

## Manjushree talks to Samrat



Novelist Manjushree Thapa, author of the much-acclaimed *The Tutor of History* has a cyber-chat with fellow-author and compatriot, Samrat Upadhyay who has just published his second book, *The Guru of Love* in the United States. Sample of the exchange:

**Manjushree** "You seem to be a squeaky-clean Nepali boy next door, correct me if I am wrong here. Isn't this unusual for a writer?"

**Samrat** "I'm hardly squeaky-clean, but yes my family and teaching are as important to me as writing."

Read the full interview on page 8-9.

## Bagchal

The First International *Bagchal* Tournament concluded last week in Bern. The Bronze Tiger trophy went to Ruth Kaeser. Back in Nepal, *bagchal* is losing its once-dominant place in the entertainment scene, but you can revive this game. To find out the rules, see page 15.

**HEMLATA RAI**, with **JANAK NEPAL**  
in **NEPALGANJ**

**W**hoever killed their parents, the children end up in the same place. Sangita Yadav's father was a farmer in Banke district. The Maoists came while he was eating, dragged him out of his house, beat and tortured him in front of his family, and killed him. Sarala Dahal's father was a teacher in the same district. He was killed after surrendering to the security forces.

Sarala and Sangita are both being raised in a child shelter which has just opened in Nepalganj by the charity group, Sahara. "We don't really care who killed their parents or relatives, we want to protect the future of these children, and they all get equal care here," says Sahara's Balkrishna Joshi.

With a capacity of taking care of 50 children, shelters like Sahara are just addressing the tip of the mountain of misery affecting Nepali children. Even so, there is such negligible rehabilitation going on, Joshi says, that every little effort counts.

Nine-year-old Hira Bahadur Pariyar and his 13-year-old brother Nar Bahadur from Rolpa have become symbols of this lack of care for the children who have been affected by the violence of the past seven years. Their father was killed by police, probably one of the first dozen casualties after the Maoists launched their "peoples' war" on 13 February, 1996. Unable to take care of the boys by herself, Hira and Nar Bahadur's mother abandoned them. Last week, the boys walked up bravely to the district administrator in Lipang and demanded that the state raise them.

No one is even keeping count of thousands of children like Sangita, Sarala, Hira and Nar

# Leave the kids alone



Children recruited by Maoists to carry their rucksacks rest at a tea house in Kalikot district in June.

**In a war between grown-ups, children are either caught in the middle or forced to fight.**

Bahadur. Besides the orphans and destitutes, there has been a sudden spurt in the past month in children being abducted from schools across Nepal, forced to take part in military training, attend Maoist mass meetings or do portering for the rebels. Many have since been released unharmed, but the spreading panic has made many parents send their children to the safety of the district towns.

By targetting schools across the country, the Maoists have indirectly affected the lives of millions of Nepali children. "They are the unseen victims, they are de-sensitised by reports of violence, they are psychologically affected by the forced closure of schools, and they are haunted by uncertainty," says Surendra

Mandal, a parent and teacher who has recently moved to Kathmandu from Rautahat. "Because these are children, you are talking about the nation's future."

Moved by the enormity of the crisis facing Nepali children, activist groups got together this week to launch a “Children as a Zone of Peace Campaign” under which they will address the specific and immediate education, health, shelter and food needs of children in 140 VDCs in 22 of the worst-hit districts.

"Firstly, the children should be kept out of this conflict," says Gauri Pradhan of Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), which is part of the group implementing the children peace campaign, "Secondly, we must start addressing

the needs of those who are already affected.”

One of the undocumented aspects of the conflict is the growing number of internally displaced families. This has increased the number of children in the district headquarters, townships and in Kathmandu Valley who have lost their traditional village support mechanisms. School closures and threats of forced recruitment of one child per family by Maoists have added to the influx of children. A recent survey in the insurgency hotbed of Rukum alone found that out of 1,000 people displaced, nearly 300 were children.

A high school headmaster from Sindhupalchok who is also living in Kathmandu told us nearly half the students in his school had dropped out this year, most have fled to Kathmandu and beyond. "Even those who have stayed behind have been very irregular in class," he said.

Tarak Dhital of CWIN feels children displaced or orphaned by the Maoists get more media attention than those affected by the action of security forces. "Most of the young victims of arbitrary action by the security forces have gone undocumented," Dhital says. These children are at far greater risk: they might not have access to institutional assistance, and they may be too scared to seek help.

Since the government either cannot help, or isn't doing much, activists say, it is now up to neutral relief groups to protect Nepali children from further harm. ♦

see also  $\Rightarrow$  p4-5

# “Recovery hinges on peace”

The Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) is one of Nepal's largest development partners with around \$2 billion invested since its assistance to Nepal began in 1969. Country Director for Nepal, Richard Vokes spoke to *Nepali Times* about ongoing assistance to Nepal, including delays in the Melamchi scheme, the development of hydropower infrastructure and the controversy over the lifting of subsidies for shallow tubewells.

Vokes admits that Nepal is going through a critical period, and

thinks the key is to restore peace. "If it is possible to resolve the conflict in the near future...there is a meaningful and effective program of rehabilitation, and development that really addresses the underlying causes of the conflict, then the prospects for economic recovery and addressing Nepal's persistent poverty are good," he says.

The fiscal crisis is more serious, Vokes adds, and says the donor community is willing to help address it. But what donors also want to see is an improved effectiveness of public expenditure. [Full interview](#) ➡ p7

Full interview → p7







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STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



# Have a party

In half-made societies, the elite periodically years for a knight in shining armour.

The deep-seated animosity between Nepali politicians and Kathmandu's social elite is rooted in history. Ever since the Rana days, politics has always been synonymous with court conspiracies, and the well-off have considered it beneath their dignity.

King Mahendra found politicians not to his liking and punished them in 1960 by putting them behind bars, dissolving parliament, suspending the constitution and banning political parties.

By the time King Birendra ascended the throne in 1972, political alignment of any kind had come to be regarded as disloyal to the ruler and the country, in that order. At the height of the "non-party" Panchayat system in the seventies, the palace establishment labelled all political leaders "anti-national elements" and prosecuted them for high treason. So the true-blue elite and the career-minded steered clear of politics. Even when King Birendra called for a National Referendum to decide the fate of Panchayat in 1979, the ban on political parties wasn't lifted.

The Popular Movement ten years later forced King Birendra to accept the existence of political parties. The new constitution

placed multiparty democracy in its preamble, and beyond the purview of any amendment. The upper crust was finally forced to accept that the political parties existed. But even then, there hasn't been much love lost between them.

Post 10-04, these old animosities have resurfaced. Cursing political parties has once again become fashionable, and few see the need to examine their own roles in the decomposition of democracy. All they need to do in order to be a part of the "with-it set" is blame politicians for all ills besetting society. There is a chilly sense of déjà vu in the Kathmandu air this winter for those who remember 1961.

In his Biratnagar address, King Gyanendra recognised that a monarchy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to be for democracy, and not against it. The very existence of unity in a heterogeneous society is dependent upon the practice of democracy, and no ruler can inhibit pluralism without undermining his own legitimacy in the process.

In heterogeneous societies like ours the role of political parties is even more crucial—they have to offset latent tensions by acting as miniature states themselves. The absence of

vibrant political parties leads to democratic decay and even the collapse of fragile states. For Marxist thinker Antonia Gramsci, Machiavelli's prince in the contemporary world is a political party with all its strength and vulnerabilities.

Why, then, does the Nepali elite still loath political parties? The revulsion is not based on principles, but on practical considerations. For one, political parties have their own loyalty and patronage network and have no place for those who don't want to get their hands dirty. Second, party leaders do not respect dress codes, know zilch about social niceties, and end up antagonising the social elite steeped in the tradition of court manners. Third, and perhaps the most important, all political parties are perennially engaged in managing their own internal contradictions, a preoccupation that puts off disciplinarian elites.

And then, it is in the nature of half-made societies that the elite periodically years for a knight in shining armour. This is a common dream of the oppressor and oppressed alike in all collectives with a wounded psyche. When political parties fail to raise hopes, even sensible people start looking for a saviour.

Neo-populist strongmen who have no patience for democratic institutions bank on this when they try to sideline political parties. In the public realm, civil society is effective enough in "protest-making" to check misuse of the law by those in power. But when it comes to "claim-making"—demanding that laws be made based on certain universal values—there is yet no alternative to political parties. An independent politician is therefore an oxymoron, for there can be no politics without adherence to certain shared values.

Party building is therefore the equivalent of nation-building. It is a complex task that requires unwavering commitment, patience, persistence, courage, compassion and a willingness to make compromises without sacrificing any of the fundamental values of the collective. Organised society can't escape from the compulsion of putting up with politicians. So, go join a party today. Better still, start your own. ♦



## LETTERS

### PRIVATE WATER

Kalyan Pande's letter (#126) on privatisation is a welcome contribution to an important topic that has not yet been fully discussed in public—the proposed use of a foreign private sector company to manage Nepal Water Supply Corporation's (NWSC) operations in urban Kathmandu valley. This is one component of a set of major reforms for Kathmandu that will in total cost \$470 million during the next decade.

One important distinction between the privatisation of state owned enterprises and the proposal for NWSC, is that the Private Operator (PO) will only manage the staff and assets of NWSC, and the people of Nepal—through government—will continue to own the assets. The use of a PO has been made a condition by those lenders and donors supporting the Melamchi tunnel in the hope that this will ensure these new water supplies are well managed. The impetus for using the private sector appears to have started

after NWSC's failure to utilise previous loans for system improvements during the 1990's.

Many of us working on water services believe that the root cause of Kathmandu's water woes is a lack of institutional autonomy to operate the system in an efficient, equitable and environmentally sound manner. As a result water tariffs are far too low to encourage responsible use, perverse subsidies help to reduce the cost for the affluent, a substantial number of families are unconnected to the distribution network, the network leaks and one third of all water is wasted, and NWSC has too many, underpaid staff.

