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Q. Should the Thapa government resign?

Total votes: 1,488

Weekly Internet Poll # 116. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Is a military solution the only way to resolve Nepal's insurgency?

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Present arms

The army and the Maoists are engaged in a lethal arms race.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Two years after it was sucked into the war, the Royal Nepali Army has transformed itself from a largely decorative force into a battle-hardened military with modern weaponry.

The army has justified the induction of lethal new automatic weapons, artillery, transport equipment and even attack helicopters to fight the Maoist insurgency. It says the guerrillas are using increasingly sophisticated long-range weapons and have acquired AK-47s from underground suppliers in India.

Contrary to public perception, however, it isn't just the Americans who are the main suppliers of military hardware to the Royal Nepali Army, but the Indians. Belgium, Britain and even China are the other suppliers.

The army has already replaced 5,000 of its standard issue SLR rifles with American M-16s. Another 15,000 are expected soon under the US government's \$12 million military aid to

fight the insurgency that also includes night vision equipment, body armour and military training. The army is keen to replace the rest of its unreliable 30-year-old SLRs.

In the past two years, India has increased its hardware assistance under the Infantry Small Arms System (INSAS) that includes 5.56 caliber rifles, mortars and machine guns. It has supplied 50 military trucks, ammunition and four light attack helicopters: two Cheetahs and two Lancers equipped with cannon and rocket pods that have already seen some action during flushing-out operations in the midwest.

The Indian assistance is worth some Rs 5 billion, most of which was grant aid. "They are very willing to supply the arms under the INSAS provision and we are happy receiving most of them as grants," one official told us. "Such supplies are done directly by the North Bloc without too much involvement of the Indian bureaucracy."

continued ➡ p6



KERLINE EVERAERT



Amnesty

The government will grant amnesty to Maoists who surrender by 12 February, Information Minister Kamal Thapa said on Thursday. "We have concrete plans for their rehabilitation at a centre in Tanahu," he told a press meet. The government also issued a list of guns it will buy for cash, which is the first hint that the rebels have captured sophisticated weapons. The army will pay Rs 30,000 for an Israeli Galil assault rifle, an M-16 will fetch Rs 50,000 and handing over a 81mm field gun is worth Rs 200,000 cash. A soldier guards an army base in Dailekh with a Belgian Minimi machine gun (top), while a Maoist in Kailali aims a GPMG captured from the army.

Royal Nepal Airlines battles battered image

The New Zealand trekking guide had reported for her flight to Bangkok at six in the morning, but her Royal Nepal Airlines flight took off at two the next morning. She got a skimpy packet lunch.

A Nepali academic's early morning flight to Bangalore was cancelled, so he was transferred to the evening Delhi flight. After waiting at the airport for nearly 12 hours, he was told that flight was also cancelled. He abandoned his trip. Hundreds of passengers who had been bumped off another Delhi flight that week couldn't take it any more and gheraoed Royal Nepal Airlines staff, chanting slogans.

In the past month, there were a lot of horror stories. Many vowed never to fly Royal Nepal Airlines again and travel agencies started booking clients to other carriers.

Despite having shed most of its routes in the past two years, the airline is struggling to maintain existing schedules with just two 757s. And when both jets get grounded with technical glitches like they did twice in the past month, RNAC earned a lot of abusive nicknames like 'Royal Nepal Always Cancelled' or 'Royal Nepal Absolutely Corrupt'.

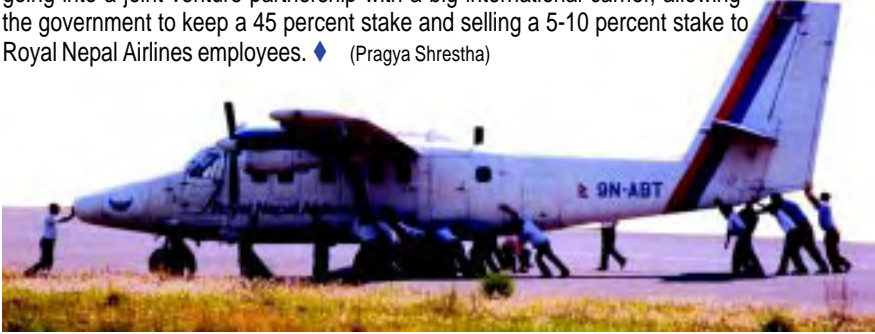
Managing Director Mohan Khanal admits the fleet utilisation leaves no margin for error (see interview, p7). But he says the state of the airline reflects the state of the country and the carrier is paying for political interference and corruption of the past 12 years that has caused a once-reputable airline to take a nosedive. On Tuesday, schedules were once more thrown haywire after a catering van dented one of the jets. The plane is being repaired and expected to fly on Friday.

"It's been a string of bad luck, but hopefully we are out of it now," Khanal told us. For the immediate future, the airline is doing some serious belt-tightening by cutting

Over-stretched and plagued by past mistakes, the national airline struggles to pull out of a nosedive.

freebies and allowances and the board has approved an immediate lease of a third 757 to stabilise schedules. News that Indian private airlines may soon be flying to Kathmandu has also lent a sense of urgency in the airline to get its act together.

For the longer term, management is awaiting a report commissioned through ICAO to examine the airline's nett worth for the privatisation effort. The report is said to favour going into a joint venture partnership with a big international carrier, allowing the government to keep a 45 percent stake and selling a 5-10 percent stake to Royal Nepal Airlines employees. ♦ (Pragya Shrestha)



KUNDA DIXIT



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NOT THE PEOPLE'S WAR

Even the most hawkish hardliner will grudgingly admit that there is no military solution to the present conflict. The Maoist leadership knows better than most that their People's War has in the past eight years turned an ornamental army into a powerful, battle-hardened force, made the monarchy more powerful, emasculated parliamentary parties, eroded the authority of constitutional organs and frittered away the early gains of their revolution by letting it get out of hand.

The military brass, for its part, will confess that killing fellow-Nepalis and being dragged down to fight a nasty civil war is not its idea of fun. No army wants to be bogged down in a guerrilla war against its own people in this kind of terrain. The military's argument is that the Maoists can be brought back to the negotiating table only by force of arms. The Maoist strategy is to hit hard at targets of their choice at regular intervals, while keeping the populace cowed down by terror.

By now it should be clear to both sides that they can't win, but they think that if they can drag it on long enough they won't really lose either. It's a classic vortex of violence: you keep fighting because if you don't, you have to talk. Societies in conflict reach such points of stalemate when they have exhausted all other options except the military one. But we haven't exhausted all other options, we haven't even tried out the most pragmatic, bloodless alternatives. There are viable compromises that have only been half-explored: ways around the locked positions on the constituent assembly.

This past week till press time, there have been 33 security forces personnel killed, upwards of 100 Maoists dead and uncounted non-combatants disappeared or dead. A housewife in Bhairawa is killed in her bedroom by a stray bullet fired by panic-stricken sentries shooting wildly at no one in particular. A student on a motorcycle in Pokhara is killed at a checkpoint by jittery police, after which, security forces guarding nearby offices start firing aimlessly at adjacent residential buildings thinking they are under attack. It turns out there were no Maoists after all in this phantom firefight.

If this is what happens with .303s, one shudders to think what kind of casualties there will be with more guns and even more lethal weapons. This war has unleashed an arms race, although sometimes it feels more like an alms race. With generous help from friends and neighbours, the Royal Nepali Army now has Belgian belt-ammo machine guns, American M-16s and Indian attack helicopters with gun pods. The army is now distributing guns to villagers and sacrificing the neutrality of civilians by turning them into combatants (See p6). Everywhere else in the world it has been tried, in Guatemala with PACs, in the Philippines with CAFGUs or in Angola, volunteer militias have degenerated into vigilante killing machines. Human rights violations have shot up and what remains of the social fabric lies in tatters. In our own conflict we have already seen how, once armed, village Maoist youth can get out of the leadership's control.

The way to end this war is not by giving the people more guns, but by ensuring their safety and security through a genuine peace process.

STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL



False premises

Did Christina Rocca figure out what is really going on in Nepal?

Immediately after landing in Kathmandu on Tuesday, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca said: "I am here to see what is going on in Nepal." By the time she leaves on Friday, it is unlikely that she will have learned much more than what she has already been told by the embassy here.

Most people she met here has probably confirmed her worst fears and best hopes. The myth of a god-king and the stabilising role of a monarchy in a traditional society all need to be rethought in the post-royal massacre scenario and in the context of the anti-monarchist insurgency. The royal takeover of October Fourth did little to bolster the king's constitutional credentials. The American assumption that the monarchy is a force of stability in a kingdom torn by insurgency is its first fallacy.

A second mis-reading may be the role and responsibility of the Royal Nepali Army in counter-insurgency operations. The Nixon Doctrine of delegating such functions to "surrogate gendarmes" is long outdated. Strategists at Langley, who seem to have resurrected it to assign the RNA the role of a modernising agent, don't seem to be aware of the royalist antecedents of this force.

Unlike nationalist armies in other developing countries, the RNA never had to go through the transforming process of an anti-colonial struggle. It has always acted instead as an instrument of power exclusively in the hands of authoritarian rulers: Rana prime ministers before 1950 and the Shah kings thereafter.

Such a traditionalist focus is not conducive in making an army modern in outlook and in a technocratic orientation necessary to usher changes to Nepali society. Since it never had to prove itself and always relied on brute force, its hearts-

and-minds actions have been largely inadequate. The RNA is ideologically ill-equipped to handle the challenges of an insurrection on its own. Eric Nordlinger in the *American Political Science Review* maintains that military establishments in developing countries are fundamentally unconcerned about social change and are opposed to groups who strive for reform.

The American foreign policy establishment has also harboured deep suspicion of our politicians. Popularly elected leaders are, by their very nature, less respectful towards foreigners and there is a dominant belief in the donor community that underdeveloped nations are underdeveloped because of their political immaturity, which is traceable to civilian politicians and their politicking.

This assumption is fundamentally flawed. Immaturity is a process of maturing that can't be wished away. It's often the most mature institution (the king in traditionalist societies, the party in post-communist states and the army in newly independent nations) that is the cause of political instability in emerging democracies.

