JANUARY: After months of secret negotiations, a ceasefire is declared. The government withdraws the terrorist label and bounty on capture of Maoists.

FEBRUARY: Maoists organise mass meetings in various cities, including Kathmandu. Baburam Bhattarai and Ram Bahadur Thapa make public appearances for the first time. Government forms negotiating team headed by Minister Narayan Singh Pun.

MARCH: First formal peace talks between the government and Maoists begin in Kathmandu. Despite the ceasefire, Maoist extort and threat continue throughout the country although there aren’t any major clashes.

APRIL: Tourism in the peak trekking season is hit by the effect of SARS. China seals border. A Helmimedia poll in Nepal new year shows 70% of Nepalis think Maoist demands can be met by peaceful means and 20 percent would vote for them if they fly down arms.

MAY: Five parties launch first phase of agitation to force the king to resume his 4 October move. Their demand: either restore parliament or form an all party government. The United States looks Maoists as a terrorist organization, prompting the rebels to harden their anti-American stance. Nepal benefits from worldwide publicity at the Everest Golden Jubile celebrations. New records and traffic jams on the world’s highest mountain.

JUNE: Prime Minister Lalendra Bahadur Chaudhary resigns, setting off a scramble to replace him. King Gyanendra asks parties to recommend candidate, but opts for Surya Bhattarai Thapa instead of Madhav Nepal. Parties close down 8,000 schools all over the country for a week.

JULY: In response to a Maoist demand, the government bans three rebel leaders to resume peace talks. Agitating parties come up with an 18 point program aimed at curtailing royal powers. There are no signs of reconstruction and rehabilitation as the period of no war no peace drags on.

AUGUST: Children are declared a zone of peace. Army kills 17 Maoists in Doramaba just as talks are being held in Dang. Maoists declare an end to the ceasefire, government restores terrorist tag. Maoists begin urban assassination killing senior army colonel in Kathmandu.

SEPTEMBER: Nepal joins the WTO in Cancun. Conflict escalates with heavy Maoist casualties. Maoists take attacks down to the tarai. Kathmandu-based ambassadors lean on parties to patch up with king; they tone down agitation.

OCTOBER: Under pressure from civil society Maoists declare a 9-day unilateral Dasai ceasefire. Security forces continue operations.

NOVEMBER: The government sets up a unified command under the army and says it will arm villagers to resist Maoists. Both moves condemned by rights groups and donors. Maoists use landmines to target security patrols with devastating effect. Interpol once again issues red corner notice against 11 Maoist leaders. Despite insurgency, tourism rebounds.

DECEMBER: Five parties resume agitation, among these student leaders anger protestors. Government announces amnesty and rehabilitation for Maoists who surrender. National Human Rights Commission issues list of more than 808 people disappeared by both sides.

As 2003 draws to a close, neither the palace and the parties, nor the army and the Maoists show signs of negotiating. What is in store for 2004?

Best case scenario: Palace and the parties agree on a national government that will rise above vested interest to agree on a ceasefire, while working towards local elections. The Maoists could be persuaded to join the political mainstream and conduct parliamentary elections in two years.

Worst case scenario: The king and parties carry on as sworn enemies, pushing the parties to join the Maoists in a republic cause. The parties’ agitation merges with the insurgency and the country sinks further into anarchy. The insurgency takes on an ethnic edge, there is greater militarisation, more human rights violations and at least another decade of worthless conflict.

Best and worst case scenarios

This year was bloodier than last year. What will next year be like?

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Weekly Internet Poll # 117. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Now that their leaders have been released, should the students call off their agitation?

Total votes: 1,494

Weekly Internet Poll # 116
Q. Is a military solution the only way to resolve Nepal’s insurgency?

Tourism in the peak trekking season is hit by the effect of SARS, China seals border. A Helmimedia poll in Nepal new year shows 70% of Nepalis think Maoist demands can be met by peaceful means and 20 percent would vote for them if they fly down arms.
EDITORIAL

IT’S NEVER TOO LATE

There are times these days when the sense of déjà vu is so acute it gets unbearable. The appearance on state television of Prime Minister Bishnu Prasad Dash and the greeting “How are you doing?” to the reigning monarch during which the monarch, Shengman Zhang, had an awkwardly polite conversation with the Director of the World Bank, Ken Ohashi, the World Bank country director in Nepal, Ken Ohashi, had an unenviable but historic role to play. The world will look at this and ask how a country like Nepal, which is supposed to be a democracy, could allow such an event to happen. The world will also ask how such an event could take place in a country that has a constitution.