There should be no mystery to running a good urban water supply system and there are a number of straightforward solutions to Kathmandu's many problems, some of which would include: cost recovery tariffs, universal metering, network repair and enhancement, paying market salaries for staff, retrenching surplus staff and offering service contracts to some, recruitment on merit, more investment in

equipment maintenance and repairs, computerised billing, service monitoring, a customer complaints system, an independent regulator, reducing connection charges; and contracting out selected activities to the local private sector.

But above all it is the removal of political interference that is required, allowing the staff of NWSC (and one or two external managers if necessary) to put into practice what they know and holding NWSC management, staff and board accountable for meeting targets of more water, to more people (especially the unconnected poor), of a higher quality, at a reasonable price, at convenient times of the day, throughout all seasons. When the PO takes over, it will be ensured of autonomy and protected from political interference by a contract and then it will begin to undertake the activities listed above. Why does Nepal need to take out loans to pay its costs, when, with political will and institutional commitment, a made-in-Nepal solution could be possible? There are also many other related

issues worthy of debate. Experience with the use of the private sector to manage urban water supply in South Asia is minimal. Government has been trying to recruit a PO for over 6 years without success. The World Bank, the lender with most international experience in the use of the private sector, has now dropped out of this project. Kathmandu's water supply is a truly important issue, one that affects every family in the five municipalities every day. WE need public scrutiny and discussion of these proposals that are simply too important to be left only to government, development banks, donors and experts.

Alan Etherington,  
WaterAid, Nepal

### UNIVERSAL VALUES

The assertions by Subarna Bhattachan ("Letters", #126) in response to CK Lal's "Musharrafsip" (#124) cannot go unchallenged. A belief in the universality of democracy, human rights and global capitalism does not imply the superiority of a racial, national, philosophical or

civilisational block. A cursory glance at world history reveals democracy, human rights, individualism, capitalism, materialism, etc, to be indeed universal. The late Professor of Journalism at Tribhuvan University, Lal Deusa Rai, wrote a book describing the prevalence of what is now called "human rights" in the Malla period of Nepal. To regard these values as typically Western is to fall victim to what Bhattachan himself calls the colonisation of thought process.

Western conservatives are in fact very fond of the fictitious notion of the "Western rule of law vs Oriental despotism". They go on to claim that values such as charity, mercy and compassion are typically Western derived from the teachings of Christianity. Another example of Bhattachan's thought process being already in the vice-like grip of Western colonisation is his disingenuous assertion that our society is rooted in "inner



# Seven years, 7,000 dead and counting



Sudip Pathak, President, Human Rights Organisation of Nepal, and Convenor of the Committee for Facilitation of Peace Dialogue.

**On the impact of the conflict:** An increasing number of people are trapped by the conflict. This kind of violence is not natural and unacceptable. We have been campaigning to restore peace, and have been getting the parties involved to give up violence. We don't even have the exact data on the number of people killed, rendered disabled or displaced due to the conflict. Over the last few months, thousands of people have been fleeing their homes in the mid-western hills in search of safety and employment. We don't know where they are living and under which conditions, or where they have gone. It is the responsibility of the government to provide them security and create an environment where its citizens can lead a life with dignity.

**On the prospects of peace:** We strongly advocate a peaceful solution to the present conflict which has exacted enormous socio-economic costs on the nation. The late Hrishikesh Shaha, had called for peaceful solution to the conflict when the Maoists launched their "people's war" in 1996. We appeal to both the government and rebels to find a negotiated settlement to the problem through dialogue. Both of them must be sensitive towards the situation in the country.

**On mediation efforts:** We have been in direct touch with both sides involved in the conflict. We have urged them to start a dialogue process, to begin with. In the second phase, we could identify the agenda for talks and in the third phase, formal peace talks or negotiations could start. But before that, both the sides will have to agree to some sort of code of conduct. We believe that the peace talks are possible through joint efforts of the government, Maoists, political parties and the civil society.

**On creating an environment for talks:** We have yet to create an environment for peace talks. We are still far away from bringing both the sides over to the table for negotiations. Of course, both the sides have expressed their commitment towards dialogue, which in itself is a positive sign. The Maoists

## The Maoist insurgency enters its eighth year next month. We asked three human rights activists about the impact of the conflict, ways to minimise the suffering of the innocents, and steps to find a peaceful resolution.

have said that they will not target infrastructure, and will not kill cadres of different political parties. The human rights community, including ourselves, want to monitor whether their commitment is being implemented. Similarly, the government needs to make public whereabouts of Maoist cadres under detention and start releasing them to create an environment of trust. The government should adopt a flexible approach toward the rebels and withdraw allegations against them. Only an environment for peaceful talks can bring both the sides together.



Krishna Pahadi, Chairman, Human Rights and Peace Society.

**On the fallout of the conflict:** Unarmed people and civilians are increasingly being caught in the crossfire between the security forces and the Maoist rebels. We recently visited two western districts, Dang and Baglung and found that innocent people had been killed by the security forces alleging them to be terrorists. Similarly, Maoist rebels ambushed passenger buses in Sindhuli and Dolakha, which is a gross violation of human rights.

**Appeal to the parties in conflict:** Our appeal to both the parties in conflict is: Don't lose patience and try to find a peaceful solution to the problem. We urge you to stand in favour of humanity and abandon this spiral of violence and hatred.

**On broader democratic agenda:** People's fundamental human rights can't be protected in the absence of democracy. We have been launching peace campaigns in different parts of the country calling for the protection of people's democratic rights. We have also organised sit-ins and "upava" (fasting) to press for this cause. We denounce the government's intervention even in the peaceful demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere.



Kundan Aryal, journalist affiliated to the human rights group, Informal Sector Service Center.

**On the impact of conflict:** People feel scared and have to a great extent lost the tradition of generosity towards strangers. The greatest victim of this conflict has been the freedom of

expression. People don't speak their mind fearing reprisals. People have been forced to live under curfew for more than 14 months in districts like Dang. And, the irony is that they don't feel secure even under the curfew. What is the justification of imposing such a prolonged curfew at a particular place? Aren't there alternatives to maintain peace and order?

**On the Geneva Convention:** The Geneva Convention stipulates that civilians should not be targeted during the conflict and that humanitarian assistance should be made available to the injured and sick. But there have been numerous instances of violation of the provisions of this convention by both the parties in Nepal over the last seven years. We have the widespread culture of impunity which needs to be changed. Moreover, the human rights community must warn the parties in conflict that they will one day have to face the International Criminal Court for their gross human rights violations and abuses.



### CORRECTION

The pictures in #127 accompanying "All for the people" and in "From the Nepali Press" were by Dambar Krishna Shrestha.



# A day in the life of Patan's street children



ALL PICS: KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

## KASHISH DAS SHRESTHA

They are there, but most of us don't care to notice them. Ragtag bands of street children sleeping outside bakeries, rummaging through garbage, loud and sometimes raucous children begging from tourists, or inhaling glue out of old milk packets.

The problem seems so overwhelming that most of us look the other way, troubled by our own conscience. "But," we try to justify to ourselves, "what

can we possibly do. Where do we even start to make a difference?"

Others have started making an effort either by buying the children clothes or food or by counseling them on work and earning. Street children are a popular cause with many charity groups in Kathmandu, but the relief hardly compares to the enormity of the problem. And what little is being done is exacerbated by the new influx of families, or school-age children fleeing the conflict

areas, or forced recruitment by Maoists.

So we went to find out how they live, what they eat, how they pass their time, how they landed up in the streets. They are nearly all boys. The recent Maoist-related influx has swelled the numbers of street children ("khatays") who were already here. All family members must work to survive, but jobs are hard to find and the younger ones end up in the streets to fend for themselves.

The families can't afford

school fees, even though back in the village most of the children went to school. Some have either left their families or their families have deserted them. Their parents simply can't afford to feed them any longer. Caught in a dead end with no education and no work, the children end up where we see them: blackened with soot and warming themselves at a trash heap.

A few maintain ties with their families, but they seldom return to the fold. Many have got used to the freedom of the



**Families fleeing the conflict have flocked to Kathmandu, swelling the ranks of street children.**

streets and can't adjust to the structure and discipline of childrens' homes. Many complain of ruthless bullying from older children in the rehab camps, and run away again.

Kuntesy runs around with a group of boys in Pulchowk. He had once stayed at the Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) shelter. "The kids didn't want us there and gave us trouble so I decided to leave," he said. They would rather sacrifice regular meals and a roof over their heads than relinquish whatever control they

have over their lives.

Today, Kuntesy and his friends are a close-knit group of children between 8-16 years. Their activities concern survival—survival from hour to hour, day to day. "I'll work and live. That's it," says Kuntesy's friend who looks 10, but claims to be 16.

The boys work hard to make a little money. Begging works sometimes, but mostly they have learnt to forage through piles of garbage, clean up and eat anything edible, and sell anything usable. The



fog is still thick, and the street lights are still on when they set off early in the morning from their cardboard shelters in Pulchowk. The best pickings are in Patan, Satdobato and Jawalakhel and they fan across the town trying to be the early birds. When their sacks are full, they return to base.

Plastic waste is separated into simple plastic sheeting and hard plastic. The two are often mixed during recycling, but the junkyards insist on buying it separately. Having finished their morning scavenging, the boys sit

together to separate their collection. The going rate is Rs 5 per kg of plastic waste. Metal fetches a higher price. Pieces of metal are hard to find, and the boys consider themselves lucky if they chance upon copper cable. They melt the plastic insulation off the wires and then hammer the wires into heavy little balls. "It increases the weight," Kuntesy says as he shows me his hoard.

What they eat and when depends on the generosity and the whims of passersby. They often have to make do with

whatever they find in the garbage, but there are times when they get a handout from a nearby restaurant, or leftovers from a party. This morning, Kuntesy has found a sausage, and we overhear him telling his friend: "Eat this. It's a buffalo's penis, and it's really tasty." Beaten rice or *chiura* with sugar is a real treat. One of them found a bag of sugar and everyone had "really, really sweet tea" that day.