The third fallacy in American policy towards Nepal is born out of the 'Brown Doctrine', named after former US Secretary of Defence Harold Brown who set forth the dictum: "Third World instability by itself, whatever the ideological orientation of the antagonists involved, is a threat to the existing world order and thus to US economic security."

The United States therefore supports the status quo in every country under its influence. In Nepal, where popular desire for change is so strong, it has put the Americans in the company of unyielding oligarchs. There is no way Madam Rocca



would have apprised herself of the ground realities in Nepal by conversing with Messers Thapa, Thapa, Thapa and Thapa with a few Shah-Ranas thrown in.

The final fallacy is the readiness of the United States to impose its authority and supremacy around the world by military force, which has alarmed just about everyone. This has brought Washington into a head-on collision in Nepal with the Europeans who insist that above all else, human rights must be respected.

The Indians are bereft of ideological baggage, their interests are more pragmatic, all they want is to ensure the continuation of their dominance in Nepal. The Chinese aren't making a hue and cry, but their alarm at continued instability in Tibet's backyard isn't difficult to appreciate. It's hard for a state under such a close scrutiny of international and regional players to 'fail' abruptly. And to prevent that from happening, the centrality of the Nepalis themselves in all this must be restored. Outsiders must also mull over how their precarious balance of interests over Nepal doesn't turn into a bruising proxy fight.

Despite Nepal's poverty, it is not one of those banana republics that can be run with the assistance of a loyal sheriff. All Christina Rocca needs to take back home to correct her government's policies towards Nepal is an appreciation of the role of democracy in this country. ♦



LETTERS

UNIFORM MISERY

I read Naresh Newar's dispatch from Dapcha ('Uniform Misery', #174) with sadness and curiosity as I am originally from there. The story depicts, in a microcosm, the traumatic situation Nepalis are experiencing. It is also evidence

of how rapidly the Maoist conflict, like other conflicts, can spread its tentacles.

Although Dapcha is only 50km from Kathmandu, it is the periphery. And unless the center comes to grips with the seriousness of this crisis, the conflict will engulf the whole nation. As your case-study from Dapcha tells us, the conflict has its greatest impact on civilians and it is often the civilians, including the children and women who bear the brunt of war. The atrocities by both the state and the Maoists have put innocent people in the line of fire. On the one hand, the army has been killing people in fake encounters. Extra-judicial killings in captivity and disappearances of persons under custody

have become common. The Maoists are torturing and killing non-combatants and using them as human shields. Young boys and girls are being forcefully recruited in the rebel army. Many people in the villages have left their homes and lands out of terror. The conflict has impacted the psycho-social wellbeing of civilians, hampering their traditional coping mechanisms. After reading Newar's report, I fear I will be a stranger in my own village when I return.

Poshendra Satyal, Cambridge, UK

• Your eyewitness reports from the field ('Spreading east', #173 and 'Achham's agony', #172) were sad reminders to both the decision-makers in Kathmandu and the Maoist hierarchy in Lucknow. Listen to the ordinary people quoted in the article and act accordingly. They want you to stop this mad struggle for power.

They don't trust either of you, and know you are cynically using the people as cannon fodder. Everytime the Maoists want to protest against the government, they close schools or kill poor Nepalis who have joined the police to provide for their families. Why punish the people if your fight is against the powers that be? Similarly, instead of trying to wean the people away from Maoist brutality, we have a state that is trying to be even more brutal than the Maoists.

Neither of you are going to win the peoples' hearts and minds this way.

Name withheld on request, email

BOHARA

I was impressed by Alok Bohara's correlation between democracy and the insurgency ('Humpty dumpty had a great fall', #173). Clearly, there is no alternative to restoring the peoples'

representatives. The alternative to democracy, peoples' sovereignty is more democracy, more people's right and sovereignty fully translated to the grassroot.

Kathmandu has always been insensitive to the hardships of the rest of the country and this is especially true during the current crisis. In fact, the rich seem to be generally profiting from the war. Political parties which grossly misused their power over the past 12 years don't seem to have realized their misdeeds. Mr Bohara should ring the bell more often to wake up the rulers in Kathmandu.

Name withheld on request, Canada

SCOUNDRELS

I was pained to notice that Kunda Dixit missed the most important aspect of the new curriculum at the School for Scoundrels, affiliated to the

Charlatan Heston University in the USA (Under My Hat, #175). Which is:

Intro to Nepali Politics Semester: Fall and Spring Level: Junior

This course acquaints students with contemporary Nepal politics, with special reference to power-seeking and seizing, party-splitting, organising bandhs and chakka jams, holding clandestine meetings and going on foreign junkets. In an exchange program with the TU professors and students, prospective politicians enrolled in this course will learn how to bunk classes and burn down buildings. Drawing heavily from the experience of the 1990s, this course intends to teach students to appreciate blame-game-ism, despotism and Maoism as art forms.

'Misunderstood Poet', email



When the social fabric is in tatters, it is only a small step away from civil militia to death squads, private armies, vigilantes and warlordism.

ROBIN SAYAMI

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“Why did they do this to us?”

After the battle, Khimdi still lies deserted, the villagers forced to live in the forest.



NETRA KC



From l-r: Chandra Bhandari and other families living in the forest bordering Khimdi. The deserted playground of Bhrikuti High School that turned into a battleground on 1 December.

NETRA KC in KHMIDI, KAILALI

It was a good place to sink their roots: the fertile and green slopes of the Siwalik in far-western Nepal. The ancestors of the villagers of Khimdi had chosen the spot well. They lived with the rhythm of the seasons and the remoteness of the village had shielded them from the violence, so far.

Then, on the afternoon of 1 December, everything changed. In the end, it was Khimdi's strategic location on the tri-junction between the districts of Doti, Kailali and Surkhet that turned it into a battlezone. The pitched battle lasted 15 hours, and when it ended, 30 people were dead, including two villagers. The Maoists claim 25 army personnel died and seven of theirs, while the army puts the figure at 24 rebels and six soldiers.

Security sources say three teams of the unified command had reached Khimdi after they were tipped off that there were rebel training camps in the surrounding villages. The first unit had crossed the river and was on its way towards Doti. “The Maoists had asked us to close the school on that day, they had planned to attack the security force unit,” recalls Harka Bahadur Bam, a teacher at the local school. But since the unit did not camp there, that

attack was called off.

The two other security force units decided to set up camp at the Bhrikuti Secondary School at Khimdi. A Maoist force based in nearby Lisnegam knew about this through local informants, and seems to have decided to attack the camp. At 4PM, the school was about to close. Some students had left, others were on their way home when the sound of a fierce gun battle rent the air.

As soon as they heard the shots, the remaining teachers and students took refuge in the house of Chandra Bhandari, shivering with fear. The fighting raged all night. By morning, when they came out, the villagers saw bodies everywhere. Most of the dead were Maoists, and the bodies remained rotting there for days afterwards. The school used to have 400 students, many are still lost. Parents went into the forest to look for their children and came back weeping when they couldn't find them.

After the clash, locals say army reinforcements arrived. The soldiers accused the villagers of sheltering rebels and forced them to abandon their homes. With nowhere to go, women like Chandra Bhandari took their children and cattle, and have spent more than a week camping in the forest. But even living in the

forest affords them little security. Villagers take the threats of aerial bombardment seriously and hide in the undergrowth.

In Kathmandu on Wednesday, army spokesman Deepak Gurung denied that the soldiers had forced the villagers out, saying many were afraid to return home because the fighting had been so fierce.

Like most villages in midwestern Nepal, Khimdi too is populated by mostly women and children. The men have all left for jobs and safety to cities or India. They send money home and that is how the families survive. One of the few men in the village is Bhim Bahadur Bali. He tell us: “The soldiers told us that if we did not leave, they would torch our houses and drop bombs from helicopters on our village.” He is so afraid that he is considering leaving his village for good. But he has nowhere to go. “My wife is telling me soon there will be another clash between the army and the Maoists and we might get killed, she wants us to move away with the family.”

“I don't mind dying at this age,” says Chandra Bhandari. “But, I want my children to live. I don't know where to take them, even the jungles are not safe.” Bhrikuti

Secondary School has been closed ever since the battle. Twelve students are still missing and the fear is so palpable that there is no point opening. Most school children now spend their days minding the cattle, always careful to remain close to the village and away from the stench of decomposing human bodies and corpses of cattle at the forests' edge.

The people are so terrified they don't talk to strangers. One of them finally musters the courage to tell us: “If we provide shelter to the army, the rebels will kill us the next morning. If we help the rebels, we get killed by the security forces. Instead of helping either side, we would rather jump into the Karnali and drown ourselves.”

Bal Kumari Bhandari remembers when life in Khimdi was idyllic: “It used to be so peaceful, we used to take our cattle to the forests' edge and collect fodder. We used to sing all day.” Today, she has no cattle to tend, they were killed in the crossfire. Newlyweds Padam and Dammara Bhandari set out on 1 December to collect fodder. No one has seen them since, although bundles of grass were found near the village.

Despite the scale of the devastation and the catastrophe that



has befallen their village, there has been little help forthcoming from the government. Kailali CDO Shibendra Purush Dhakal admits that low-ranking army personnel mistreated the villagers after the Maoists attacked the camping soldiers. The villagers went to meet the CDO but despite his

assurances, they've returned back to the relative safety of the forests.

As we got ready to depart Khimdi, the group of locals who had agreed to speak to us had just one question: “The two sides came here, they killed each other, drove us out, and then they left. Can anyone tell us why they did this to us?” ♦

HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



Vale of Forgetfulness and Unreality

What's it going to take to wake up the elite of this blighted land? Anyone who puts so much as a foot outside this Vale of Forgetfulness and Unreality discovers that Nepal is in deep distress and getting worse. Yet all we hear from all levels of the national leadership and the international community here is the same old nonsense.

On a security level, we're supposed to believe that the war is going in favour of the authorities and against the Maoists. Cited as evidence of this is the absence of major Maoist attacks, like those before the ceasefire, in which dozens of policemen and soldiers were killed. Also, the dissipation of the withering fear felt by the rich, famous and high-profile in September, when it seemed the rebels were finally starting to tackle those at the top. These are evidence, we're told, that the conflict in the countryside can have a military solution, a 'victory' by the 'government' of the moment.