But not the omnipotent king of Nepal. For him, perhaps, the world was proof to many of the ascendance of Panchayat-era throwbacks in Kathmandu. We get vertigo just watching them struggle to grab the steering wheel as the bus with all of us in it careens to the edge. It is a familiar sycophantic ambience in the air. We get hopelessly as hundreds of people personally have watched this before for this to be a fluke: the belief that nominating a new prime minister is some kind of a solution, the announcement of yet another royal civic reception in Nepalgunj next month, a familiar syndromic absence in the air. There is a reckless disregard for public will and national sentiment. When you see power as a zero sum game, there is a 50-50 chance you will lose. To win at all cost, it is tempting then, to use militarisation, religious fundamentalism, or extra-constitutional forces’ during the Panchayat period is still a bulwark against the rise of the hardline right. Having been consistently centrist throughout his career, he apparently sees familiar ghosts from 20 years ago against the rise of the hardline right. Having been consistently centrist

STATE OF THE STATE

Boom, gloom and doom

We live in the present with the memories of our past, and undermine our future.

A storm is coming into the history of Nepal with the Khet Massacre, Jang Bahadur del three things. First, he acquired social legitimacy by forging intermarriages between the Shah clans with their Kunwar soldiers. Second, he reinforced it by other bundhaning or called the composition. Third, he acquired political legitimacy from the East India Company by offering the services of the Godha Army for activities like crushing the 1837 Sepoy Mutiny for which Kritsune gave Jung the appellation ‘British dog’. These three moves served Jang’s extended clan for well over 150 years, even though his sons had to enjoy their prosperity in exile when his brothers did not. It was true that he had done to fair and illustrious uncles. The cross-marriages between the Shahs and Ranas fused the two into the single ruling family of Nepal.

Rai, Magar and Gurung youngsters

Look at the way he is passing the new constitution. He has not found it necessary to advise the country along this line.

Kathmandu

ROYAL NEPAL

Your pull piece on Royal Nepal Airlines (RNAs) battles against corruption (km #175) does nothing to mitigate the suffering of thousands of passengers who have been inconvenienced and treated like dirt by Nepal’s flag carrier. Nor does it force the airline to take responsibility for its dismal performance. The airline’s managing director you interviewed in the same issue is right when he says the airline

C.K. Lal
Of the people

Voice of the people

A television program shows that Nepalis still have the courage to speak up. The nation listens.

Walls limit our freedom, said poet Basu Sashi in another age. Those lines make more sense today than when it was penned: the higher and thicker our walls, the more insecure we become.

Four months ago, when we started broadcasting ‘Amar Abhimat’ on Nepal Television every Tuesday night, it seemed like a bold step because, unlike conventional Kathmandu-centred talk programs with studio guests, we took our studio right to the people. We thought it would not be easy gathering people in places where speaking the truth on camera was suicidal. But we underestimated how brave people can be when they have suffered and have nothing to lose.

In four months we visited 24 districts, and we were overwhelmed by the extent of local participation. Numbers grew from 30 participants in Gokha to 100 in Daddhura. People walked for days to be on the show and pour our their sorrows and shared their hopes. The format is open: everyone gets an opportunity to speak as long as possible. They are intelligent and speak with simplicity about violence, extortion, threats, corruption and hopes for peace.

There is no manipulation or superficiality. Without fear they express their frustrations towards both the army and the Maoists. At times, it is in the editing rooms who have to think twice about including statements that could get them into trouble.

As a journalist, this is satisfying work: we are pushed into the background and the medium takes over. It brings satisfaction and also tears of sorrow to hear the suffering of the Nepali people who have been made childless, widows and orphans.

Jashoda Sharma in Baglung exists in a limbo. Her husband was disappeared and although the village regards her a widow, she still walks around with sindoor. “For me now? It doesn’t make any difference whether I live or die.” In Gokha, a brother laments the loss of his sister but feels nothing for his other sibling who joined the rebels and died in an encounter. “He died for his political commitments but my sister had nothing to do with the Maoists, she wouldn’t even hurt an ant,” Rudra Pokhrel, principal of a local school, said on a Mat Abhimat.

Participants at a Mat Abhimat program in Pokhara.

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Pala. He says that he has seen too many young people die and disappear. The tears running down his wrinkled face say the rest.

Through Amar Abhimat, the unheard voices of Nepal’s rural population from the most violence-ridden districts are now on record. Of course there are risks involved. Just two days before Dasai, in Saule Bazar at Doti, we arrived at an encounter and found three policemen bleeding to death on the ground. That sight left me and our crew sleepless for many nights. At Dipiyal, a Maoist disguised as an army officer tried to force a police constable to pressurise us into giving him a ride in our car. And on our way back to Dhangadi, we found ourselves in the middle of a shootout.

The 21 talk shows we have broadcast so far made me realise that the people are still optimistic and aspire to a better future. The people of Nepal, away from the cities and big towns, are honest, hardworking and don’t have big dreams. They want peace and understood very clearly what’s at stake. We all stand to learn more by listening to what they want to say.