Kuntesy's group would probably survive at this rate until they grow older. But they



*From left to right: Kuntesy (centre, in cap) sorting plastic from metal for his sack-load of material to sell to the junkyard. Kuntesy's friend with his pet dog. Balley is glued to glue. Kuntesy's dog shares his precious bed space.*

## DOMESTIC BRIEFS

### Death toll update

More than 7,000 people have been killed since the Maoist insurgency began in Nepal in 1996. A report by the human rights group, INSEC this week says 5,431 people have been killed by the state while 1,952 people have been killed by the Maoists. These include police, army, security personnel, farmers, teachers, civilians, political workers, civil servants, businessmen, social workers, lawyers, health workers and journalists. Among those listed killed between 13 February 1996 and 13 January 2003, 118 were children. The report, compiled from government and human rights organisations' statistics says 2,514 people have been displaced during the insurgency—the majority from Lalitpur district. However, displaced populations have not been registered in Rolpa and Rukum, two of the worst-hit districts by the Maoist movement. Human rights organisations say the actual number is much higher.

### Food shortage not acute: ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross has concluded after a survey of districts in western Nepal worst affected by conflict that there was "for the time being no acute food shortage" in the areas. ICRC staff visited areas under the sway of the Maoists as well as those under government control.

This conclusion contradicts media reports (including this paper, see "Famine by February", #120) that there was a looming food crisis in the districts of Bajura, Achham and Mugu. ICRC said there had been "alarming newspaper articles" in the Nepali media and there was little first-hand information from the area to confirm this.

"Agriculture was being pursued fairly normally and families' overall economic security remained comparable to that of normal times," ICRC said in a report released earlier this week. But it added that restrictions imposed by both parties, a chronically poor transport system, and insecurity arising from the fighting were all inhibiting commerce and transport.

It said that these factors could still precipitate an "acute crisis" in the area by preventing migrants from returning home with planting and harvesting. ICRC said it would refrain from large-scale food distribution in the areas of conflict so as not to undermine "existing coping mechanisms".

### On trial

A case has been filed against top Maoist leaders, including Dr Baburam Bhattarai and Chairman Prachanda for crimes against the state. Other defendants named in the case are Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Barmam Buda of Rolpa, Pampha Bhusal of Arghakhanchi, Kali Bahadur Malla, Bharat Bom, Khadga Nepali, Bishwanath Yogi, Durga Rawal of Jajarkot. They have been accused of attacking and destroying the Khatwada police post in Kalikot on 25 November and killing 11 policemen, destroying bridges and government buildings and disrupting public life. The Kalikot district prosecutor's office filed the case last month and has demanded that the rebels be imprisoned in accordance with the State Offence Act 1990, Article3 (3). This is the first case to be filed since a special court against corruption and anti-state crimes was established on 16 August last year.

### Climbing up

Despite a steady drop in tourist arrivals to Nepal, there's good news on the mountaineering front. Tourism ministry officials say 134 climbing expeditions, including 23 American, 13 French and 12 Japanese expeditions received permits to climb in the Nepal Himalaya in 2002 resulting in revenue amounting to Rs 120 million. That's the highest number of expeditions the country has seen since 1998 when 141 expeditions were permitted to climb in Nepal. Officials say the increase in expeditions is a result of recent amendments to climbing regulations, but others attribute it to the Everest 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Most of the climbing is concentrated in the Solukhumbu, Annapurna, Langtang and Kanchanjunga regions.

### Poisonous pesticides

A study conducted in KathmanduValley has revealed an alarming rate of toxic substances - many of them banned - in vegetables, fruits and crops grown in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Lalitpur. The study reported that 78 percent of vegetables and crops tested by scientists at Tribhuvan University's Zoology department, were contaminated with critical levels of hazardous toxins. The levels were higher than the acceptable daily intake level set by the Central Food Research Laboratory, a regulatory agency of the government. The study says farmers were often ignorant about the safe waiting period between spraying and harvesting the crops, and many were prone to pesticide induced illnesses owing to weak protection.

## HERE AND THERE

# Take it easy on the "T" word

It is surely long past time to end the silly debate—here and around the world—about the "T" word. Should we journalists use the words "terrorist or terrorism" when we report on insurgency, militant activity, violent attacks in civilian areas, the American campaign against Al Qaeda, or should we simply tell our readers, listeners and viewers what has happened and leave them to make the decision about terror?

My own policy, garnered from my employers of many years, the BBC World Service, hasn't changed. It is the latter—I say what has happened and leave the colourful and subjective judgements to others. To my mind, good journalism demands no less.

We in the world arm of the BBC were considered extremely suspect in the United Kingdom in the 1980s whenever we covered the quagmire known as Northern Ireland. The violent campaign to end British rule by the Irish Republican Army and others, was a clear-cut case of terrorism to many of my colleagues in other media, including the BBC's home news services. A bombing that killed civilians was "an outrage", an IRA appeal for peace talks or a denial of responsibility was "a bloodstained lie". The IRA were "terrorists"—no questions asked.

We begged to differ, not with the intense feelings of the people affected by violence in Northern Ireland, or the understandable loathing that victims and potential victims had for those who used bombs and bullets against democracy and civilians. It was the use of the words themselves, and the occasionally self-indulgent tones of newscasters and writers who let a bit of that hatred or anger creep into coverage that was supposed to be enlightening, comprehensive, neutral. I, for one, could think of nothing worse to contemplate than a bomb in a crowded area that killed civilians.

To call it an outrage was to miss the point. It was ignoring the tragedy of individual victims and their families. It covered up the



reality that only negotiation and compromise could end such "outrages" once and for all.

In tragic, beleaguered Israel, an angry nation is lashing out at the western media for showing—it's widely believed—too much sympathy for Palestinians who tie explosives to their waists and detonate them in markets and buses, killing dozens and calling down the wrath of the security forces. So much pressure is put on reporters from other lands that one American TV network has taken to using the term "homicide bombers" instead of the more widely favoured "suicide bombers".

Yes, Israel is a victim of horrific violence, and suicide bombing is awful, unspeakable really, but by attacking terminology of media coverage, aren't we missing the point? Surely the priority is to end the practice once and for all, and in the end, that can only be through

## Today's terrorists may be tomorrow's political leaders

dialogue, compromise and efficient defence. Even President Bush's "war against terror" is ill served by sloppy terminology and rampant demonisation of the enemy. Again, an enemy that can be understood can be pre-empted and eventually beaten, especially in a case like this where compromise is out of the question.

And so we come to Nepal, where the Maoists—we read in 2001—were "officially declared terrorists" by the late, unlamented government of Sher Bahadur Deuba. In those dark days of the state of emergency, a docile media followed suit. News stories spoke of "terrorists" being killed, with no attempt being made to probe into circumstances or even the identity of the so called "terrorist". Now, the media is much bolder and rarely uses the "T" word. In fact, reporters frequently ask ministers if the Maoists—who are being asked to restart peace talks—are indeed terrorists. Some say yes, some say no, in the way of this government.

Visiting dignitaries and diplomats also mix their terms, especially those from countries that provide military aid and sell arms to Nepal. Hard to justify a big arms deal or an aid package if the enemy isn't as evil as possible.

Using the "T" word eclipses the obvious, that peace talks and compromise are the only way out of the current, tragic reality of Nepal. Today's terrorist is tomorrow's political leader, as the scions of the Nepali congress, the UML and others no only too well. Let's take it easy on the "T"-word. ♦

by DANIEL LAK



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Berlusconi's failed right



ROME — Italy now looks as unsettled and decrepit as Britain did when Margaret Thatcher assumed power 24 years ago. Fiat wallows in crisis, university rectors resign en mass, judges attend the opening session of the judicial year carrying copies of the constitution as a warning to the government. When he returned to power, Silvio Berlusconi promised bold Thatcherite reforms to set things right. His reforms, however, have been few and insipid, aimed mostly at benefiting himself, says Italian academic and former MP, Ferdinando Targetti.

Italy is in economic decline. Its share of exports in world markets is contracting. On the list of "most competitive countries" prepared by the World Economic Forum, Italy has fallen in one year from 26th place to 39th. Unemployment is higher than the EU average (9% against 7.6%). Inflation is nearly twice that of France and Germany, though all three countries use the euro. The ratio of debt to GDP (110%) is almost twice the European average and is growing. Fiat's crisis may see the country lose its last great internationally competitive industrial enterprise.

In response, Italy's President has asked the entrepreneurial classes to help shore up the country's competitiveness. Unions should return to the policy they adopted during the successful struggle against inflation in the 1990s. The state must improve public services, strengthen the educational system, and devote greater resources to research and development. The government must reform social welfare and pensions.

The entire political spectrum, indeed, must recognize the country's predicament and find common ground for legislation. But this will be impossible so long as Prime Minister Berlusconi dominates Italian politics. Berlusconi is a new phenomenon on the European right. In recent decades, mainstream right-leaning parties in most Western countries evolved from a defence of tradition (sometimes with a tinge of nationalism) to a more liberal worldview favoring a limited role for the state and greater individual responsibility. Coming from the pinnacle of Italian business, Berlusconi might have been expected to conform to this pattern. In fact, however, Berlusconi represents political extremism and programmatic ambiguity.

(Project Syndicate)

Rogue creditors threaten debt plan

LONDON — The World Bank and IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative for debt relief is looking increasingly threadbare because of rogue creditors, according to economist Romilly Greenhill.

Because it is not addressing the central issue of unpayable debts and is not seen to be independent from both debtors and creditors, the process is perceived as unjust and ineffective. Conditionalities attached to HIPC relief through IMF programmes have been lambasted by NGOs as veiled economic mechanisms for transferring resources from debtor to creditor countries.

Now, however, the initiative is under threat from another quarter — non-participating creditors and governments like Iraq and Taiwan, which are refusing to write off their share of HIPC debts. According to Ann Pettifor, Director of Jubilee Research, the long-term solution would be to implement the Jubilee Framework for international insolvency, by which HIPC debt would be treated like middle-income country debt. A public, transparent insolvency framework would give legitimacy to the sovereign debtor's insolvency while protecting the fundamental human rights of the debtor nation, Pettifor says. (IPS)

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COMMENT

by ALAN F KAY

Hawks fly higher



Why should anyone listen to the retreaded hawks who came to prominence under Reagan and flourished under the Bush I and Bush II?

