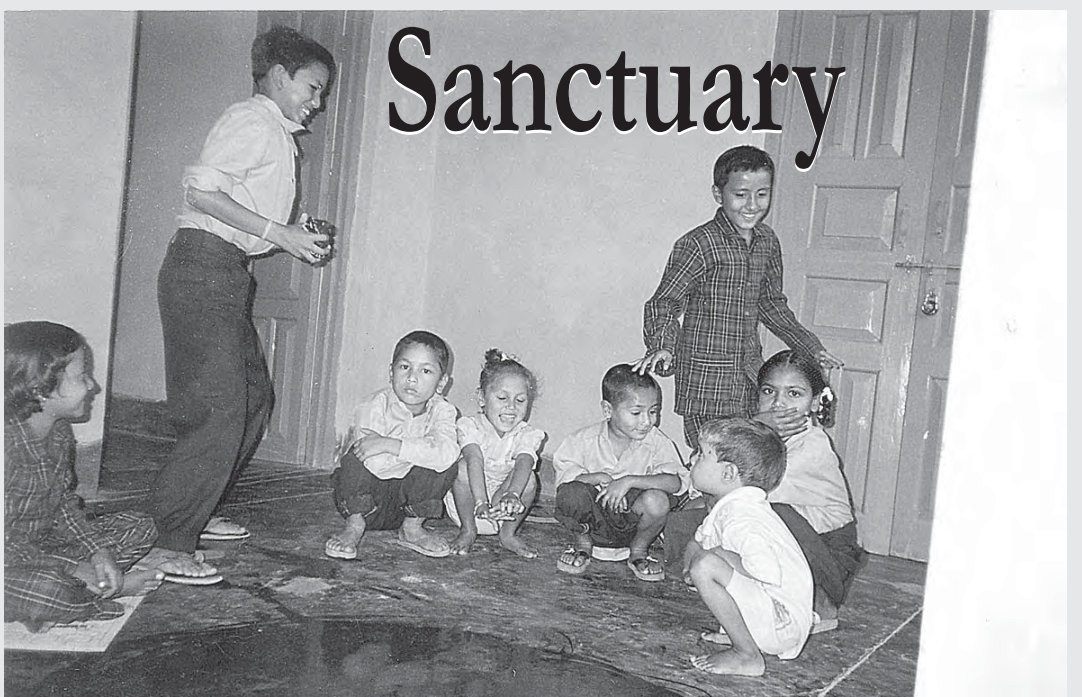
- Comrade Swanam, leader—NCP (Ekatakendra- Masal)



Wow, how smart! They've already bought helmets. Okay, let's go.

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Nepal Samacharpatra, 1 January, 2003.



Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 December-14 January

"Father was eating when they came and dragged him out and killed him."
"Our father had gone to teach, he didn't come back."

This is the horror that children like Sangita and Sarala have to live with. Sangita's father, Sohan Yadav, a farmer from Banke was beaten to death with clubs by the Maoists. Security forces killed Sarala's father, a teacher also from Banke. Both the girls now live in a children's home established by Sahara Samuha in Nepalganj for the rehabilitation of children who are victims of the insurgency. The group, which started operating from 17 November, has enough room for 50 children.

Eight children now live at the home. Six of them had no one left to support them, two of the children were left homeless by the security forces. Balkrishna Joshi, secretary of Sahara Samuha says, "It doesn't matter whether the children have been rendered helpless by the Maoists, the police or anyone. We treat them the same."

The home is run on Rs 350,000 donated by locals and needs more money since there are so many who need help. Supporting one child for a month is estimated at Rs 1,200. Says President Chandra Prasad Timilsina, "There's a danger of those affected by violence to seek revenge. The children's home wants to help them avoid the violent path, and to work towards peace."



Green Bar of the month



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Card design exhibition** by Dewendra Pandey, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal. 10AM-4PM, till 6 January. 220735
- ❖ **Paintings by Stina Haldorsen** at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM-6PM from 10-19 January. 411122
- ❖ **Snow and other adventures:** "Poems in Frames" by Mark Wyatt at Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Woodturning in Kathmandu** by Dan Hogan, and **Unspoken Words:** new Tibetan Calligraphy by Dharmakhang at Indigo Gallery, Kathmandu. 8AM-6PM till 14 January. 413580
- ❖ **New Road Street Festival** Free 3-4 January, Kathmandu