Amar Abhimat airs at 9PM every Tuesday on Nepal Television.
P

order, if you will, the importance of time. Not the magazine, which at its best is a prop for not showing fear on airplanes. No, I want to think this week about the time that governs when we sleep, work, travel and live our lives. We can’t control its passage. At best, we can try to manage time. But, contrary to what quite a few foreign residents of this capital city may believe, we can’t stop time. It rolls on, even when you’re wearing sandals and a dashiki. One of the most effective techniques of managing time came to us from a Canadian named Sanford Fleming. A railway engineer by profession, Fleming got to thinking about the passage of time when he missed a train in 1878. It was a simple enough idea. A single system of time for the entire world that began in the village of Greenwich and marched away east and west. Less than 10 years later, the entire world had adopted his notion of standard time—based on the British imperial notion that the world was centered on London. It was a simple enough idea. A single system of time for the entire planet that began in the village of Greenwich and marched away east and west in one hour intervals, encircling the globe and ensuring that everyone got to do their daily activities in—well—daylight.

This was an especially important concept in a place like North America. Canada and the United States are wide countries and thanks to Sanford Fleming’s idea, New Yorkers and Los Angelinos, along with everyone got to do their daily activities in—well—daylight. Canadians and Americans can accommodate both the imperial center and the fringes of its far flung possessions but modern, ostensibly anti-colonial nation states can’t. This idea of time zone nationalism spills over into Nepal as well. In the scheme of things, we could two different times if we followed the scheme of things, we could be two different times if we followed the scheme of things, we could be two different times if we followed the scheme of things, we could be two different times if we followed the scheme of things, we could be two different times if we followed the scheme of things, we could be two different times if.
A World Bank report presented at an environmental meeting in Manila last week that named Kathmandu as the most polluted city in Asia has been flayed by air quality experts in Nepal. The report that went out internationally on the wire services last week lists New Delhi and China’s Chongqing as second and third.

But Nepali environment experts, including those involved in air quality monitoring, say the report is unprofessional and has distorted the real picture. A World Bank consultant appears to have taken raw data of three-hour averages during rush hour from Kathmandu’s worst-polluted streets and compared it to annual averages of other cities. That survey of Kathmandu air was carried out by the ESPS project in Kathmandu to determine the location of its monitoring meters, and measured the worst areas of Kathmandu during the most-polluted peak hours during winter.

The World Bank report cited Kathmandu’s PM10 concentration (particles smaller than 10 microns per cubic metre) at more than 500, while the actual annual average is about 150. The World Bank report compared the worst pollution in Kathmandu to average levels for other cities. “This has done incalculable harm to Kathmandu’s image,” said air quality researcher, Toran Sharma at Aja KU discussion program on Radio Sagarmatha on Tuesday. “Kathmandu has a pollution problem but we can’t compare it from unscientific standardised measurements.” Kathmandu Valley ambient air pollution is now being measured by six monitoring stations and is posted on the Ministry of Population and Environment website (www.mope.gov.np) and weekly averages are carried in this newspaper (page 14).

The World Bank cited the case of Bangkok, where the visibility at the city’s airport improved from about five km in 1996 to nine km in 2000. And, in Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka, the phase-out of two-stroke engines on motorcycle taxis has slashed concentrations of fine airborne particulate matter by 41 percent.

The livestock sector is one of the key entry points for programs to reach the rural poor and, if correctly oriented to small animals, its development favours disadvantaged groups, such as women and poor farmers,” says Brian Fawcett, livestock production and small-scale livestock related enterprises for 164,000 families in 48 districts of Nepal. The main focus is on developing livestock production, processing and marketing in 22 districts.

“The livestock subsector is one of the key entry points for programs to reach the rural poor and, if correctly oriented to small animals, its development favours disadvantaged groups, such as women and poor farmers,” says Brian Fawcett, livestock production and small-scale livestock related enterprises for 164,000 families in 48 districts of Nepal. The main focus is on developing livestock production, processing and marketing in 22 districts.

COOL RIDER: A new and affordable Hero Smart motorcycle has entered the Nepali market. Manufactured by Hero Motors Company of India, the supply is made through Nepal’s SINO Automotives. With an American engine and Italian design, this four-stroke engine 75cc motorcycle has one the best mileages—100km on a litre of petrol, making it a budget investment for Nepali bikers.
Dam development

How local support frittered away on Nepal’s largest hydropower project, the Kali Gandaki A.

Countries need to build hydropower projects for energy and economic gain, but their construction has to be balanced by local needs. Understanding this balance makes all the difference between good projects and bad.