When the devastating possibilities of atomic bombs had just become apparent to the world, heroic, victorious WWII generals George Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and even the right wing's favourite, George Patton, independently made public statements along these lines: If we don't get rid of nuclear weapons they will get rid of us.

The following year a directive from President Harry Truman still operative—barred active-duty military personnel from making public their individual opinions on nuclear weapons. A few military heroes, after retirement, publicly expressed such beliefs. Most said nothing at all publicly.

Why were the heroes' admonitions to get rid of nuclear weapons ignored? There were many developments which show how that happened over the course of the nuclear era. But behind the scenes, hawk strategies have served to keep political

decision-makers pushing even more money into the "military-industrial-labour-university complex" for over 50 years with only brief, minor reversals.

Hawks make one powerful argument that, reluctantly or not, most people accept: "It makes sense to begin to develop some anti-missile capability. Even initially when it is very expensive and has only a small chance of working, if it is needed and it does work, it will save millions of lives. What is a human life worth?"

You cannot put a number on it. We cannot afford NOT to proceed with missile defence."

This argument seems to trump all possible responses, but leaves open one crucial possibility: the United States could both save the colossal amount of money such a system would cost and cut the probability to near zero that anybody will ever launch a nuclear missile attack by countering the outside world's reaction to our behaviour by non-violent means.

By using diplomacy and the forms of conflict resolution that in recent years have successfully resolved both new and ancient

ethnic, economic, and factional violence and war all over the world, the US can save time, money, and lives. What is needed is a "Marshall plan without the war", "building friends instead of enemies."

Abe Lincoln was accosted by an angry northern senator at the end of the Civil War, who told him, "I believe in destroying enemies." Lincoln replied, "I agree with you, sir. And the best way to destroy an enemy is to make him into a friend."

For years the US people have preferred dismantling and rendering impotent and obsolete all nuclear weapons of all nations as soon as possible to our current strategy of allowing a few "trustworthy" nations including the US to maintain and possibly upgrade a reasonable stockpile of nuclear weapons. (In December 1987, responses were (a) 56 percent and (b) 41 percent.)

The hawks now make the case that the danger of "non-deterrable" dictators acquiring nuclear weapons may leave the United States with no recourse but a pre-emptive military strike to remove the weapons. Ken Adelman, as head of Reagan's Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, thought unnecessary (and fought against) bilateral verifiable nuclear arms reductions, particularly the nuclear freeze referendum which was supported by over 80 percent of the American people beginning in the early '80s.

Twenty years later Adelman says that the only recourse the US has in the case of Iraq may be an imminent pre-emptive strike, and the longer it is delayed the more difficult and necessary pre-emption will be.

Yet for twenty years the US pursued the hawks' approach during which Adelman (and the

rest of the hawks) never sought what he now says would have been the best course. Doves have known for decades that the failure to reduce worldwide nuclear arsenals convinces everyone that pre-emption may ultimately become our only recourse. Adelman should have figured that out long ago. Why should anyone listen to him or any of the retreaded hawks who came to prominence under Reagan and flourished under the Bush I and II?

With an Iraq invasion probable we may soon know the outcome of our first major pre-emptive strike. The belief that certain dictators can never be made into friends is a racist assumption without scientific basis. Populist leaders like Fidel Castro, Lula da Silva, and Hugo Chavez, one a dictator the other two popularly elected, wish for good relations with the US, but so far find only hostility and death threats. A dictator of the greatest "evil empire", Mikhail Gorbachev, was totally redeemed in US eyes after a few years in office. Redemption is preferable to pre-emption.

Upstaged by nuclear era upstarts, an 80-plus percent consensus of the American people is frustrated. The WWII heroes will roll over in their graves as billions more are spent on a course the heroes predicted, and the people rightly fear, will ultimately end in our destruction, while the possibility of stopping our own demise grows increasingly remote. ♦ (IPS)

(Alan F. Kay is a mathematician, social scientist, and pioneer of public-interest polling. He is the author of "Locating Consensus for Democracy" and numerous public policy articles)

Ganesh in southeast Asia

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY in BANGKOK

Throughout the day, devotees offer flowers and incense to a large gilt Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god. The statue squats on its high pedestal under a canopy outside Bangkok's World Trade Center. If passers-by do not have a gift for the god, they offer a simple sawadee.

The respect accorded to the Ganesh is a reminder that Southeast Asia has had a thousand years of interaction with India. Yet modern Southeast Asians seldom mention the Hindu kingdoms that once flourished in Java, Sumatra, Laos, Cambodia and Malaya.

Princess Sirindhorn of Thailand, erudite in Sanskrit and Pali, once warned me not to speak of Indian influence, even though her father's formal title, King Rama IX, recalls the legendary Hindu god-king, hero of the epic Ramayana, which Thais call Ramaken. "They probably think even the Buddha was born in Thailand," the princess said with a smile.

Such is the degree to which things Indian have been absorbed into Southeast Asian culture. A Thai dignitary once reportedly asked a high-ranking Indian visitor, whom he accompanied to a dance drama of the Ramaken, whether he didn't have something like it in his country too.

With rabid Hindu chauvinists in India claiming Ganesh as the original Santa Claus, I can understand local sensitivities. Hindu art languished in Southeast Asia with the rise of Theravada Buddhism. Islam wiped out many Hindu traces, and 19th century Western history, which stressed the benefits of European colonialism, further helped to play down India's influence. Cold War politics compounded the estrangement.

But while more exalted deities were forgotten, Ganesh remained a vibrant reminder of the synergy of Indian and Southeast Asian cultures. His elephant head stands for sagacity, wisdom and prudence. His mount, a rat, gnaws through every obstacle.

Indians believe that Ganesh has only one task because the other was worn down writing the Ramayana at a sage's dictation. Traders, travelers, artists and statesmen but above all business people claim his patronage. The first Southeast Asian Ganesh I saw was a sandstone carving from Cambodia in the Los Angeles County Museum. The first I acquired was Indonesian. The cast iron figure is not especially beautiful, but I was intrigued to find a roadside shop in the world's most populous Muslim country stacked with Hindu icons.



Hinduism's lofty philosophical message may have been lost in Thailand, but its symbol of material success is flourishing.

My guide explained that Indonesians keep Ganesh in their gardens and treat him as a decoration and not a deity. I wondered therefore who had left flowers at the feet of the Ganesh in the 1,100-year-old Prambanam complex near Jogjakarta. And why the 20,000 rupiah note should flaunt his visage. Some Western scholars even called him the "Indonesian god of wisdom."

I came across another form of internalisation in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, where a little brass Ganesh in a wide-brimmed coolie hat rowed a boat, just like Bangkok's food sellers before the city's muddy canals were filled in for roads. A depiction of Ganesh is also the Thai Fine Arts Department's logo.

Burma knows him as Maha-Piennen and Cambodia as Prah Kenes. Ganesh lives in an ancient iron ring from Laos, a terra-cotta in Kedah and a Japanese scroll. His images have been found in China and Turkmenistan. Ganesh is the god with the common touch. That is one reason for his abiding popularity as a source of good fortune. Perhaps a more compelling one today is his association with commerce, underlined by the World Trade Center backdrop as well as by Bangkok's other large Ganesh, in the lobby of the Rama Hotel.

Hinduism's lofty philosophical message may have been lost—but its symbol of material success is flourishing. ♦

(Sunanda K Datta-Ray is he former editor of The Statesman in India, and is currently senior fellow at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.)

Tehelka pays for raising hell

Two years after this muckraking investigative website went undercover to expose corruption in India's defence establishment, it has been hounded out of business and is nearly defunct.



Tarun Tejpal, Billy Singh, CEO NuBazaar.com and reporter Aniruddha Bahal

LUKE HARDING in NEW DELHI

Tarun Tejpal is sitting amid the ruins of his office.

There is not much left - a few dusty chairs, three computers and a forlorn air-conditioning unit. "We have sold virtually everything. I've even flogged the airconditioner," he says dolefully.

Twenty months ago Tejpal, editor in chief of tehelka.com, an investigative website, was the most feted journalist in India. He had just

broken one of the biggest stories in the country's history—an expose of corruption at the highest levels of government.

His reporters, posing as arms salesmen, had bribed their way into the home of the defence minister, George Fernandes, and handed over £3,000 to one of the minister's colleagues. The journalists found many other people prepared to take money - senior army officers, bureaucrats, even the

president of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party, who was filmed shovelling the cash into his desk.

The scandal was deeply embarrassing for the BJP prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Vajpayee sacked Fernandes and ordered a commission of inquiry. The scandal promoted a mood of national catharsis, and congratulations poured in from ordinary Indians tired of official corruption. Tehelka, which had only

been launched in June 2000, was receiving 30 million hits a week. But the glory did not last. "I had expected a battle. But we had not anticipated its scale," Tejpal said. "The propaganda war started the next day."

Nearly two years later, he has been forced to lay off all but four of his 120 staff. He has got deeply into debt, sold the office furniture and

scrounged money from friends. "They drop by for dinner and leave a cheque behind."

The website, which once boasted sites on news, literature, sport and erotica, is "virtually defunct". George Fernandes, meanwhile, is again the defence minister.

The saga is a depressing example of how the Kafkaesque weight of government can be used to crush those who challenge its methods. In the aftermath of the scandal, the Hindu nationalist-led government "unleashed" the inland revenue, the enforcement directorate and the intelligence bureau, India's answer to MI5, on Tehelka's office in suburban south Delhi.

They did not find anything. Frustrated, the officials started tearing apart the website's

investors. Tehelka's financial backer, Shanker Sharma, was thrown in jail without charge. Detectives also held Aniruddha Bahal, the reporter who carried out the expose, and a colleague, Kumar Badal. Badal is still in prison.

"It got to the stage that I used to count the number of booze bottles in my house to make sure there wasn't one more than the legal quota," Tejpal recalls.