EVENTS

- ❖ **Winter Day Camp** ECCA for students (Class 4-9) 29 December-14 January. ECCA, Thapathali, Kathmandu. 268297,268328 email: ecca@mos.com.np
- ❖ **Free Aura-Diagnosis:** Andreas Lohmann gives aura advice. 11AM-4PM on 4 January **Encounter Kali free entrance.** 5PM, 4 January. **Aura-Seminar** Learn to perceive aura, heal and listen to your inner guidance by Andreas and Kali Ma: Rs 2000, 10AM-6PM on 5 January. All at the KTM Centre of Healing, Maharajgunj. 425946 New Road

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336
- ❖ **Acoustic jam** at Moksh, Sanepa (inside Club Hardic) 6:30 onwards on 3 January. Free. 528703
- ❖ **Shikhar Music Beat** competition and performances Free 2PM onwards at Dasrath Ranagasla,Kathamndu on 4-5 January

DRINKS

- ❖ **Friday Indulgence** Irish music from An Fainne, tasting with 12 Scottish single malts, Rs 999. The Piano Lounge, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999
- ❖ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096.

FOOD

- ❖ **The greenest patch** Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799
- ❖ **Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Sekuwa Saanjh** with Rusty Nails at Dwarika's Hotel. Rs 555 plus tax per person with free beer or soft drink. 479488 extn: 432.
- ❖ **Patan Museum Café** Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11AM-2PM. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza** at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 480262
- ❖ **Taste of Beijing** Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589
- ❖ **Newari Bhoj** Traditional snacks, drinks and meals, outdoors or indoor, in a restaurant designed by Bhaktapur artisans. Lajana Restaurant. Lazimpat. 413874
- ❖ **Traditional Newari and Nepali Cuisine** 6 to 20 course meals at Krishnarpan Restaurant. Lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended. 479488 extn: 230
- ❖ **Tukche Thakali Kitchen** Buckwheat, barley, bean, and dried meat specialties. Also brunch with porridge and pancakes, all raw material from Tukche village. Darbar Marg.


GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tea House Combo** Room, breakfast, Nepali thali dinner, swimming, jacuzzi. Rs 700 per head on twin sharing for Nepalis and expats, Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 410432
- ❖ **Birdwatching, short hikes at Bandipur.** Rs 1,850 per person with dinner and breakfast, Rs 925 per child 5-14 years Shivapuri Heights Cottage, info@escapes2nepal.com, 370616
- ❖ **The Great Godavari Getaway Special** weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort. 560675
- ❖ **Writing Retreat** Full board package. Aesthetic living, innovative thinking, creative writing and nature at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 375280
- ❖ **Bardia Bonkers** Freshwater dolphins, giant tigers, elephants, safaris, rafting, evening cocktails, traditional food, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com.
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Rs 2750 per person per night (Tax included) for accommodation, meals, arrival and departure transfers from Bijaypur, walks, bar snacks and swimming. 01-361500


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

NEPALI WEATHER


by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



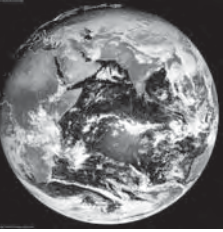
SUN



MON




TUE




WED

Fri




17-01

Sat




16-02

Sun




17-00

Mon



16-00

Tue




17-01

That one sprang out of nowhere, as you can see from this sequence of satellite pictures of the subcontinent. What was a small low pressure area over the Arabian Sea suddenly swelled into a major circulation that engulfed northern India and Nepal with rain on New Year's Eve. This was welcome rain for the winter crops, and the first westerly front of the season dumped up to 35 cm of snow in Humla, Mugu, Manang and Khumbu. The rain has dissolved the dust and smog haze over the Indian plains, look forward to partly cloudy skies but the sun should be bright and warm when it shines thorough. Foggy mornings with front in Kathmandu.


KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri




17-01

Sat




16-02

Sun




17-00

Mon




16-00

Tue




17-01


BOOKWORM



The Brick and the Bull: An account of Handigaun, the ancient capital of Nepal
Sudarshan Raj Tiwari
Himal Books, 2002
Rs 1,150
Handigaun, the earliest known urban settlement of Kathmandu Valley, was the site of the great Kirat and Lichchhavi palaces and served as the capital of the Valley for more than a millenium. Tiwari, an architect and cultural historian, weaves a fascinating past with the power places and public spaces still in use.



Halfway to the mountain: the Jirels of Eastern Nepal
H Sidky, J Subedi, J Hall, S Williams-Blangero
Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 2002
Rs 1,500
The Jirel people of Dolakha display a mixture of diverse cultural elements from Hinduism, Buddhism and Shamanistic traditions that they have adapted to unique ways. The authors emphasise the extraordinary Jirel sociocultural and religious traditions located halfway between the lowlands and the lofty mountains.