It reminds me of the old joke about the man jumping up and down on a street corner and barking like a dog. A passer-by finally asks him what he's doing. “Scaring away the wild elephants,” he replies, which prompts his questioner to point out that there are no such animals within a thousand kilometres. “See,” says the jumping man, “it works.”

Turning to politics, we have the parties announcing yet another 'stir' and more muttering about the king forming an all party government. Foreign diplomats add their two cents worth. Which is all its worth, frankly. Haven't we been here before? And haven't things moved on since 4 October 2002 when any self-respecting democrat should have been out on the streets protesting the king's dismissal of the Deuba government?



With respect to His Majesty, what does it take to get a sense of urgency into the royal palace? Things are deteriorating badly on every level and only a serious attempt to restore equilibrium, to bring the people back into power, can offer a glimmer of hope.

The economy? Forget it. The Finance Minister may have been a competent man in previous avatars, but no country can consider itself

Perhaps it's time for Nepal to declare its independence. From Kathmandu.

solvent with nearly three-quarters of development expenditure coming from outside sources. And the rest of the national pie is going to yet more military spending, something that only makes sense if—like the United States—you manufacture most of what you buy for your army. If Nepal were a business, the bank would have foreclosed long ago and the welfare cheques would be arriving in the mail.

Then there's the question of national morale, no small factor in troubled times. Frankly, Nepalis are running low on their fabled resilience. More than three-quarters of this mountainous, lovely land is either bandit country or run by the Maoists. The 'government' holds no sway outside of most district headquarters, and it seems that Maoist central control over the rural cadres has long since slipped badly. Without the rule of law, Nepalis have nothing. They disappear, their sons get killed, they leave for other countries.

Yet here in Kathmandu, we've just had a woozy week of Christmas parties and weddings. Most people seem more worried about hangovers than the dire state of their country.

Perhaps it's time for Nepal to declare its independence once and for all. From Kathmandu and all its denizens. ♦

East not so red



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA in ILAM
The Maoist strategy of replicating the party's military gains in the midwest in the eastern region appears to have suffered setbacks.

Military sources say the rebels had used the ceasefire period earlier this year to transport a large number of their militia as well as weapons to the eastern region to launch major attacks on army and police bases. But the rebels appear to have realised now that the conditions in the east are different. There have also been reports of Maoists from the midwest having linguistic and cultural problems adjusting to the region.

Maoists captured by security forces have provided the army with information about rebel hideouts and training centers. The cadre do not seem to be as ideologically committed to the revolution as Maoists elsewhere, and military sources say rebels in the east have been quite willing to pass on vital information.

It was on the basis of a tip off from a captured Maoist that the security forces were able to raid a rented apartment of the rebels' eastern command military chief, Barshman Pun ('Ananta') in Dharan on 9 October. The raid yielded important documents, a computer with a work plan, a satellite phone with pre-paid SIM card from Singapore Telecom. Pun's aide was captured and provided information about the Maoist strategy in the east.

In mid-November the army raided the house of the



The Maoist strategy to go east has suffered setbacks.

Maoist eastern regional in-charge, Agni Sapkota in Janakpur. Earlier, the army was able to capture Gyanu Subba, the deputy chief of a Maoist-affiliated group who has been speaking out openly to the media against the Maoist leadership.

Said one security source: "After the raids and the arrests, we have been successful in many of our offensives and have been able to arrest many more rebels." Most of them are said to be from the Maoist-associated Limbuwan Liberation Front and the Kirant Workers' Party, the source said. Brigadier General Man Dhoj Budhamagar at the army's eastern command headquarters told us the main reason for the Maoist setbacks have been differences between their political workers and the military wing. The Maoist party's relations with the associated Limbuwan and Kirat parties have also often been frayed.

Another major setback for the Maoists was the battle in Khotang on 7 December in which an army patrol engaged the Maoists 17th Battalion C Company in a firefight and killed its commander, 'Utthan' and four female guerrillas. Earlier, the army had captured the 17th Battalion Commander, Manbahadur Malla (Sangharsha). Since the end of the ceasefire on 27 August there have been more than

six major battles in Belbari, Karkigaun in Panchthar and in Chintapokhari and Bakachaul in Khotang. The Maoists have admitted that they have suffered setbacks in the east. In a statement by the Mechi-Kosi Regional Bureau on 26 November, more than 70 guerrillas had been killed since the end of the ceasefire. The security forces say they have killed more than 450 Maoists in the eastern region in that period and captured large amounts of explosives and weapons. Eastern command chief, Major General Pradip Pratap Bam Malla also appears to be ahead of the rest of the country in setting up new volunteer civilian forces that arm and train villagers to fight the Maoists on their own.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Don't meet in India: embassy

The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu says it doesn't approve of Indian territory being used for clandestine meetings between Maoists and Nepali politicians like the one between the UML and Maoist leadership near Lucknow last month.

"We would urge that all concerned should refrain from such activity in future," the embassy statement issued on Monday said. It also admitted it was possible that Maoists were using the open border to go back and forth, but denied it was giving them sanctuary. "The Maoist insurgency represents as much a threat to India's security as to Nepal, and we are committed to cooperating closely with Nepal in meeting this challenge," the embassy stated.

The embassy has also expressed concern over the extortion demands against two India-Nepal joint-venture companies and said the government had agreed to provide additional security.

Nepali inmate dies in Thailand

One of the 36 Nepali prisoners in Thai jails waiting for an extradition treaty to be sent back to Nepal, has died in a prison hospital, Thai sources said.

Hari Bahadur Gurung had been living with HIV and was transferred from Bangkok's Bangkokwan prison to a hospice run by a charity a few days before he died on 12 December. Before passing away, Gurung had been looked after by several volunteer inmates including Uwes Dambermann, a fellow-inmate from South Africa. Gurung is survived by a wife and two young children in Nepal.

"We have been trying very hard to convince the Thai government to amend the law, so that the terminally ill inmates can be eligible for compassionate release," said hospice director, John Lerwitworapong.

Other activists who have been lobbying with the Nepali authorities to expedite an extradition treaty to bring Nepali inmates home are disheartened that the issue is not getting sufficient priority in Nepal. "The Thais have said they can send the Nepalis back, but our government doesn't care," says GS Rai, one extradition activist. "The Nepalis want to come back and serve their terms in

their homeland." Nearly all the Nepalis are accused of drug trafficking offences and are serving sentences of 10 years to life imprisonment. Many say they were framed by Thai traffickers.

More flights

News of Indian private airlines starting flights to Nepal and the resumption of Pakistan International Airlines flights to Kathmandu after two years has raised spirits in the tourism and aviation sectors.

India's private Air Sahara announced this week it plans to start New Delhi-Kathmandu flights this week. Reduction in Royal Nepal Airlines flights has lead to increased demand for seats on this sector. Jet Airways is also expected to announce flights to Kathmandu from points in India.

PIA, which stopped flights last June following India and Pakistan disallowing each other's airlines to use their air space, is expected to resume twice weekly flights between Kathmandu and Karachi on the new year.

Public communications

Nepal Telecommunication Corporation (NTC) is in the final throes of privatisation. The cabinet has given the nod, passing bylaws and regulations. NTC will still be a public enterprise, but it will run under the Company Act and not the Corporation Act. "Government will float shares once the corporation is turned into a company," our source said.

EU against arming civilians

The European heads of mission in Kathmandu are concerned over the government's plan to arm villagers against Maoist rebels, saying it will increase bloodshed. "We do not believe that the formation of such forces will contribute to a resolution of the conflict," read a press release issued by the German Embassy that holds the EU presidency. It urged the government to review the policy and ensure all counter insurgency operations are conducted in full compliance with Nepali and international law.



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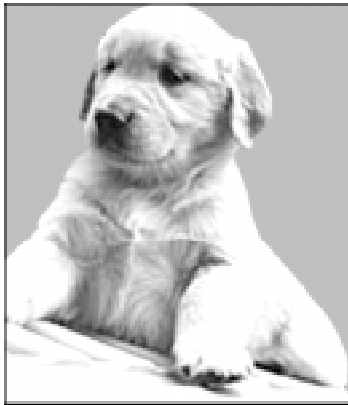
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'Kathmandu Animal Treatment' Centre (non-profit, charitable organization) is looking for a second-hand Maruti or similar utility vehicle, which will be used as Animal Ambulance for Animal Birth Control Programme. The goal is to create a dog friendly, rabies-free, non-breeding street dog population in Kathmandu Valley. If any person is interested to sell or contribute to this animal welfare work, please contact us at...
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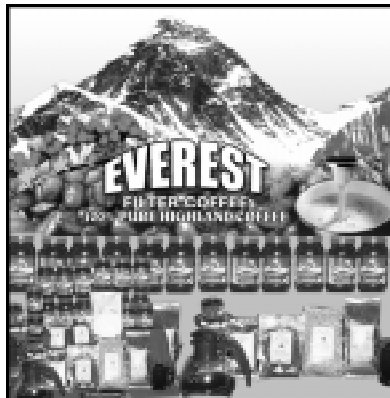
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“The Minimi is the best deterrence we have against the Maoists.”

from p1

But in the field, it is the Belgian Minimi M249 belt-fed machine guns that soldiers are really excited about. “The Minimi is the best deterrence we have against Maoist attacks at present,” one army source told us, citing its capacity to fire 1,000 rounds a minute upto a range of 1km. The Minimis replace earlier clip-ammunition guns that took time to reload and were not useful in Maoist human wave attacks. The army bought 5,500 Minimis from Belgium last year in a controversial E25 million deal that triggered a political crisis in Belgium with the resignation of the foreign minister.



A similar controversy has now erupted in Britain over the supply of military equipment to Nepal. Last year, Britain bought two Mi-17 transport helicopters for the Royal Nepali Army under its ‘Global Conflict Prevention Pool’. However, the British government has come under fire from human rights activists for contravening its

own arms exports guidelines not to supply military equipment to armies that flout human rights. A British embassy official in Kathmandu refuted this charge: “The UK has been supplying non-lethal equipment to the RNA that are not used directly to kill people.” Britain is now said to be considering an army request for

secondhand short-takeoff and landing transport planes.