The government commission set up to investigate Operation West-End, Tehelka's sting, meanwhile, started behaving very strangely. "The commission didn't cross-examine a single person found guilty of corruption. It was astonishing," said Tejpal. Instead, it spent its days rubbishing Tehelka's journalistic methods.

The official campaign of vilification against the website has attracted protests from a few of India's prominent liberal commentators, such as the veteran diplomat Kuldip Nayar and the respected columnist Tavleen Singh. Tehelka's literary supporters, who include Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and VS Naipaul, have also expressed their outrage. But in general, India's civil society has reacted with awkwardness and embarrassment to the website's plight.

"I read all of Franz Kafka when I was 19 and 20, but I only understand him now," Tejpal wrote in a recent essay in the magazine Seminar. "He accurately intuited that all power is essentially implacable and malign."

The treatment of the website's investors has scared away anybody else from pumping money into Tehelka. The company owes £620,000. Vajpayee's rightwing government has bounced back from the scandal and is expected to win the next general election in 2004. Last month, it won a landslide victory in elections in

the riot-hit western state of Gujarat after campaigning on a virtually fascist anti-Muslim platform.

Tehelka's expose was not about "individuals", but about "systemic corruption", Tejpal insists. He admits that his sting operation would have gone down badly with any government, but says that the BJP's response was venomous.

"The degree of pettiness has been extraordinary. They have a crude understanding of power and a lot of that stems from the fact they are in power for the first time. Our struggle is emblematic of a wider issue: can media organisations be killed off when they criticise governments?"

The gloomy answer appears to be yes. Last night Balbir Punj, a leading BJP member of parliament, claimed the government had nothing to do with the website's collapse. "Just because you do a story exposing the government doesn't mean the gods make you immortal," he said. "Many other internet portals have closed down. The boom is over." ♦ (The Guardian)

Sri Lankan talks on track

NAKHON PATHOM, Thailand – Negotiators of the just-concluded Sri Lankan peace talks have deferred trying to seek an immediate remedy for explosive issues, particularly those that could destroy the still fledgling peace process between Colombo and the Tamil Tiger rebels.

But this does not mean shying away from politically sensitive matters. Rather, the two sides appear to be willing to soldier on by seeking solutions that will, in the end, satisfy the warring parties.

This was how the negotiators overcame the first major obstacle at the just concluded talks — a sharp difference of views between a Sri Lankan military commander and the Tamil Tigers over the resettlement of Tamil civilians in lands under military occupation in Sri Lanka's north. It arose after the military commander suggested that the Tigers should disarm and decommission its heavy weapons in the north before Tamil civilians are permitted back to their homes.

During this fourth round of talks, which ran here from 6-10 January, the Tigers pulled out of a special committee set up in the war-ravaged island's north to discuss the sensitive issues such as de-escalation and normalisation.

But this act of protest did not result in the collapse of the talks. On the contrary, the Tigers agreed to Colombo's proposal to speed up resettlement in areas beyond the disputed territory and, further, to seek the views of an Indian military expert on striking a balance between humanitarian and security needs. (IPS)

More nuke tit-fot-tat

ISLAMABAD - India's disclosure of its nuclear doctrine this month was supposed to quell fears by clarifying the conditions under which it would use nuclear weapons, but it has only increased uncertainty in the subcontinent, Pakistani analysts say.

The atmosphere is not helped by the latest tit-for-tat moves by India and Pakistan on the missile front. Four days after India explained its nuclear doctrine, Pakistan handed over the Ghauri, a medium-range missile capable of carrying nuclear warheads, to its army. A day afterwards, New Delhi announced that it had successfully test-fired a short-range version of its Agni-1 intermediate ballistic missile.

Predictably, Pakistan's foreign office dubbed the Indian disclosure of its nuclear policy and formation of its nuclear command authority (NCA) as further evidence that nuclear weapons and their use is very much part of India's strategic policy.

India had previously publicised only a draft doctrine in 2000, and Pakistan itself announced its NCA in February of that year. (IPS)



# “The king doesn’t see democracy as a free-for-all”

Trained as a power engineer in the former Soviet Union, Dipak Gyawali studied resource economics from Berkeley. He is the Minister for Water Resources. Excerpts from an interview in Gorkhapatra.

Gorkhapatra, 12 January

जीरखापत्र

**You have returned to the ministry as minister. How does that feel?** When I was at the Water Resources Ministry 16 years ago, the staff used to be professionally motivated. This time, I found them demoralised due to excessive politicisation. I am trying to change that. In 2011, we will be completing 100 years of electric power generation in Nepal. My goal is to make cheap and reliable power available. By cheap, I don't mean reducing tariff. A number of agreements are in place which make this option difficult. We will have to make arrangements for cheaper electricity and making it available to industries. We can also generate cheap electricity by developing efficient infrastructure. Privatisation doesn't necessarily bring efficiency, competition does. A commodity like electricity should be partially privatised to promote competition.

**Can the Maoist problem be resolved through dialogue?**

First of all, the Maoist leadership should prove that its cadre are under its control. If a political negotiation is to take place with the Maoist leadership, the armed cadre must be listening to them. You can hold political dialogue only with political side. To deal with those who are carrying arms, you must use arms to bring them to dialogue.

**How do you analyse Maoists' strategy of destruction?**

The Maoists have adopted the Hegelian philosophy. They are destroying power plants and productivity itself. This will not take us towards socialism by enhancing productivity. There are a number of contradictions within the Maoist fold, they must correct these.

**How do you see the political future of the Maoists?**

I think the book, *Future of Maoism* by noted Marxist thinker, Samir Amin, is still relevant in case of Nepal. Amin called the USSR "bureaucratic socialism", and referred to the Maoist model in China as a good socialist path. But it was only after Deng Xiao Ping turned China on a strong, capitalist productive road that China has now turned into an economic superpower. Nepali leftists and Maoists, too, need to understand this. If they continue the tradition of worshipping neo-feudal elements as was seen in case of Pol Pot no achievement is possible.

**When will this government hold elections?**

His Majesty has asked us to focus on holding elections. We want early elections, but because of climate and other reasons elections can only be held during April-May or December-January. But local elections can be held at any time. My personal preference is to hold local elections first for the development of local leadership followed by general elections as early as possible.

**But aren't there political obstacles?**

There are two or three hurdles. The prime minister has said elections can be held within two hours of the political parties saying that they are ready to face polls. They are citing two reasons for not going to the polls. The insurgency may only be 40 percent of the problem, but 60 percent of their problem is that they have got nothing to tell the people.

**What is your impression of the king?**

I had an opportunity to know him when I was with the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). Chairing its board meetings he used to listen to all, but took decisions himself. He had a "no nonsense" attitude and took criticism seriously. I have felt that he doesn't see democracy as a free-for-all system. He wants things managed. During my last meeting, His Majesty said the invoking of Article 127 of the constitution was a compulsion and that he had not acted unconstitutionally.



## 30 years,12 years

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika* (31 December-15 January)

Nepal's economy grew by an average of 2.5 percent per year over the last 12 years. But during the three decades (1960-90) when there was no violence in the country and the king ruled directly, the economy grew at only 0.5 percent. During 1960-90, the child mortality rate declined by only 2.6 percent, whereas in the following next 12 years Nepal's child mortality rate declined by 4.2 percent. Similarly, the average life expectancy of Nepalis rose to 59 during 1990-2002 as against only 42 years in the three decades preceding it. Only 48 percent of the men and 14 percent of the women could read and write in Nepal till 1990, whereas over the last 12 years (1990-2002) the male literacy rate has reached 59 and that of women 24. The expansion in the Nepali economy, level of awareness among common citizens and unprecedented and positive changes seen in the social sector over the last 12 years should be compared with the entire history of Nepal, and not only the previous three decades.

## Respect privacy

Anju Chhetri in *Kantipur*, 9 January

कान्तिपुर

Amnesty International (AI) last month published its report (*Nepal: A Deepening Human Rights Crisis*) giving the identities of the rape victims in Nepalganj. Whether it was right in doing so is an issue of debate. Probably, AI needed to identify the rape victim women for international credibility. However, it was expected of Nepali media to protect the identities of these victims. A trend has been set by the Nepali

press to protect identities of rape victims by not publishing names and photos in the recent years. But the victims of alleged rape by two senior army officers in Chisapani barrack of Nepalganj were not accorded such respect. The English language *Nepali Times* newspaper even reproduced a picture (#125) of the victim earlier broadcast by Royal Nepal Army on its weekly Nepal Television program. Protecting identities of victims does not mean the press should leave out crimes against women, but to respect the privacy of a victim. If the woman voluntarily wants to reveal her identity, then it is her decision. But in the Chisapani incident, nobody bothered to ask if she wanted to be identified. The government and the army repeatedly inflicted mental torture on the women publicly by showing their pictures and revealing their identities. But the press and human rights organisations should have been more sensitive. Instead of forming different committees to probe on the incident and making the victims to relate their horrific experiences afresh, everyone should respect the credibility of the Amnesty International report to pressurise the government and the army to punish the perpetrators of the crime.

## Sikkim

Dhruba Adhikary in *Samacharpatra*, 16 January

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

The *Nepali Times* is regarded counted as a quality English language newspaper. It is cited as the paper regularly read by Kathmandu-based diplomats. Since it is edited by a professional and skilled journalist, one doesn't come across too many mistakes or weaknesses in this paper. But there are exceptions. One such exception may be the 3 January issue which has an article on Sikkim. Written by the editor



himself, this article carries a strapline that says: "Sikkim is one-tenth the size of Nepal, but it seems to be governed ten times better." Maybe. Kunda Dixit went to Sikkim, looked around and there is no reason to doubt what he has to say. But the message of the piece is incongruous. Sikkim is a state of India. Nepal is an independent nation. How can you compare the two? It may sound like Nepal also needs to move in the direction of becoming like Sikkim. Certainly, that was not the editor's message. Timely cautiousness doesn't do anyone harm.