Date Conversion Chart: Bikram to Christian Era
Tri Ratna Manandhar (ed)
Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 2002
Rs 115
A handy guide for those who have to switch from AD to BS and vice-versa. This slim book will be invaluable to researchers, historians and students. The conversion chart begins in 1752 and ends in 1906 when the Nepal calendar was transformed from the lunar to a solar based system.

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


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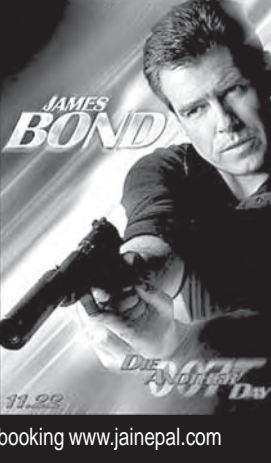
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Daily	2245-2300	BBC नेपाली सेवा
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Sun-Fri	0800- 0830	डबली (विषयगत अन्तरक्रिया)
Sun-Fri	2000- 2030	आजका कुरा (समसामयिक विषयमा बहस)
Sat	0800- 0830	शान्ति अभियान
Sat	1930- 2000	आचार विचार (षष्टाचारविषद सहकार्य)
Sat	2000- 2030	कूटनीतिक सञ्च

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रङ्गम सगरमाथा

ARCHITECTURE

The house that Rabindra built

How to combine old and new, and blend it with the medieval urbanscape of Bhaktapur.

MOHEINDU AMIRAN CHEMJONG

It's fitting to find the perfect marriage of traditional architecture and modern living in Bhaktapur, the Valley's best-preserved town.


A few blocks off the Dattatreya Temple in this ancient town is Rabindra Puri's house, and you could be excused for walking right past it: so well does this 150-year-old Newari-style townhouse blend with the surroundings. But once you enter it,

you will realise how cleverly it combines old with new. Rabindra's attachment to the house is almost emotional: when he was a boy, Rabindra saw an old and familiar house being torn down. The loss affected him deeply, and although he has a degree in development policy from Germany's Bremen University, architecture has always been his hobby. After working for the German aid group, GTZ and Patan Museum, 33-year-old Rabindra is now designing a nature club in Dhapasi


and helping build an ashram in Dolaghat. After selecting this house in Bhaktapur, Rabindra remodelled it and did the interiors himself. After passing through a pagoda-style gateway you see the exterior of the house with its subdued elegance and impeccable workmanship of brick and wood. At the entrance stands wooden beams, made from original, antique wood. In the foreground of the lobby are two exquisite windows in latticework (*nikijhyal*).

The living room has a pleasing ambience. The architect has been a little audacious by introducing a fireplace, alien to traditional Nepali houses. The floor is laid with baked clay bricks (*niya eir*) and accented by Afghani rugs. The lounge leads to two beautiful adjacent rooms which serve as resplendent reading rooms. The overall impression is of space. The lounge on the third floor is particularly beautiful with a wooden threshold and pillars that support the main ceiling (*dalin*). The pillars are embellished with elaborate traditional carvings. The floor has a simple, all-purpose straw mat (*sukul*). The play of the light is an excellent architectural addition, highlighting specific spaces and objects.


The mood in the no-nonsense study is tranquil. The computer table is low and the keyboard is just the right height to sit cross-legged. A passage off the study leads to a simple, elegant and sophisticated bathroom. The bath is softly contoured to lend grace. The blue and white coloured tiles add a contemporary dash to a brass washbasin. This floor opens up into a Rana style balcony (*bardali*) adorned with a lamp (*sukunda*) and an Israeli hammock, which somehow doesn't look odd. The kitchen is in the attic and it's mix of modern appliances with brass utensils symbolises the balance of ancient and modern sensibilities in this remarkable house. "My house is an interpretation of how upper-middle class families can combine comfort and at the same time preserve our traditional architecture which holds the secret to our diverse cultural past," says Puri. "Hopefully it will impress and influence others."



Season's Greetings




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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Some more news items we'd like to see in 2003

As you may have noticed, 2003 is off to a flying start with the daily papers carrying a slew of positively-angled news items designed to warm our cockles. The best piece of news to hit us in the new year is the actual one reproduced here that announces plans by the Royal Society for Humour and Satire (Rebellious) to establish Nepal as an International Humour Centre.

Further details are awaited. But, if true, what this means is that besides being known as the abode of Pashupatinath, the venue of the SAARCASM Secretariat and the Bandh Capital of the Eastern Hemisphere, Kathmandu is also going to be turned into a seriously funny place. About time, too, since things were starting to get a bit out of hand around here.

According to well-placed sources quoted by RSS, the Nepal Chapter of Humorous International will work closely with the Nepal Tourism Bored to promote humour tourism, and to kick this off it has already declared 2004 "Amusing Nepal Year", launching it by hosting the XVII International Congress on Good Humour which will be inaugurated jointly by the Ministers of Fun and Games of all participating countries.