Having acquired anti-aircraft guns from China in the late 80s, the army has recently taken delivery of Chinese-made field communication equipment. “Of course, the anti-aircraft guns are not for firing at planes, but they are ideal in mountainous terrain,” one army source said. ♦

Clockwise from top: Soldiers with M-16s and tripod mounted Belgian Minimis during an exercise at an army base in the midwest, Lancer helicopters are fitted with firing pods, soldier takes aim through his belt-fed machinegun.



Amnesty offer for Maoists

The government is hemmed in from all sides and beleaguered, but spokesman Kamal Thapa did not show any indication he was worried at his press meet on Thursday.

The prime minister is out of the country, the Maoists killed 25 security personnel in landmine attacks in one week, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca, delivered a tough message on human rights violations by the army, the political parties launched a new improved anti-king agitation, a Maoist strike has brought education to a halt and put 1.5 million students out of school.

But Thapa tried to seize the initiative with a timebound offer of amnesty to Maoists who surrender, guaranteeing them and their families safety in a special rehabilitation camp in Tanahu. If they surrender with their weapons, they even get a cash bonus.

Thapa even spelled out plans for the medical treatment of injured rebels, higher education and even employment guarantees. Legal cases filed against them will be withdrawn and the ex-Maoists will be allowed to take part in political activities.

“The idea is to give the rebels a chance to live a normal life if they are willing to quit the Maoist bloc,” Thapa said. “They must realise they have no chance of winning. The social, economic, political and international scenario is not in their favour.”

As long as he was at it, Thapa also criticised political parties for getting the students agitated and demonstrating against the king. Asked about the two student leaders detained and charged with sedition, he said they would be prosecuted according to the law. Students blocked roads and set fire to tyres in continuing protests for the release of their leaders.

Thapa labeled Christina Rocca’s visit to Nepal as ‘routine’, but admitted that she has raised the issue of human rights violations in meetings with government and military officials. He added: “But we assured her that we were doing our very best to prevent such violations.”



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Yeah, I've heard that being said many times and my standard response is: look at where Thailand is now. An airline can't be an island of efficiency when the whole country is going downhill. When your country is run like Charkhal Adda, how can you have an airline that runs like Singapore Airlines? Thai International developed because Thailand developed. Our airline has gone downhill because the country itself is sliding.

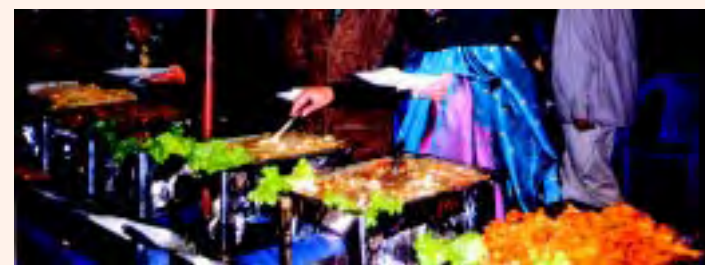
by ARTHA BEED

What's cooking



The Beed sniffs out Nepal's booming catering business.

The catering business poses a challenge to hotels that operate in the organised sector. With little regulation on product or quality, unlike in hotels, caterers get away with anything. Furthermore, these companies do not have to take care of labour benefits or even pay minimum wages. It seems labour organisations have exempted this category from seeking proper labour rights



Another reason why the catering business is so lucrative is because they operate outside the tax net. No bills are made, service taxes and VAT aren't applicable and most of the business is simply 'cash down'. Catering companies that offer no-questions-asked services are a blessing for customers too, especially for those who are reluctant to reveal where their cash comes from or those who'd rather

It's only a matter of time before the Finance Ministry wises up to this business, which at current estimates, rakes in more than Rs 100 million annually. Government regulations are necessary to make catering companies improve the quality of their products and services. Catering companies worldwide have an equal share in the food/service business compared to hotels and restaurants. They must be brought under the tax net, the quality of their assets must be monitored and aspects of labour legislation looked into. On the face of it, the current status quo might seem like a good thing—everyone has their cake and gets to eat it too—but it is vital to get the right regulations in place before the situation gets out of hand. Just some more food for thought as we tuck into more heaped platefuls at the next wedding reception. ♦

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Happy birthda

Take the guesswork out of gift giving with these great finds.



In the two millennia since his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ's birthday has become a global symbol of good cheer, life, hope, new beginnings—and a stunning display of wanton consumerism. You may have detected a certain sprinkle of cynicism about the festivities, but the Nazarene was right about several things, including “do unto others as you would have done unto you”, a maxim that lends itself rather

well to the Christmas ethos. Gifting something passably appropriate—mass-produced in Taiwan and hence easily found, quite ironically, at places like China Bazar—is easy. But what really counts is the thought. And the quality.

Which is why, this year, it comes as quite a pleasant surprise to find a whole goody-bag of presents made in Nepal worthy of setting under the Christmas tree. From wheels of Ilam cheese and Kakani strawberries to herbal soaps, *Nepali Times* scoured the Valley for things bright and beautiful. Nepali handicraft stores have long wised up to the lucre of the season. While most window displays along Kupondole are laden with tinsel, fairy lights and fake snow some have managed to bring in a genuine Nepali spin to what used to be a western festival.

The new nativity set has Mary in a *phariya* and Baby Jesus sleeps in a *kokro*, minded by a yak or two.

We didn't have time enough to stuff a turkey but that will be available, with all the trimmings at better hotels and Mike's Breakfast, where the Christmas Day buffets are always gastronomically memorable. At today's frantic pace, nobody has the time to bake their own Christmas cakes, let alone let it mature for the traditional 30 days or so. Why bake when you can

buy from Jawalakhel's Herman Helmer's Bakerie?

This holiday you might want to pass up the Bordeaux and try a little Nepali wine instead. Hinwa brings out a decent red and

white. If the palate protests, you could always salvage it with Executive Chef Victor Holla's excellent recipe: heat the red over a low flame, throw in a quartered orange, ginger, sugar (optional), lots of cinnamon, a little clove, cardamom and a dash of lemon heated through for some heart-warming grog. If you want a little more punch (no pun) add a dash of cognac or VSOP brandy.

Having established that Christmas is definitely not about

deprivation and denial (the devout save that for Lent), there is something wholesomely indulgent about Wild Earth's products. Their Tibetan aromatherapy oils in handcrafted miniature wooden chests, soap reborn as Soap Suds and other delights rival the best of Body Shop. The scented 'Hangover' herbal pillow should come in handy, especially post-holiday season.

We're not certain if it is indeed better to give than to receive, another Biblical saw, but if it involves a little thought, some imagination and a dose of good taste, both will be a pleasure. ♦

(Trishna Gurung)



ay, Jesus!

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Two-speed EU

BRUSSELS – As the conference on a new constitution for the European Union collapsed last weekend, a dispute arose over a “two-speed Europe”. At the close of the meeting, France and Germany, the core founder members of the EU, talked of the possibility of like-minded nations integrating more closely in the absence of a constitution, which could leave other states on the sidelines. “If we do not reach a consensus... a two-speed Europe will emerge,” German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said after the talks broke down. French President Jacques Chirac added that he also hoped to see a small group working together in closer cooperation. The problem of handling the EU constitution will now fall on Ireland who takes over EU presidency in January. The breakdown capped a year in which EU member states were split over war in Iraq, when EU budget rules were bent, Sweden voted against joining the Euro and Britain delayed a referendum on the same issue. The failure of the summit will undoubtedly add to the growing crisis of confidence in the EU. The first test of this will be elections to the European Parliament next June. (IPS)

The right rises

PARIS – Recent elections and opinion polls show that parties taking neo-fascist and racist positions are winning substantial support all over Europe. A new survey in France indicates that more than a fifth of voters support the neo-fascist Front National (FN) led by Jean-Marie Le Pen. The *Le Monde* survey showed 22 percent support Le Pen's program for massive expulsion of immigrants, especially of Muslims, of bringing back the death penalty and defence of “traditional values”. The survey says 30 percent of voters would find a FN candidate acceptable for presidency of a French region.

The success of neo-fascist political parties is not a French phenomenon. Right-wing extremists have risen to public office in Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Denmark and Portugal. In Italy, Austria and Denmark, openly racist politicians are or have been members of ruling coalitions. “Nationalism, fear of change and hatred of foreigners are the ingredients of this populism,” the *Courier International* said in a report titled ‘Xenophobe populists have launched the conquest of Europe’. The paper published a map of Europe in which only Sweden, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Britain, and Spain appear free of significant neo-fascist influence. (IPS)

Keeping the farm

GENEVA – The European Union's agricultural commissioner, Franz Fischler, of Germany, has just rejected the possibility of deeper reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the subsidies regimen that supports the “inefficient” farmers and exporters of the 15-member bloc. The United States, which last week lifted the trade barriers it had imposed on steel imports, has left intact its farm law, a series of subsidies for farmers with some similarities to European farm sector protectionism.

The reluctance of the EU, the US, Japan and other industrialised countries to dismantle the mechanisms that channel an estimated \$1 billion a day to the agricultural sector in the North, threatens to undermine the entire multilateral trade liberalisation system. The resounding failure of the last WTO ministerial meet was largely the result of disagreements on agricultural issues. The farm question remains at the forefront, and the elimination of all export subsidies is essential. The farm subsidies issue will return next year at the WTO Committee on Agriculture. The member states agreed to renew the activities of theme-specific committees, which had been suspended after the Doha ministerial meet in 2001. (IPS)

“We have him.”

But what are we going to do with him?



JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

President George W. Bush celebrated a second victory in Iraq with confirmation that occupation forces had captured fugitive former president Saddam Hussein on Saturday evening at a farmhouse outside Tikrit. But even the normally cocky US commander-in-chief, who addressed the nation by television from the White House, stressed that the former Iraqi dictator's arrest will not mean a quick end to the occupation's armed resistance.

“The capture of Saddam Hussein does not mean the end of violence in Iraq,” Bush declared solemnly at the conclusion of a short statement that described Saddam's detention as “crucial to the rise of a free Iraq”. Bush's resignation to more resistance reflected much of the reaction to the day's news, as lawmakers and analysts described the capture as a potentially major breakthrough that would not necessarily, however, prove decisive.