## Change bank

*Nepal Samacharpatra*, 14 January

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

The Finance Ministry has issued directives that all UNDP-assisted programs open their accounts with Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) instead of Standard Chartered Bank as presently. A source at the ministry said that the decision was part of the government's initiative to bring about transparency in foreign aid. Similarly, the UNDP-funded projects in the districts will have to operate their accounts through local branches of the state-owned Nepal Bank Limited and Rastriya Baijnya Bank. Nepal received nearly \$15 million worth assistance in 27 UNDP-assisted projects in 2002. Nepal Standard Chartered Bank following the government's directives.

# Huddled masses

Birendra Rawal in *Himalaya Times*, 13 January

हिमालय टाइम्स

Kailali – Since the government abolished the bonded labour system nearly three years ago, the ex-kamaiya have not been able to enjoy their biggest festival–Maghi. For some, it is a time for merrymaking but for others it is a time for more debt and sorrow. While rich Tharu landlords are preparing to spend lavishly on their biggest festival, freed bonded labourers in far west Nepal are struggling to make ends meet. They are concerned that Maghi, the day when kamaiyas traditionally decide which owners they're going to work for the rest of the year, is here.

Despite the abolishment of the kamaiya tradition by the government, the tradition of bonded labour is still alive in this part of Nepal. With the approach of Maghi, many landowners are scouting the kamaiya camps in search of bonded labourers. "They're promising a lighter workload," says Ananta Chowdhary, a freed kamaiya of Durgauli VDC – 9 in Jagatpur.

Last week, Chaudhary sent his eldest daughter to work as a dishwasher in a hotel in Tikapur bazaar for a year. With no certainty of food, shelter and an education for his children, Chaudhary was compelled to take the step despite being a freed kamaiya. This year, it's been harder for the kamaiyas in the camps. If there is no help from support organisations, he'll have to put his other children to work.

Tarka Bahadur Sawad of Baliya VDC - 8 is on the lookout for a kamaiya to look after his young children at home. The older children go to school, his wife is busy with home affairs, and he has to look after the business. The family requires house help. As most of the freed kamaiyas don't have the basic necessities it's difficult to talk about their rights, says social worker Laxman Kunwar.

The careless and unplanned manner in which the government announced that bonded labourers were free has resulted in more abject and miserable conditions for the kamaiyas. Previously, the kamaiya were oppressed by their owners, now they are oppressed by the government. More than 300 freed kamaiyas have been given identity cards. Says Jokhram Tharu of Narayanpur VDC "Last year various NGOs and Ingos helped the kamaiyas celebrate Maghi by providing a goat, rice, lentils, salt and oil to each of the kamaiya camps. This year, there's no sign of them. They must be enjoying their warm houses and big cars at our cost."



## CULTURE

### FICTION

by GEETANJALI A. LAMA

# Kanchi's Tale

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

It's raining incessantly, a monotonous drone drearily knocking on wooden panes... I lean over the window of the wooden house that I call home... gazing at the myriad colours unfolding under a luminescent grey sky and the smiling gold rimmed eyes of Lord Buddha on a hilltop boring down into infinite stretches of stench, filth, poverty and brilliant sunsets.... Blowing away a lingering stray hair, listening to nature's rhythm alternating between a frenzied climactic din on tinned roofs and a stealthy hushed up muffle. This is a world where the rich and the poor lie closely juxtaposed, constantly surveying each other under a microscopic glance, one envying the full throated laughter seeping to the streets below from winding stairwells and the other...? It's the sanctified grounds of the Pashupati temple: undying expanses of glistening idols gaping blankly into eternity, compassionate and avenging deities freely mingling with a stream of humanity; fat, skinny, poor and wealthy, beggars and tramps. Shiny Mercedes and green Maruti taxis, tooting rickshaws, muddy river water and soap bubbles blending with fragrant incense and fuming pyres and glowering embers of scorched corpses; the remains of someone's aunt, father, son or mother.

When I start the story of Kanchi... I wish to begin from the start, not that her birth was anything near to being momentous, there were no celebrations and no sawing heads off goats and even chickens. She was born because she had to be born... sad but a bitter truth! Her mother kept mourning repeatedly deeply hurt by yet another daughter. "I can't put her back in my stomach, *didi* (sister), so she might as well come out..." I suppose she was an accident formed in a passionate coupling where biological urge prevailed over any emotion that came close to affection and in due course became a newborn wrapped in a bundle of tattered saris, abandoned to suckle her thumb in the corner of a dingy shack while her mother trudged along to the gates of Pashupati temple joining hands in supplication, bowing, rubbing red vermilion paste on her forehead, praying for a son and promising the lord a coconut and undying devotion in return.

Tolling temple bells from the banks of river Bagmati harken the valley of fierce deities into golden shadows, the clanging bells herald no blessed sacred showers but scream through a gathering dusk, spitting, screeching, vibrating over trees sullenly naked and seeping into a surrounding dreariness which by now you know is the world that the likes of Kanchi, my heroine inhabits. A little shack against the wall of my building with our windows curiously staring at each other its as if we view each other's lives through these gaping holes intent and absorbed with faces pressed against the panes. Stripped off all warmth she sits pale today squatting on the floor, a stainless steel plate glaring up at her, scantily furnished with whatever "ama" (mother) has been saving all day, a little rice and a lump of watery potato curry. She gazes at it wistfully. She has just come back from her neighbours' house across the street, thankfully for her they have a daughter of her age, her playmate and she has had her fill of yellow haired dolls and brilliant coloured plastic toys and not even the steel plate glinting at her can wrench away the thrill that has enveloped her guts.

"Chaali chapli setting in dewal  
Counting number sixty pho..."

(Charlie Chaplin sitting on the wall  
Counting numbers sixty-four...)

She hums the rhyme twisting words of a language largely incomprehensible, nibbling at the meal and licking off morsels running down her hands. After the meal she will go down to the river and come back lugging a copper water pot on the crook of her hips, moving a little from side to side with the lightness of a pendulum. Dodging greedy, street dogs milling around the butchers' shop. Smiling at the potbellied shop keeper busy cracking betel nuts while spitting out a flame of red spit on the floor. "Aye, Kanchi wants to marry my son", the mustachioed neighbourhood drunk, raucously teases her as she hurries home where nightly chores patiently await her little chapped fingers. "C'mon hurry you good for nothing girl", screams her mother swaying on the doorstep, a heavily pregnant mother of three who by day sells little amulets and flowers on leaf plates on the portals of the temple where the massive bull *Nandi* sits towering on a stocky potbelly, dolefully gazing down at worshippers tripping past.

I get up to familiar sounds in the morning with the loudest blare imaginable from my neighbours' made in China radio churning out latest Hindi film songs very close to my ears and the swoosh of onions on frying pans. It's nine o'clock and every one is hurrying past my door. First comes Santa *did* freshly powdered with pink lipstick in a bright green sari, proudly touting her children "Bye bye... going to school" the two heavily oiled students call out to neighbours. Maya auntie my landlady waddles down the rickety stairs, sighing and loudly blowing her nose at every step, with betel leaf stained teeth, the official commentator of anything "hanky parky," that is worth a gossip in the narrow nooks and crannies of the neighbourhood, presently on a self imposed exile from things that she deems mundane like, cooking and cleaning. Dedicating herself passionately to match making, *bhajans* and *puja* (hymns and prayer) and churning out "top of the line" comments on a wide variety of subjects ranging from teenaged prepubescent belly buttons, mini skirts and greedy politicians to ongoing scandals and controversies. Maya auntie drops into my room once in awhile on her way to the temple, hastily examines my room, sniffing nosily as if she were on the look out for condoms and scandals, plomps herself cross-legged in my armchair turning over the pages of a magazine and wrinkling her nose at the pictures of actresses in bared midriffs and after a hot cup of *chiya* (tea) offered out of mere compulsion and habit on my part and heartily welcomed with a gracious smile by her she continues her pilgrimage. Down below in the gates of the temple, Kanchi's mother has started cajoling and coaxing pilgrims hoisting her sari up above her knees and swearing on the entire pantheon of gods and goddesses that her flowers come from the cleanest plots in the valley.

I think Kanchi's mother exists in a microcosm, wrapped up in a vignette of dreams and personal cravings and a deadly desperation to feed her children, relishing bits and pieces of diverse emotions and outbursts of cruelty. Sometimes she brings radish pickles to me and asks me if I could teach Kanchi ABCs and sometimes she releases her rage that must be locked up all inside and once unlocked flows out lava like seething with fury. She is screaming today in the middle of frenzy that her kids do not understand. "Hurry before I tell your father and he thrashes you and move quickly you... lazy girl," she lashes out stinging her poor daughter into instant action. Kanchi runs into the hut and starts vigorously pulling the strings of the straw cradle wherein lies her sister cuddled up in the warmth of tattered rags, faintly smelling

"Aija chuneri chunu munu chunu mun aija,  
Aija chuneri aija ho baba hoho."

"Come pretty sleep come  
Come to my little baby."

An ancient lullaby that has echoed within walls of marble laden homes and fragrant white palaces lined with Jacaranda trees hummed by fragile bejeweled mothers in nocturnal nighties. Her hands are busy and intent pushing the cradle suspended from a tin ceiling... I hear the familiar Creak! Creak! The beams in the ceiling sing out in rhythmic protest as the grown up sister of six puts her sister to sleep.

Kanchi's mother has stopped making her routine dish washing calls on me and when I meet her occasionally on the temple stairs she smiles awkwardly, bursting and swelling with her pregnancy, she tells me it's the... "Lords work," raising her eyes towards the sky and confiding... "*Didi* what to tell you, I have nothing to do in this matter, my husband wants a son. Kanchi sits closely by looking up with eyes that are little dream pools of hope suspended... fluttering, waking...dying... spinning, her fingers hovering over the wilted flowers.