The Chairman of the Amusing Nepal Organising Main Committee told newsmen at a solemn press conference: "It is of great national pride for Nepal to be chosen as the venue for this conference. You there near the window, what's so funny? This is no laughing matter, we are taking this development very seriously indeed. We will not allow our country to be made a laughing-stock."

Besides the plenary, the convention will have several working groups to deliberate on issues like "Good Governance and Humour", "The Role of Court Jesters in Conflict Resolution", "Is Democracy a Joke?" during which delegates from all over the world will present their research findings for peer review.

We may laugh about it, but the main duty of any government is to protect its citizens. That is why we are glad to see this news item in the press:

Helmets mandatory for pedestrians
KATHMANDU – The Kathmandu Valley Traffic Police Office has announced that helmets and protective suits will be mandatory for all pedestrians in the capital from 1 April 2003.

Citing the increasing numbers of speeding Kathmanduites who collide with parked vehicles everyday, commuters who get sideswiped by motorcyclists on zebra crossings, vendors in Asan who get gored every so often by bulls and those who fall into potholes while attending to calls of nature on the sidewalk, the police has decided that pedestrians will be required to wear protective gear while going about their daily business.

"It is our duty to make it safe for people to walk on the streets," said the head of the police's new Safety First and Last Task Force. "We will not rest easy until every life and limb of every street walker in Kathmandu is accounted for."

The mandatory gear that every Kathmanduite will be required to wear while walking on the streets will include a Grade 50 Thermex Crash Helmet with Neck Brace and Visor, industrial strength facial mask with a 1,000 litre oxygen cylinder, elbow and knee guards, teflon-coated shin pads, crampons, carabiners and jumara rope to rappel out of potholes.

"Anyone found walking about without this gear will be fined Rs 250," police said. "The public has to realise that we are doing it for their own safety and protection."

Girija threatens to spill beans

BIRATNAGAR – Former ex-prime minister Girija Koirala today threatened to "tell all" about who masterminded the 1914 assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo that plunged Europe into conflict 90 years ago.

"So far, I have refrained from the urge to speak out for fear that it may trigger World War III, but one day at an opportunistic time, I will bring out the truth," he told a motorcycle rally of pillion-riding party cadre, all of whom were wearing helmets.



Nepal to be developed as Int'l humour centre
RSS
Humour and Satire Society Nepal (HASSNE) is working hard for developing Nepal as the international humour centre. The society wants Nepal to be developed as the centre for humour tourism as there is no other humour centre in the world in spite of the existence of many famous institutions, says society president Dr. Ravi Kumar Paudyal.
The house will be constructed in such a way that it gives the impression of a well-being, long by the technical knowledge of different nations, reflecting and echoing the humour, literary, and play of cartoon pictures, comic performances, humour museum and humour treatment centre, he further said.
The society is looking for the necessary land for the house estimated to be constructed at a total cost of Rs 10 million, he said.
The architectural details of the house have been prepared by society member and cartoonist Acharya Man Singh.
The society plans to organise the International Humour Conference after the completion of the construction of the house.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Ellen Findlay, MBE

Ellen Findlay had just returned to Pokhara from a rural health camp in western Nepal on New Year's Eve when she got a call from the British ambassador in Kathmandu.

"Congratulations," the ambassador told her, "you have made it to the Queen's New Year's Honours List."

The 60-year-old Scottish nurse thought he was joking. But it was true: Ellen Findlay had just been made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition for more than three decades of selfless work in the Nepal. A midwife by training, Ellen first came to Nepal in 1970, treating everything from leprosy to maternity cases in and around Pokhara. Since 1994, she has been coordinator of the International Nepal Fellowship (INF) which organises mobile rural health clinics throughout western Nepal.

Ellen says she has seen great

improvements in Nepal's urban health care system, but rural health care is still too thinly spread. In remote districts like Baitadi and Mugu, patients walk for a week or more to seek medical help, usually for infections and gynaecological problems.

There has been a slight decrease in patients visiting these camps after the insurgency accelerated in western Nepal, but there are still a lot of sick people. The insurgency hasn't affected Ellen's work, although there was a firefight close to a gynaecological camp in Baitadi last year. "But the patients stood in line through it all, some waiting up to 12 hours for their turn," she recalls.

"The thing that keeps me going is the extraordinary strength of the Nepali people to smile even through the most difficult situations," she says. "There is tremendous sense of personal fulfillment, and now it is great to see the work I enjoy doing being honoured." Looks like someone who belongs in our honour list too. ♦