Indeed, some specialists warned even before Sunday's announcement that Saddam's death or detention would prove largely irrelevant to the difficult problems faced by US and coalition forces in Iraq. The reason lay in the fact that loyalty to Hussein—or even to his Ba'ath Party—had ceased to be a

catalyst for the insurgency and the complex internal political situation in Iraq has begun to fuel more tension and violence. Some even suggested that Saddam's capture might actually create new problems for the occupation by empowering sectors in the country's Shi'a community to test the occupation and back up their demands for direct elections to a new Iraqi government with more militant tactics. “Now that it is perfectly clear that (Hussein) is finished,” noted Iraq specialist Juan Cole, who teaches history at the University of Michigan, “the Shiites may be emboldened. They may therefore now gradually throw off their political timidity, and come out more forcefully into the streets when they disagree.”

Saddam, of course, had been target number one for US invasion forces, who actually tried to kill him in two “decapitation” air strikes in the course of the war. US commanders expressed great confidence that they were closing in on the former president after his two sons, Uday and Qsay, were killed in a four-hour shootout at a house where they were hiding in Mosul. But over the days and weeks that followed, the trail apparently went cold, although US military officials told reporters consistently they believed Saddam had gone to



ground somewhere around Tikrit.

In the end, that proved to be correct. Tipped off by Iraqi informants, US commanders said they found him in what they described as a 2 x 2.5m “spider hole” built under a farmhouse outside the city where Saddam grew up. The bearded fugitive reportedly offered no resistance to US troops, and Iraqi political leaders who were taken to the scene Sunday described his attitude as defiant. Videotape taken by his US captors showed him being examined by medics, possibly for head lice. Commanders said they did not broadcast his capture until they could determine positively through DNA testing that it was indeed the former dictator.

Although military commanders have long insisted that resistance to the occupation was being carried out primarily by “Saddam loyalists”, they had never ascribed to him any actual leadership role, apart from his status as a symbol, particularly for Ba'athists. That appeared to be borne out by the circumstances of his capture. Not only was Saddam bedraggled, he also lacked any apparent means of electronic or satellite communication, such as a telephone, with his supporters.

That was noted by some observers, who said it proved the

resistance was clearly operating independently of Saddam. “Given the location and circumstances of his capture, it makes clear that Saddam was not managing the insurgency, and that he had very little control or influence,” said Senator Jay Rockefeller, the Democratic leader on the Senate Intelligence Committee. “That is significant and disturbing because it means the insurgents are not fighting for Saddam: they're fighting against the United States.”

Others argued that, regardless of Saddam's relevance to resistance operations, his capture was bound to have a demoralising effect on the insurgents, particularly members of the Ba'ath. Michael O'Hanlon, a military specialist at the Brookings Institution, told National Public Radio (NPR) the psychological impact of the capture was a “devastating blow to (Saddam's) supporters”. That impact could be more significant on anti-Saddam sectors in Iraq, according to observers, although they failed to agree on whether it would, on balance, favour the occupation.

These theses, as well as the administration's continued insistence that the insurgency consists mainly of Saddam and Ba'ath loyalists, criminals and foreign “jihadis”, will be tested in the coming weeks and months. ♦ (IPS)

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ANALYSIS

by TIM SHORROCK

“A trustworthy ally”

Since World War II, Japan has played a subservient role to the United States in foreign policy on nearly every issue to come its way. Its servile role has often been embarrassing, and frequently left many observers with the impression that Japan was no more than a bit player to its master in Washington.

Nearly four years into the 21st century and more than a decade after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the relationship between the United States and Japan that was forged in the early days of the Cold War does not seem to have changed much at all. In fact, as the two nations celebrated the 50th anniversary of the US-Japan Security Treaty in November, Japanese leaders appeared to be bent on deepening their reliance on the United States, seemingly without any national debate about whether a close US military alliance with the United States is in Japan's best interest or not.

The best example of Japan's willingness to do the United States' bidding is the Middle East, where the cabinet of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi agreed last week to deploy 1,000 soldiers from Japan's Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to Iraq at Washington's request. Koizumi's dispatch of the SDF, which comes in the aftermath of the killing of two Japanese diplomats in Iraq, marks the largest overseas deployment of Japanese troops since the Second World War.

But this significant turn in Japanese policy would never have taken place if President Bush had not reversed two centuries of US policy with his unilateralist, pre-emptive strike on Iraq. “Rebuilding Iraq is necessary for the stability of the entire Middle East and the rest of the world, and is in Japan's best interests,” Koizumi said in a nationally broadcast news conference on 10 December. This, of course, exactly mirrors Bush's belief that rebuilding Iraq is necessary for the

stability in the Middle East and the world, as Bush has made clear in his many speeches on the subject.

Koizumi went on to say that Japan was meeting its responsibility as a long-time US ally, as opposed to a sovereign nation with its own obligations to the world. “The US is Japan's only ally, and it is striving very hard to build a stable and democratic government in Iraq,” he said. “Japan must also be a trustworthy ally to the US.” Apparently those words were designed to assuage the Japanese public, which is overwhelmingly opposed to his decision to involve Japan in America's overseas ventures. Recent polls show that only about one-third of Japanese voters approve of the sending of the non-combat troops to Iraq.

Japan's overseas deployments have been closely aligned with US policy goals as well. Its first overseas peacekeeping mission, which took place under UN auspices in 1993 in Cambodia, was widely seen in Japan as an experiment to gauge both foreign and domestic reaction. It was followed by another “blue helmet” peacekeeping mission to Kenya. In 1998, however, Japan's overseas military capacity expanded significantly when it signed a major agreement to provide logistics support to US forces in Asia. Then, following the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, which took the lives of 24 Japanese citizens, Japan sent 24 naval ships to the Indian Ocean.

As a junior partner to the United States in an alliance that has remained unchanged for over half a century, Japan may merely be moving in sync with the changes taking place in Washington—just as the former satellites of the Soviet Union might still be orbiting Moscow if their long-dead patron was still alive. ♦ (IPS)



Is Japan's relationship with the United States in their best interest?



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Needed: trust between king and parties

Keshar Jung Raymajhi in *Deshantar*, 14 December

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The king has said he would be happy if there is a referendum to decide whether the constitution should be amended by the parliament or whether a new constitution should be made through a constituent assembly. The peace talks failed in August because there was no agreement on the issue of a constituent assembly.

The Maoist rebels should have dropped the idea of a republic and accepted a constitutional monarchy. The government should also have acceded to a referendum for elections of a constituent assembly. Pleasing everyone is not possible in politics. In a multiparty system, agreements and disagreements are bound to happen. The political parties should submit a proposal to the king for an all-party government. Under the current circumstances, the king is not to be blamed at all. He already entrusted the government with responsibilities and so the latter should function, not the king. An article in the constitution clearly states that for the larger interest of the country the king will protect the constitution and will also follow it.

The king had no other choice but to sack the elected prime minister last year. After the royal palace massacre, King Gyanendra became the head of the state. He has ruled within the parameters of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. The king has the duty to use his rights to maintain law and order. The fact that the palace has deployed army, police and the armed police force proves that it has certainly felt threatened by the Maoist insurgency. King Birendra was of the opinion that the government should hold talks with Maoist rebels. I agree that the rebels should give up arms and reach an understanding through talks. I believe that they can also take part in elections.

There could have been some dialogue between the palace and the rebels through mediators in the past. The king appointed Surya Bahadur Thapa as prime minister in line with the condition of the country, the mindset of the people and the international context. He saw no solution coming from the five parties. The duty of the Raj Parishad is to counsel the king whenever he wants it. During my tenure with the Raj Parishad, we used to send our representatives to different districts. They used to come back with reports on the people's opinions and feelings. Based on that information, we counselled the king.

There has to be an understanding between the king and the parties. It is important for peace, solution of the Maoist problem and to provide a direction to the country. The political parties should stop being suspicious about the king and instead take him into their confidence.



Taxing pilgrims

Rajdhani, 14 November

राजधानी

More and more Muslim pilgrims to Mecca are facing extortion from Maoist rebels in different districts of the country. The Maoists are said to demand between Rs 25,000-30,000 from every Muslim preparing to leave for Mecca this year. Chairman of the central Haj committee under the Home Ministry, Mehbub Shah says his office is receiving increasing complaints from the Muslim community that rebels are targeting them. "The Maoists are approaching pilgrims going to Mecca and the government does nothing," he said. Shah added this could be the main reason behind dwindling numbers of Haj pilgrims this year. A Muslim pilgrim, in Kathmandu making preparations to leave for Saudi Arabia, said the Maoists had called him for donations, reasoning that if he could afford the journey to Mecca, he could give a 'donation' as well. Every Nepali Muslim has to spend between Rs 150,000 and 200,000 for the pilgrimage to Mecca. According to Islam, money for the Haj has to be earned by the pilgrim and can't be borrowed.

Brave guides

Ekal Silawal in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 15 December

Visitors to Royal Chitwan National Park will have an even more memorable trip if they have guides like Deepak Adhikari and Meghnath Niraula. Dutch citizens Ralf Pan Lith and Van Pikin were lucky to have guides who not only saved their lives, but also offered a rare sight of a man and beast wrestling it out. The guides spotted a tiger cub, but as they were trying to get closer the mother sprang out of the underbrush. Both the guides tried to beat away the tigress with their sticks, the big cat became fiercer and at one point had Meghnath's arm in her jaw. "She was very aggressive and pounced on whoever was closer," they recall. The hand-to-mouth combat lasted a few minutes until the tiger had enough and ran off with her cub. Meghnath and Deepak

took turns tackling the animal while the tourists ran to a safer distance. "We hit her on her nose and head till she retreated," they said. Said Pikin and Lith later: "Nepali guides are not only loyal but also brave."