It is early morning and I wake up to an agitated noise and loud shouts from the street below and get up, leaning over the window to see a small crowd gathered behind the tea stall. Animated gesticulating and loud shouts from below. Sarita *did* comes screaming up the stairs spluttering, "Come quick... somebody has thrown a newborn baby in a sack, it's dead..." "*Hare! Shival* ... Bad times are here... Imagine! Doing it so close to the temple... may the witch get sores and die..." yells my landlady spitting arrows of white saliva on the ground below, hitting her palms against a feathered forehead and leaning over the railing and directing a "I told you so" look at the increasing volume of bystanders below and gaping tenants. I look down at a world suddenly turned away, mad and bewildering.

Monsoon has long gone from the valley foraging for victims in stranger places falling on unknown tin roofs and courtyards. It's a sunny Tuesday in the valley, my neighbours have roused themselves up, down below people squat bundled around teashops, transistors gaily blaring out film songs

and business is in full swing with the vegetable vendors and flower sellers. It has been many months since I last saw Kanchi and her mother. I was told in a conspiratorial tone by Maya auntie that Rame *dai* had taken them back to *Panchthar*, their village in the hills and Kanchi's mother was accused of strangling a live baby girl and would serve ten years in a prison in *Charkhal Adda*, Dilli Bazar in Kathmandu. She was found inside the temple premises clutching her dazed children close to her breasts in a state of delirium, smelling like a *sutkeri* (woman who has just delivered) raving and ranting at the gods and accusing Rame *dai* who always wanted a son swearing on the story idols, that she had not killed the story idols.... That she had not killed the baby... she was innocent.

As I write this, I wonder where Kanchi is. She is most probably running bare feet along a muddy path with hair streaming in the wind, down to the village school with a book tucked under her arm. Squatting for hours in a shop handing out betel nuts to customers and keeping coins under a mat or sweeping the floors of a big house and given a square meal in return. Well! Who knows she might still be in the streets of Kathmandu, salvaging plastic bags and bottles from under a pile of rubble by day and by night humming lullabies and gently patting her sisters to sleep while Rame *dai* looks on nonchalantly... letting life slide by... noisily sucking at a *Khukhuri* brand cigarette and flicking ashes on the ground. ♦

## ANIMAL KINGDOM

by JIGME GATON

# A pile of puppies



ROSE FISKE

## One page from the memoirs of an unaffiliated aid worker.

It was to be a great day in the life of an unaffiliated aid worker in Nepal, and today's mission was to help a dozen puppies noticed yesterday piled in the mound in the lot behind my office. A dozen puppies huddled together for warmth, while 3 or more mothers with udders watched from afar or wandered out in busy Pulchok in search of scraps, invariably being kicked or beaten away from the open-air tea shops or chicken stands. I was ready, and armed with the following: two cans of dog food purchased from a neighbourhood foo-foo grocery store at Rs100 each, a cheap metal spoon also purchased there for Rs35, and one pair of rubber gloves. I came prepared to help the down-trodden, sheathed in rubber, and with a silver spoon other than my own.

I find 12 streeturchins playing next to a pile of 12 one-month old puppies of various colors and conditions of health. All of which were very excited to see me—a white boy on a motorcycle, looking vaguely like the Marlboro Man. Their excitement increased as I started opening a can and produced a spoon. Disappointment quickly ripped through the crowd once they realised the food was not for them, but for the dogs. Still, one small boy was deeply honored when I handed him the task of feeding the puppies and the mothers who were starting to growl at my closeness to their pups.

The young lad clearly had to resist the urge to sample the can himself. I then donned my rubber gloves and began picking up the pups and placing them in my specially equipped side boxes, ready to be whisked away to the SPCA Animal Shelter of Nepal where a doctor was waiting, but I was suddenly and surprisingly stopped by a few elderly residents of the neighbourhood.

"What are you doing with those puppies," asked a woman in guttural Nepali.

Luckily, I had brought my friend Prakash from the nearby tea-shop for translation support. I instructed Prakash to tell the rather large and well-dressed woman of our plan: to bring the dogs to the shelter, get them medical treatment, and then to find good homes for them where they would live happily ever after. Well, she was nearly-violently opposed to the idea, as she waved her hands telling us that while we could bring a vet to the dogs, the dogs were not going to a vet.

I had assumed the dogs were stray. After all, I had seen one of the puppies just yesterday running in the traffic. She gestured to her house, "The puppies belong to us." Feeling confused and well aware of the Nepali neighborhood-care system of stray animals I asked her: "But who exactly is taking care of them, who is feeding them, who is keeping them warm?"

She replied with a shrug and a gesture that indicated that she would share no more information with this *kuire*. But I had one more question for her: "And just who is looking after the puppies like that one." I pointed to the rotting corpse of one who had not-so-recently departed the litter. With that she stomped off.

And so did I, puppy-less. I wondered just what I was doing in this country as an unaffiliated aid worker trying to save starving puppies. Once home, for the rest of the afternoon I sat contemplating Buddha's teachings on Idiot Compassion—with an emphasis on the idiot part. ♦

*Jigme Gatton is the pen-name of a rarely-employed American "aid" worker in Nepal. Despite his abortive rescue attempt, the Society of the Prevention to Cruelty–Nepal, SPCAN is making a difference to help people and animals who suffer needlessly everyday. spca\_nepal@hotmail.com*

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

If you talk about conduct - political conduct, individual conduct, the conduct of parties, then democracy is alive. A question arises when you talk about the workings of the constitution.

- Chakra Bastola, Nepali Congress leader in *Ghatana Ra Bichar*, 15 January, 2003.



Left umbrella: all-party government  
Right umbrella: reinstitute parliament  
Wave: right-left extremism

हिमाल

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 January, 2003.





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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

❖ Paintings by Stina Haldorsen at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM-6PM from 10-19 January. 411122

EVENTS

❖ CAN Info Tech 2003 Experts, professionals, buyers, sellers, manufacturers and suppliers provide a forum for networking and exchange of ideas in Information Technology. Technical seminars and workshops. 23-28 January 2003 at Birendra International Convention Centre, New Baneshwore. Book in advance: [www.can.org.np](http://www.can.org.np)

❖ Au Coeur du Mensonge Showing at Alliance Francaise, 2PM Sunday January 19. Free. Molire Auditorium, Alliance Francaise, Thapathali. 241163

❖ Weekly dialogues on life and living and borrowing of books/audio tapes at K Study Centre, Swoyambhu, open 2PM-6PM every Saturday. Contact Kumar at 279712.

❖ Monks from Lo Manthang to Create and Destroy Sacred Sand Mandala. The sand mandala brings benefits not only to the makers, but also to the donors and viewers, 17-19 January, Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat. No admission, but donations accepted. 410089

MUSIC

❖ Live music by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 ½ ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel. 414336

❖ Rusty Nails presents their blues, jazz and beyond, 7.30PM every Friday at The Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, Battispatali. 479488.

❖ Sur Sudha and friends performs "Shukrabar" at Patan Museum, Patan Durbar Square, 5 PM onwards 17 January. Rs 350 (Rs 600 with "Shukrabar" CD)

❖ Cadenza Collective Live, 17 January 7.30PM onwards. Entrance Rs 300 inclusive of welcome drink. Specially discounted menu at the Jazz Bar Shangrila Hotel, Lazimpat. Contact Aishwarya.412999

DRINKS

❖ Kiwi Sensations Cocktails, mocktails & desserts made with organic Kiwis 11AM till midnight daily at The Piano Lounge and Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999 ext 2865

❖ Paddy Foley's Irish Pub A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights. 416096.

❖ Rang Mahal Buy one drink and get one free from the house of Seagrams and Carlsberg Beer. Dinner and performances by Kathmandu's top dancers. 7-10 PM, Hotel Vaishali. 413968/ 423878

FOOD

❖ The greenest patch Weekend lunches in the oldest and largest garden in Nagarkot at The Fort Resort, fort@mos.com.np. 226799

❖ Oriental Express From the fragrant spice coast of Southeast Asia...Fiery Thai Cuisine to subtle Japanese. Wednesday nights at The Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti. 248999

❖ Patan Museum Café Mixed menu, garden seating. Lunch only, 11AM-2PM. 25 percent off with Summit Card. 526271

❖ Rox Restaurant Enjoy Italian cuisine for lunch on Sundays with a wide selection of antipasti, main course, varieties of pizzas and a dessert buffet at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234

❖ Taste of Beijing Roast duck and other Chinese meat, fish and vegetarian delicacies. Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, Birendra International Convention Centre. 468589

❖ 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.

❖ Vegetarian specialties and clay oven pizza at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha. 480262

❖ Wood fired pizzas, cocktails and coffee at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel.

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](mailto:info@escapes2nepal.com), 370616

❖ The Secret of Kathmandu Package Local residents buy one night for \$99.00 plus tax and get the second night at 50%, single/double at Dwarika's Hotel. 479488

❖ 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](mailto: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

VIS-15-01-2003 06:00 GMT




by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Those expecting an end to the devastating fog in the tarai will be disappointed to learn that it will persist at least till the weekend. As can be clearly seen in this satellite picture taken Wednesday morning, the fog blankets the entire Indo-Gangetic plains from Lahore to Guwahati. The only hope lies in a weakening of the high-pressure zone over Tibet that is drawing icy Siberian winds from the north into South Asia. A fresh westerly front is emerging in Afghanistan and may enter western Nepal by Friday. That could see the end of the fog, but not the haze. Expect some light snow over the high mountains this weekend, isolated drizzles across the midhills. Morning frost and fog in Kathmandu valley.


KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri




18-00

Sat




17-02

Sun




16-01

Mon




18-00

Tue




18-00


BOOKWORM



Ethnic Conflict & Secessionism in South & Southeast Asia Editors Rajat Ganguly and Ian Macduff  
Sage Publications, 2003  
Rs 792  
The flaws and contradictions in the process of post-colonial nation building in many countries of South and Southeast Asia have been highlighted by the intractable and continuing phenomenon of ethnic conflict. This volume incisively analyses six such ethnic conflicts in the region in order to understand not only the internal destabilisation and havoc that they have created, but also their dynamics and wider impact.



Jihadis in Jammu and Kashmir A Portrait Gallery K. Santhanam, Sreedhar, Sudhir Saxena and Manish  
Sage Publications, 2003  
Rs 608  
India's relentless fight against cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is well known. However, what is not so well known is the pattern of terrorist activity and the tactics of the different tanzeems or organizations, particularly during the troubled decades from 1980 to 2000. Part One deals briefly with the origins of the Kashmir dispute. Part Two is a handy reference with portraits of 31 tanzenms.



Vishnu on Freud's Desk Editors T.G. Vaidyanathan and Jeffrey J. Kripal  
Oxford University Press, 2002  
Rs 552  
Freudian psychoanalysis, commonly critiqued for being rooted in a male-centric, Central European ethos, has surprisingly been an extremely fertile ground for the study of the Indian psyche. This volume brings together a rich variety of classical and contemporary writings in aspects of Hindu culture, and places these within the frames of understanding of psychoanalysis.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, [mandala@ccsl.com.np](mailto:mandala@ccsl.com.np)

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Anokhi Newly opened home store for bedcovers, curtains, cushion covers, salwar kameez and more from Jaipur, Rajasthan. Kupondole, opposite Hotel Himalaya

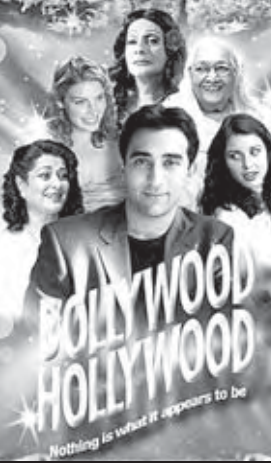
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Rahul Khanna, Lisa Ray, Moushami Chatterjee, Dina Pathak, Ranjit Chowdhary star in Deepa Mehta's comedy debut. The movie follows the "clash of civilisations" genre of which this year's low-budget hit, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is one. When people from a culture largely defined by Bollywood find themselves in an environment that is saturated with Hollywood, the result is a state of mind that celebrates these two seemingly disparate worlds. A "Bollywood/Hollywood" state of mind. The film Bollywood/Hollywood is a madcap love-song to both East and West with Bollywood music, Hollywood choreography, North American locations. And the Actors? Bollywood's best! From Friday, 10 January onwards.

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0800- 0830

2000- 2030

0800- 0830

1930- 2000

2000- 2030

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GAMES

Bagchal in the Alps

An ancient Nepali board game enjoys a revival in Switzerland.



**SRADHA BASNYAT**  
From the Himalaya to the Alps, bagchal has now traversed the continents with the First Swiss Bagh Chal Tournament held in Bern last week where 200 participants battled it out for the Bronze Tiger Trophy.  
The tournament was organised by "Crazy" David Levine, who became a bagchal aficionado after a visit to Nepal. He sells bagchal sets and organised the tournament in an old church in the Swiss capital.  
Bagchal is thought to have been discovered by Himalayan herders, whose occupation the game mimics. Shepherds spent many hours playing bagchal on a grid scraped into the dirt, using larger stones to represent bagh (tigers) and smaller pebbles as bakhri (goats). In Nepal, bagchal is played much the same way it has been for centuries: school children scribble a board on paper during breaks or we find grids etched into dirt patches. Today, the bagchal grid is carved into a wooden or brass game box to sell to tourists.  
At the Bern tournament last week, Raya Gurung from Gorkha advanced to the semifinals with brilliant moves only to be beaten by his Swiss wife, Ruth Kaeser. Ruth

How to play Bagchal



Requirements:

- A family of 4 Tigers (bagh) and a herd of 20 Goats (bakhri)
- The game board is a 25-point grid

Positions....  
Bagchal is a challenge between predator and prey: The Tigers assume their positions, one prowling on each corner of the board. One Goat appears in the distance, cautiously occupying a vacant space on the board. Following the placement of each Goat, a Tiger stalks along the line of movement.  
Note: All twenty Goats must first appear before any may move from its position.  
The objective is SURVIVAL!  
To satisfy their hunger, the Tigers must "eat" a total of five Goats. Leaping over a Goat, the Tiger devours its prey. (A variation to the game may be played where the Tigers eat all the Goats.)  
To protect themselves, Goats throng together, surrounding the Tigers and limiting their movement. Tigers win when five Goats are "eaten." Goats win when all Tigers are surrounded, unable to leap over and eat the Goats or make regular movements.  
Prowl or Press?  
One Tiger is on the prowl at a time, moving from one space to an adjacent space along a connecting line. To get one's Goat, the Tiger leaps over an unprotected Goat along a line of movement on to an open space. The devoured Goat is removed from the board. Once all Goats have appeared on the field, one Goat per turn moves to an adjacent space along a line of movement. Tigers cannot leap over more than one Goat so Goats must press together to protect themselves.  
Note: Tigers cannot leap over Tigers or around corners and Goats cannot jump at all. Life in the jungle continues, alternating moves between Tiger and Goat...

Strategies


iGhost Goats!

iCircle of Death!


: Goats can have the Tigers by their tails, without physically occupying a space, restricting the Tigers' movements.

: To lure the Goats into their grasp, Tigers cordon the Goats, leaving two vacant spaces in front of each Tiger.



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played well against all opponents and was the highest-ranked woman in the tournament, eventually winning the Bronze Tiger. Silver was won by newcomer Martin Moser of Bern who played an excellent game against Daenu Wyss, which ended in a stalemate after 10 minutes. Due to time limitations, Crazy David was forced to determine a winner by coin toss, which Martin lost.

There was even a Green Trophy for the worst player, 15-year-old Samuel from Wallis in southern Switzerland. Plans are already afoot for the next Bagchal Tournament which will be held in May in the Bernese Oberland. "I love this game and the way it brings people together," Crazy David told us.

Back in the land of its origin, bagchal is in slow but steady decline. A tournament was held in Janakpur during the Panchayat days, recalls organiser Visma Jwalaanda Rajopadhyaya. But since then there have been no concerted efforts to revive this ancient game. Legend has it that none other than Gautam Buddha himself was a bagchal fan. The game has a strategy similar to chess and draught. There are 25 spaces on a bagchal grid connected diagonally or on a straight line. These are the only valid lines of movement the challengers may take. The bagh attempt to leap over and devour lonely, unprotected bakhri. The bakhri find their strength in numbers. They throng together, attempting to surround the bagh and limit their movement. Just like real wild tigers in the tarai, bagchal tigers are constantly on the prowl for food. If the goats are not clever, they make an easy meal for the hungry felines.



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## Vijay Kumar's makeover

What does it take for Nepal's formerly most-arrogant journalist to suddenly go soft on us? Those who knew Vijay Kumar Panday 15 years ago will wonder when they meet him today where that legendary swagger and haughty disdain have gone.

Partly it is spiritualism. Vijay has now become a devotee of Sai Baba and the Buddhist guru, Choikinima Rimpoché which has transformed his personality. "You may find it hard to believe," Vijay tells us, "but I was always an introverted person. I used my brashness to mask my shyness."

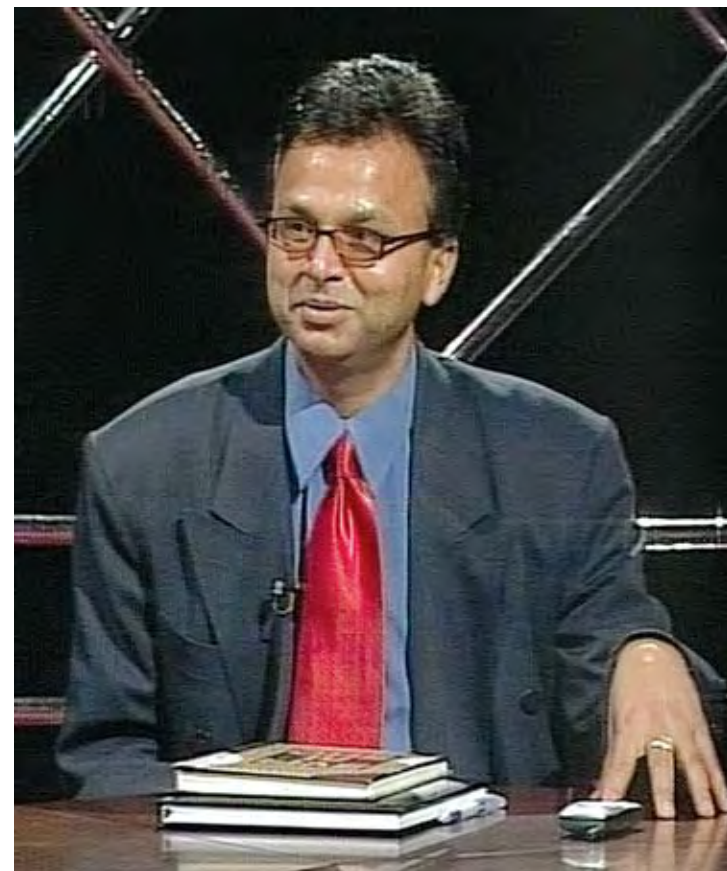
Still, who can forget his combative and blunt questioning of Amitabh Bachhan and some senior Indian ministers in the early 90s? Thanks to these high-profile television interviews in the pre-cable age, Vijay Kumar developed a reputation for being an interviewer who would chew people alive in the studio. Even senior political figures thought twice before agreeing to appear on his shows.

But watching him these days on his Monday night show, *Dishanirdesh* on Nepal Television, Vijay Kumar looks like he has reincarnated from a carnivore into a herbivore. "What my gurus did was point

out the goodness in me. I think I have become less arrogant, less of a hypocrite and I think I am a genuinely better person. Earlier, my ambition was to become fantastically famous fantastically fast. Now, I just want to be a good human being."

Easier said than done, but this fellow mellows with age. He has now launched Sara, Sarans & Vijay, a television production house named after

his daughter, wife and himself. Vijay has partnered with Siddharth S Rana of the Soaltee Group to set up SS&V, and it aims to produce news and current affairs for some of the four new television channels starting out in Kathmandu this year. He reasons: "The tv market has opened up, and people are looking for sharp, incisive and independent content." But promise not to chew people alive anymore? ♦



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