Unaccountable

Kantipur, 14 December

कान्तिपुर

The security forces' indifference towards the deaths of ordinary citizens is apparent in the mounting toll of non-combatant deaths. If they continue to hurt more citizens and disregard human rights, this will only place the security forces in a negative light. It won't be long before civilians start to question the true objective of their operations. To be sure, this is not an easy job for the security forces, what with the Maoists brutally using women, children and other civilians as human shields in their assaults. Assassinations, oppression and unspeakable atrocities are common to the rebels, but sadly, these unjust actions are not confined solely to them. State terror is not and should not be the answer to organised terrorism.

Recent recklessness by security forces in Bhairawa and Pokhara must not be taken lightly. It is also inappropriate for the security forces to force villagers in Pandaun in Kailali to abandon their homes. Such actions will only help the Maoists to turn the people against the army. How does the depopulation of innocent villagers in Pandaun actually help the security effort? The army's job is to protect citizens and maintain peace and security, not spread more fear and violence. There is a lesson here from the government's Kilo Sierra II operation in the early days of the insurgency which fuelled the spread of the People's War.

If the security forces continue on the same path, it will give rise to mass unrest against the state. There must be a transparent process of punishing the guilty in recent atrocities. Internationally, the government faces potential embarrassment from the global community as word of human rights violations spread. If the state tries to

protect, hide or whitewash these crimes, we will regard it as an anti-citizen policy and question the true intentions of the state.

Maya's story

Kantipur, 16 December

कान्तिपुर

Rana Bahadur's spirit was so shaken by the gory sight of his daughter's dead body that he could not go back home. He had watched helplessly as the security forces shot her down just outside their house at Chamkharka in Kabhre 14 December. Rana Bahadur was basking in the sun when all of a sudden about 30 security personnel arrived at his door. His daughter, Maya, was busy with household chores. The soldiers surrounded her, beat her with a stick and then shot her dead. The father did not have the courage to raise his voice, even as this tragedy unfolded before his eyes.



"We saw the soldiers open fire," says neighbour Ram Bahadur Tamang. "But we remained quiet because we were very afraid." Earlier, a soldier had come to Maya and asked information on her. He left when she denied any knowledge, only to return later with more men. Maya was dragged to a shed and summarily executed. The soldiers then buried her in a shallow grave near the house, which has begun to smell. Terrified neighbours refuse to even leave their homes and a boy who witnessed the incident stays cooped up in his room. Maya married a Maoist cadre last year but had been living with her father for two months after running away from her husband. Villagers suspect she was killed for being a Maoist's wife.

युनिफाइड कमाल



Unified Miracle
Balaju

Bhairawa

Pokhara

हिमाल

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Those willing to retaliate against the Maoists will be given arms."
— Army spokesman Col Dipak Gurung in *Kantipur*, 18 December

Security first

Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

हिमाल

Turning schools into police stations, that seems to be the way things are going in Rahjena VDC of Banke. Gyankunj Secondary School has been removed and replaced with Maheswori Armed Police Division's DIG Office. There have been protests to save the only secondary school in this village. "We pleaded with them but they kept building the police station here," says Shanker Sharma, chairman of the school's management committee. "We even went to see the prime minister in Kathmandu, but we were told the priority is security not schooling," says Dipak Kumar Malla, school principal.

Two years ago, the locals worked together to build the school in an abandoned government building. In just two years, the number of students rose from 25 to 400. They happily pay Rs 150 as monthly fees as the annual fund of Rs 50,000 from the VDC office is not sufficient to meet the annual school expenses of Rs 700,000. Even during the construction phase of the police station, the Maoists bombed and destroyed one of the buildings. The armed police DIG office building has occupied not just the school but also moved the VDC office, post office and a centre for the handicapped.



Back at Sundarijal >50 “Prison is a relief.”

King Birendra finally meets BP Koirala on 7 June 1977 and tells him he is suffering from a throat problem. He travels to New York for an immediate operation, and spends the next five months in convalescence. There are no entries in the diary during this period. But BP resumes his diary on 8 November, the day he returned to Kathmandu and, for the second time that year, is whisked away from the airport to prison. At the Police Training Centre, BP is so tired that he thinks going back to prison again is a relief.

Monday, 30 May 1977
[no entry]

Tuesday, 31 May
PTC [Police Training Centre]
Today a team of Drs (Mrigendra, Sharma, Dongol or Gongol, Surgeon Laxminarayan, ENT) examined me very thoroughly and afterwards went into consultation among themselves for over an hour. Then told me that they want a thorough medical checkup for me. By their behaviour I could gather that they suspect heart trouble, altho they have asked me not to worry. I would be so happy if they took me to the Bir Hospital for my medical checkup—this will be an agreeable change of environment. But I don't think they will do it for fear of people's abduction. They will do the checkup in the detention camp itself.

[1-2 June pages missing]

Friday, 3 June
X ray taken. 10 pictures at the Bir Hospital. Sushila, Rosa, Chetana, Niru, Santosh, Kalpu with her daughter came to see me.

4-6 June
[no entries]

Tuesday, 7 June
PTC
In the evening, met the king who told me that I was suffering from thickening of the artery of my neck—condition with possibility of stroke, death or blindness.

8 June
[no entry]

Thursday, 9 June
Kathmandu to Delhi—released for treatment. Left Kathmandu with Sushila and Chetana.

9-10 June
[no entries]

Saturday, 11 June
Delhi to Bombay. Left with Sushila for Bombay. Met JP.

Sunday, 12 June
Left for US at 2AM with Sushila. New York at 3PM.

Monday 13 June
New York

Tuesday 14 June
Admitted in the New York hospital for operation.

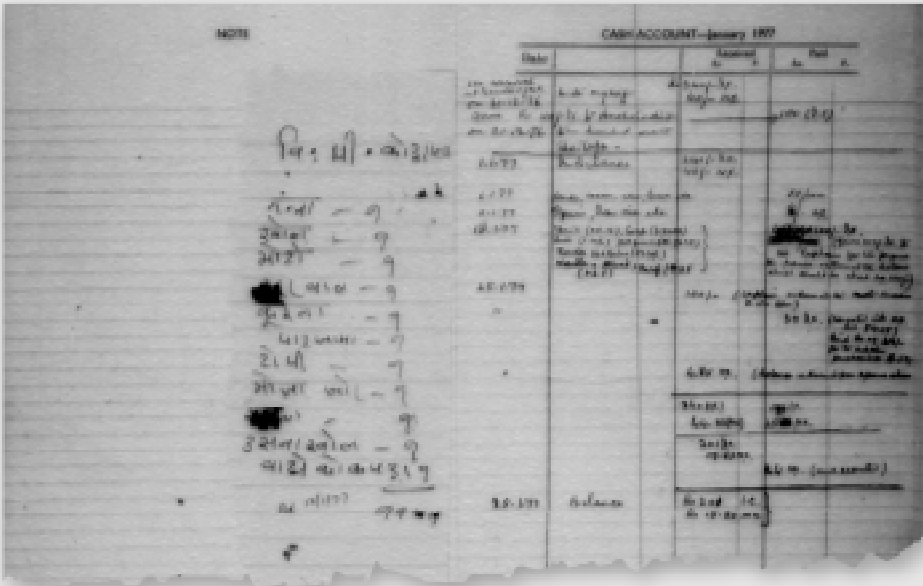
[15-22 June pages missing]

Thursday, 23 June
[no entry]

Friday, 24 June
Left hospital for my hotel.

Police Training School (Detention Camp)
8.11.77

How to begin? What to write? In detention I become subjective—I think about my own mental state. I can only record—not see events that occur outside of me—my thoughts. I vividly recollect all the details of the small events of the day—scenes at the Patna airport where a large no. of my



friends including Chandra Shekhar (President, Janata Party) and Karpuri Thakur (CM, Bihar) had come to bid me goodbye, most of them with moist eyes, garlands, flowers, momentary attacks of extreme tiredness and weariness, accompanied with extreme heat, exhausting me, myself yielding to drowsiness, Shailaja's anxious inquiries as to my sadness (she thought that perhaps the immediate prospect of arrest had saddened me) my constant thoughts about Sushila when I left 4 days ago in Varanasi, her pale anxious face haunting me, photographs and more photographs—what will happen when we land at Kathmandu airport? Shailaja whispers don't worry, I am always and always with you, I will keep faith with you, etc—a telephone call from JP wishes me all the luck in life + invokes god's blessings, regrets couldn't come to airport because he is too weak + ill. And then at the Kathmandu airport. Shailaja presses my hand and again whispers she would keep faith with me always and always. Why has she to assure me of her faith? Rishikesh Shaha has been fidgety all though the plane ride, says take it from me, you won't be arrested + then when he sees a helicopter parked by the side of the plane which had halted at the far northern end of the airport, says—why is this helicopter here? Suspecting that I might be whisked away to...he proves wrong on both counts. Some officers enter the aircraft and ask me to disembark. Other passengers are asked to remain in the aircraft. Shailaja collects our handbags some of the officers help her in carrying them to our waiting jeeps. I walk up to Shahaji who is already in one of the police jeeps and shake his hands + then I start walking up to Shailaja who rushes to me in a bewildered state—things happened so fast. Says—keep faith, dear, don't worry. I hold her hand, pat her cheeks + return to my jeep. Shailaja carries my hand bag up to the jeep, and the jeep starts + takes a sharp turn. The police officer accompanying me is DSP...Straight brought before the tribunal. I raise technical objection to my arrest at the airport + my production before the court made in police custody. Am extremely tired and exhausted—prevented from getting the assistance of my legal adviser. At about 3PM brought back to the old place of detention in the Police Training Centre. The day had been extremely hectic—why for the last 15 days I had no rest or enough sleep. Prison is a relief. But homesickness assails the moments I step into my room in the detention camp. GM is very much reduced.



KUMAR BASNET in TOKYO

Among other Rana rulers of his period, Deb Shumshere was a reformer and was impressed by Japan's Meiji Reformation and the rapid strides that the country was taking in science and technology. He looked at Japan as a role model and initiated education reforms in the country in 1901.
As part of a strategy to reduce dependence on the British in India, he also seemed to have decided to cultivate closer ties with Japan. The first outcome of this decision was the departure of eight Nepali students for higher studies in Japan more than 100 years ago (*see pic, top*). The strategy was what is today known as 'technology transfer', and Nepali rulers decided on the subjects that they felt the country needed: armaments, horticulture, engineering and mining.
At this time, Japan was in the process of

reform: the Tokugawa era had ended and power was restored to Emperor Meiji in 1868. Reform work was carried out in education, law, transportation, communication, commerce and Western-style industrialisation had started. Then in 1899, the Japanese Zen ascetic, Ekai Kawaguchi, became the first Japanese to live and travel extensively in Nepal. He initially entered Nepal illegally (since the country was closed to foreigners at that time), masquerading as a Chinese monk on his way to Tibet. This lead to suspicions that he was actually a Japanese spy. However, historical records in his birthplace, Sakai, show that he was indeed a Buddhist monk with a keen interest in collecting Tibetan Buddhist scriptures and Sanskrit manuscripts.
Kawaguchi stayed for nearly a year at Tukuche, Marpha and Chharang and brushed up on Tibetan which he had studied in Darjeeling. During his stay, he sought to

100 years of Nepal-Nippon

One hundred years ago, Nepal's Rana rulers were so impressed by Japan's process of modernisation that they looked upon it as a role model.

secretly travel to Tibet and ultimately succeeded in doing so through Dolpo in July, 1900. His book *Three years in Tibet*, published in Madras in 1909, narrated his travels.
According to the different books on Japan-Nepal relations, Kawaguchi liked Nepal so much that he suggested to the Rana rulers that more effort should be made in education for development. It was on his suggestion that Nepali students were sent to Japan.
The scholarships materialised during the rule of Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere. Eight students, 17 cooks and attendants and a guide from India, Swami Giri, were sent to Japan. Leaving Nepal on March 1902, the students boarded a ship in Bombay on 29 April 1902 for their 46 day journey to Yokohama with stops in Colombo, Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong and Kobe.
Arrangements for schooling was requested from the British legation in Tokyo by the Nepal government and students were admitted to three government institutions: Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku (presently Tokyo University, Department of Technology), Tokyo Kogyo Gakko (presently Tokyo Institute of Technology) and Noka Daigaku (presently Tokyo University, Department of

Agriculture) and were officially called the 'State Students of Nepal'.
The students were aged 18-27 and they had interpreters to overcome their language barrier. Among them were Jang Narsingh Rana and Bhakta Bahadur Basnet studying ammunition engineering, Deb Narsingh Rana and Bal Narsingh Raimajhi in mining, Deep Narsingh Rana in agriculture, Hem Bahadur Rajbhandari in mechanical engineering, Rudra Lal Singh in applied chemistry and Bichar Man Singh in ceramics.
The students lived in a large house and because of their high caste, some had their own cooks and attendants. By all accounts, the Nepali students were diligent and worked hard. They returned to Nepal in 1905 and were immediately given jobs to put what they learnt to good use.
Students who studied ammunition and mining were employed to develop the Howzer mountain gun, three-pound gun, and worked to modernise Nepal's arsenals. Deep Narsingh who studied agriculture planted the first Japanese flowers and fruits, wisteria, chrysanthemum, persimmon and chestnut, which have now almost become native to Nepal. Another student was

appointed to Saptari for the construction of the Chandra Nahar, Nepal's first irrigation canal. Bal Narsingh Raimajhi minted the one paisa and five paisa coins at the request of Chandra Shumshere.
Although they were enthusiastic about developing the country, some Rana rulers became suspicious that the students had been infected by the 'democracy bug' while in Japan. They started to talk about democracy, development and even about the ability to make grenades with which to attack government offices! Most were subsequently transferred out of Kathmandu. Some were even exiled.
The seeds that were planted then by Kawaguchi, Deb Shumshere and the eight pioneering students is now being carried forward by more than 200 Nepali students studying in Japan. The Nepali Students' Association in Japan (NESAJ) has 138 registered student members today: 22 enrolled as undergraduates, 52 in masters programs and 64 in PhD courses. ♦

Kumar Basnet is a PhD student at Tokyo's Sophia University, and president of the Nepali Students' Association in Japan. He wrote this piece on the occasion of Japan's National Day, 23 December.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **International Painting Workshop** Paintings by expatriate and Nepali artists from 20-26 December at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Divine Light of Tibet** Photographs by Gabriela Mayorquin 21 December–5 January at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Reflections of Colour** Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **Sofa so good** Paintings by Kripa Joshi at Dhokaima Café at Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- ❖ **The Last Picture Show: Faces of Chitwan** Photographs by Susal Stebbins, till 21 December at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Our times, our lives** Cartoons by Batsayana till 28 December at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694



EVENTS

- ❖ **Mela at St Xavier's:** Games, food stalls, horse rides and bingo. 11AM–5PM on 20 December.
- ❖ **Inter-Cultural Film Society:** *La Vida es Silbar* (Life is Whistling) by Fernando Perez, Cuba. 5.30 PM on 21 December at NTB, Bhrikuti Mandap.
- ❖ **Children's Christmas party** at The Bakery Café, Teku. 12PM onwards, 20 December. Tickets: Bakery Café outlets.
- ❖ **Santa's Groove Station** featuring Cadenza Collective and a buffet. Rs 999, 24 December at Shangri-la Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Christmas carolling** at Hotel Yak & Yeti 24 December. Everyone is invited to join the fun! 4248999

DRINK

- ❖ **Cosmic Cocktails** and chic home furnishings at Mitra Lounge Bar and Mausam homestyle boutique. Above Cafe Mitra, Thamel. 4259015
- ❖ **Fusion** at Dwarika's for over 100 cocktails, happy hour and Abhaya & The Steam Injuns every Friday. 4479488
- ❖ **Eggnog**, hot rum drinks, special wines with the best steaks at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4433043

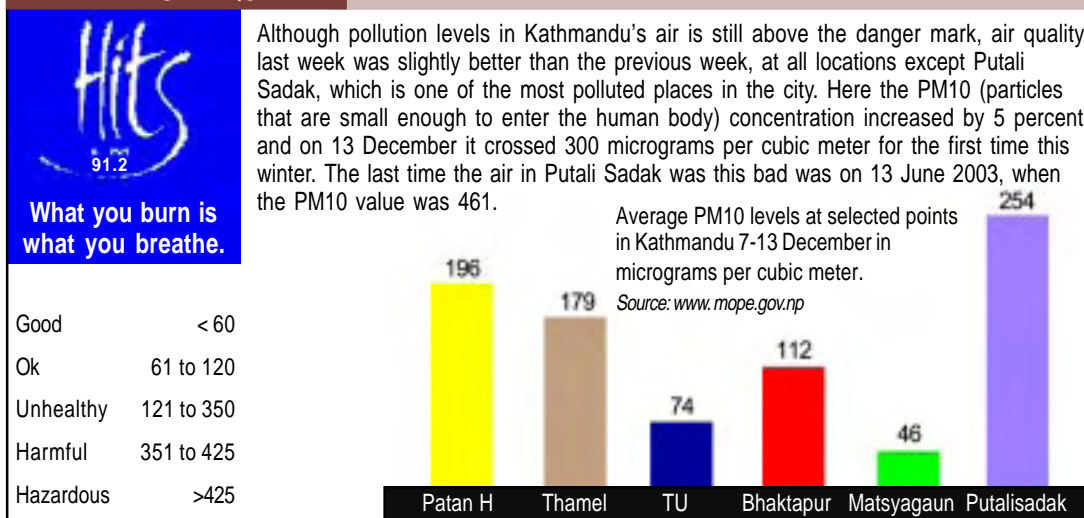
FOOD

- ❖ **Three course traditional turkey Christmas dinner** for Rs 850. 6.30 PM onwards, 25 December at Summit Hotel, Kopundol Height.
- ❖ **Special Christmas menu:** Avocado with prawn cocktail, roast turkey or goose, plum pudding and more. Rs 1,200 per person. Pre-booked groups only. 20–25 December at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5543017
- ❖ **Traditional Christmas Dinner** and wine at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel, 4250440
- ❖ **Bring your wine** along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- ❖ **Christmas Eve** dinner on 24 December. Single Rs 1,499, couples Rs 2,499. **New Year's Eve** Single Rs 1,500, couples Rs 2,500. Special overnight packages at Dwarika's Hotel Dinner and live band. 4479488
- ❖ **Celebrate at the Hyatt:** 24 December - Buffet at The Café, set menu at Rox Restaurant, live band at Rox Bar. 25 December - Christmas Buffet Lunch at The Café. 31 December - buffet with live band at The Café, seafood dinner at Rox Restaurant, three DJs at Rox Bar with juggling bartenders. 4491234
- ❖ **Roadhouse Café** for speciality coffees. Opp St Mary's School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- ❖ **Traditional Newari Thali** at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632
- ❖ **Vegetarian specialities** at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Christmas Eve dinner** at the Chimney Restaurant, Yak & Yeti. Five-course traditional roast turkey dinner by the fire. Rs 2,499 per person. 4248999

GETAWAYS

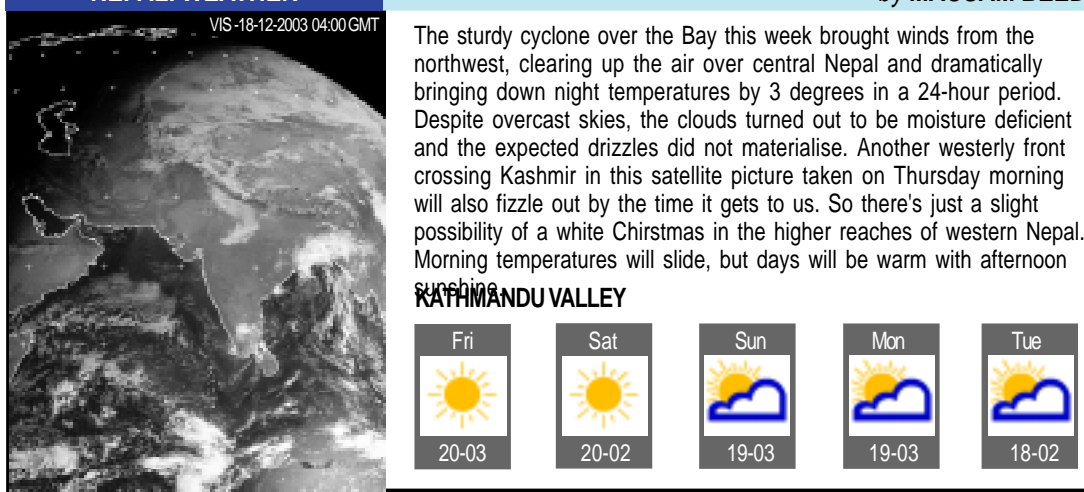
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Grab your tissues, Karan Johar is back with all his legion. His mission is to make *Kal Ho Naa Ho* the biggest tearjerker of 2003. Directed by Nikhil Advani, scripted and produced by Karan Johar, the film has music by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy and lyrics by Javed Akhtar. The script trudges the tried and tested path of yesteryear's hit *Anand*, but with the contemporary look. Set in a New York neighbourhood, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* takes a look at the life of the Kapurs, a half-Punjabi, half-Catholic family. Naina Catherine Kapur (Priety Zinta) shoulders the responsibility of her family which includes her mother Jennifer Kapur (Jaya Bachchan) and great grandmother. Enter Aman Mathur (Shah Rukh Khan), an incorrigible optimist even in the face of his ailment, who decides to make a few changes in Naina's life. To accomplish this task, he ropes in his friend Rohit (Saif Ali Khan). Weighing heavily on its emotional quotient, *Kal Ho Naa Ho* is guaranteed to get your popcorn soggy.

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“Hamro Dasai”

Nepali Christians prepare for Christmas.



Church of the Assumption, Jawalakhel.

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Nepal's small Christian community is excited about Christmas, which it calls "hamro Dasai". Baby Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Joseph, the Three Kings—the Christian icons of Christmas are being Nepalified.

At the Church of the Assumption in Jawalakhel, Fr Bogati describes what attracts even people from other faiths to come see the Christmas day celebrations: "They feel at home, like in a temple." During Nepali mass anyone can perform *arati* with *dhoop* instead of the incense used in traditional Catholic services. "And after communion, they are given flowers as *prasad*, or blessings so they don't go away empty handed," the father explains.

The church itself is a testament to cultural overlaps. The brick exterior is lined with pillars reminiscent of those



found at Hindu temples across the Valley. Guardian angels appear as *dwar palaks* at either side of the entrance (see pic, bottom left) and the heavy doors are carved wood complete with Buddhist lotus symbols. On the walls, *thangka* hangings depict various Biblical scenes. In one, Jesus and his disciples break bread over the Last Supper inside a Nepali house while ominous black clouds swirl overhead.

Before Christmas Eve mass, many Christians go carolling, a custom some say has been imported from Darjeeling. Carol *khelne*, or "playing carol", is similar to the *deosi* and *bhailo* traditions during Tihar. It's a door-to-door ministry, sharing the good news of Jesus' birth and being witnesses to their faith. Some of the carols are English staples translated into Nepali while others are original Nepali compositions.

Like in the last few Christmases, this year there will be no Midnight Mass because of transportation and security problems. Most churches will instead celebrate an evening mass. Then, as in Sagar Rizal's home, the service is followed by a family celebration. "It's a good time for family to come together and have a *bhoj*. The feast is mostly Nepali food and some bring birthday cakes. We decorate our homes and wear new clothes."

Rizal belongs to the Nepal Bible Church in Satdobato, a Protestant church, which has a greater following than Catholics. The first Catholic missionaries came to Nepal even before Prithibi Narayan, but Shah rulers mistrusted Catholic priests so they retreated to India. Says Fr Bogati: "Basically we are the same. Even as Christians we have our Nepali culture, which we should keep."

On Christmas Day this year, Fr Joseph Thaler will conduct morning mass at Jawalakhel. Most will sit cross-legged on the floor and sing hymns. When he first came to live in Nepal in 1977, Thaler lived with a Brahmin



Christian thangka.

family. "I saw them truly practice and live out their faith, which inspired me to live out my own. People's fundamental questions were the same as were their struggles with what is right and just, transcending any -isms."

As 25-year-old Dina Tamang, a member at The Church of the Assumption, prepares to celebrate Christmas, she'll go to confession on

24 December. "Before Jesus is born, we believe we have to clean ourselves of *pap*," she says, using the Nepali word for sin. Afterwards, her family gets together for a typically Nepali feast, except for a Christmas fruitcake. Her dreams of a perfect Christmas are complete when her friends, mostly Hindu and Buddhist, come to church on Christmas night. ♦

Catholic services:

24 December Christmas Eve Mass at The Church of the Assumption, Jawalakhel 6PM 5526732
25 December Christmas Day Mass at The Church of the Assumption, Jawalakhel 9AM & 5PM 5526732

Protestant services:

25 December Christmas Day Mass at Birendra International Convention Centre, Baneshwor 10AM 5533564 (Koinonia Patan Church)
25 December Christmas Day Mass at Nepali Isaimandali Gyaneshwor Church, Gyaneshwor 11AM 4414489

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

100 years of flying around aimlessly



This week the world is celebrating the centennial of powered flight. Giant leaps have been taken ever since those two famous brothers, whose names escape me at the moment, became the first heavier-than-air humans to fly at an altitude of six feet above mean sea level, and remain airborne for exactly 2.5 seconds before smashing into a parked horse. The exhilaration! The thrill! The excruciating pain!

It is natural for us, living as we do in the technologically superior age of double-decker Airbus 380s, mothballed Concorde and Twin Otters with no toilets, to pooh-pooh the achievement of those early aviation pioneers. Just try doing controlled man-powered flight yourself. Go on, attach a pair of wings to your bicycle and attempt to soar into the wide blue yonder while coasting down Panitanki downhill. Not so easy is it?

Ever since early hominoids gazed up at the birds

and watched them swoop across the heavens to drop guano on the heads of unsuspecting passersby, he has yearned to do the same (swoop across the heavens, I mean). In the course of trying to imitate the birds and the bees, mankind has had many false starts during which unexpectedly, and without warning, the force of gravity has made its presence felt, and mankind has had to be scraped off the asphalt so he could try flying again another day. But by and large, we must say that, we as a species, have made progress in the last century in pinpointing the main cause of deep vein thrombosis.

Here in Nepal, the Ministry of Uncivil Aviation has in the past 50 years gone through a lot of trouble to ensure that the romance of domestic airline travel keeps abreast of the latest technological advancements by making it mandatory to have family-size barf bags on all flights to Jomsom after 9AM.

Modern aviation is governed by Murphy's Law, which states inter alia that the guy with the window seat on a long flight has to be the chap with a technical malfunction of his bladder. Or, it is always the most garrulous gentleman in the universe with his ample girth who gets to sit next to you. On a direct night flight to Europe, the bulkhead bassinet in front of you must be occupied by a baby in an advanced state of colic who wails non-stop right across the airspace of all the ex-Soviet Central Asian republics. Sooner or later another flight to Biratnagar is going to fly to Bhairawa, but as long as it doesn't collide with a catering truck, we don't mind. ♦

NEPALI SOCIETY

Immortal strings



For Nepali *gaine*, making it big in the music industry is a distant dream. The wandering minstrels with their unique three-string fiddles called *sarangi*, are often ostracised for belonging to a 'low' caste. But Jhalakman Gandarba rose above the social restrictions on the strength of his talent for music and lyrics. The outpouring of national loss at his death last month was a fitting tribute to a man who did more to make the *gaine's* *sarangi* and plaintive lyrics popular in Nepal and abroad than anyone else.

Born to a poor fisherman near Pokhara, Jhalakman spent his youth fishing and singing door-to-door with his *sarangi*. An encounter with the legendary folk poet Dharma Thapa in his village changed the direction of his life. Jhalakman was invited to Kathmandu to participate in a nationwide folk music competition where his stirring "*He Barai...*" was judged first. This passionate ballad describes the loss and bereavement of a Gurkha soldier's family after he is killed in action in a foreign war, and is relevant now more than ever because the haunting words resonate at a time when Nepalis are dying at the hands of fellow-Nepalis.

The respect and honour that Jhalakman received after his death was in sharp contrast to the disregard shown to him by established musicians and singers when he was alive. The singer himself was unselfish about his talent and taught anyone keen to learn how to play the *sarangi*, although many never credited him when they became famous. Jhalakman's wish to pass on his musical talent to his grandchildren remained unfulfilled and his impoverished family couldn't even raise money for his funeral.

Modest till the end, Jhalakman played from the heart, for the love of his music. He could coax 36 different notes from his instrument and recorded more than 250 songs in his lifetime—music that will live on in Nepali hearts. Jhalakman's immortal words in an interview shortly before his death: "As long as the *madal* and *sarangi* exist, Nepali music will never die." ♦ (Peshal Pokhrel)

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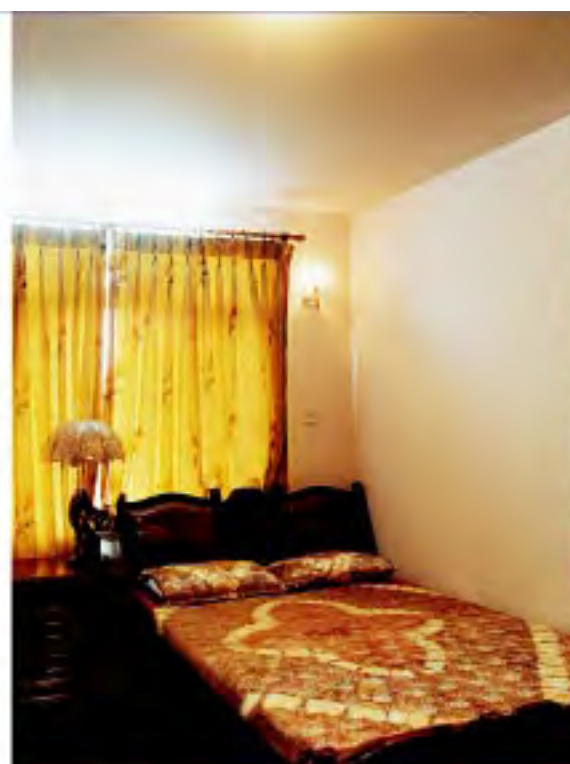
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