This is the main lesson from the 144MW Kali Gandaki A, the largest hydropower project in Nepal (See: ‘Kali Gandaki project was first announced.

Despite large political factions in the main project area, there was overwhelming support from the local people when the project was first announced. Rival local alliances sprang up. Their support was total, they did not envisage any negative effects.

Families living in the dam site at Mirmi and the power house site at Bokhari remember their naivete. It was only when land acquisition details were printed in Gorkhapatra that they started seeing flaws in the deal. Then powerful locals started negotiating with project staff for good jobs on the site.

The high rate of employment during the construction period made locals relatively cash-rich and they found new ways to spend it. But the absence of economic vibrancy after the construction finished forced them to look for alternatives or return to agriculture.

Migration to urban centres within Nepal or outside (both temporary and permanent) increased. People accustomed to income and a heightened cost of living found it difficult to adjust. Those who had learnt technical skills moved to jobs in the Middle East and South Asian projects in Lamjung. People realised that political dealings are not the only means to gain benefits and economic activities have to be taken seriously as well.

Having lost their land and resources, most don’t take risks anymore. In mid-2003, local land was up for acquisition to build an army camp. Although the locals were better and resilient, they could no longer revert, as the crucial negotiation advantage they had when the project was being built did not exist. Land prices tripled over the years. In comparison to other projects, the compensation rates were better but it could not match the rise in prices after project intervention.

The rampant small-scale corruption during the project period made locals antagonistic towards the project. They now realise that with better information and community orientation, they could have bargained for more support such as drinking water facilities. But most are now resigned to their fate again. All for the sake of Nobak.

Kavita Rai is an anthropologist currently pursuing her PhD at the Center for Development Research, University of Bonn, Germany.

Beautiful at any age

EPSON

New issue of Himal South Asian ahead of the SAARC Summit in Islamabad.
ECONOMY

Nepal Times: How come such a big company is interested in a relatively small market like Nepal?

Sanjeev Roy: We have some Indian and global clients who need specific attention in Nepal, some have asked for it, some have not. But we see it as an opportunity. It is a market which doesn’t require very high expenditure for you to get any reasonable rate of returns. One thing that I am sensing is that Nepal and indeed all of South Asia is predominantly young, and these young people are not going to be caught up with borders. They are much more international and because there is so much happening, it is going to create a lot of desire, whether the economy grows or not. It is going to be very high levels of competition within media in Nepal, and that means a much bigger role for quality advertising. Irrespective of what the market looks like, it is going to be rapidly professional and before we realise, it is going to change. That is why we are here with our Nepali partners, Outreach Nepal.

How about your India operations?

Euro RSCG started in India in 1996, and I was one of the start-up members. The key thing was that this was going to be a young, modern entity. All my life I had worked with these large established networks, and something that bothered me is that ‘one shoe fits all’ way of the world was going anything but RSCG promised to be very different. For example, from the start we went completely digital, in 1996 that was unheard of in India. We started with globally aligned clients like Intel, and we picked local clients along the way and today we are among the top 10 in India.

Isn’t the market in India already crowded?

But it is growing all the time. That is the beauty of it, some sector may stagnate, but there are new sectors that get added on every year. So if it’s not the cars that fail growth, then it’s the durables or the financials. And the advertising market is growing at anything between 8-12 percent. This sometimes defies logic, but it is growing rapidly.

How much has television impacted on this growth?

It has changed the picture dramatically. And it has also changed things around, so that more budgets have moved towards satellite, especially for brand advertising. Newspapers are still big for corporate or information advertising, but satellite television has really hit the magazine market. But it has also created an opportunity for a whole lot of marketers to expand, like the car manufacturers. Suddenly they become brands because of television. This means media planning, buying and scheduling functions, which used to be backroom till about five years ago, is up-front.

How has the readership survey and ratings industry reacted? Is there more accuracy?

How do you get anything accurate in a country like India? It’s so huge. Something like the National Readership Survey had a sample size of 100,000 and was one of the largest surveys in the world, but it is difficult to say what the right sample size is in guarantee accuracy.

Isn’t there a contradiction that the satellite channels have regional footprints, but the content and indeed the advertising is aimed primarily at the Indian market?

There are some channels where regional advertising happens a lot, like the sari manufacturers. Suddenly they became brands because of television. This means media planning, buying and scheduling functions, which used to be backroom till about five years ago, is up-front.

Strictly Business

Media competition will ensure quality advertising.

Advertisers who now have choices in terms of subjects, prices and types of paintings. But more investments in the market also means the prices of each painting goes down, even to such an extent that sooner or later a few galleries are forced to cut prices to survive. The problem is compounded all the more by a general economic climate that does not encourage people to spend money on art.

Reputation: A painting is a risky investment. A serious collector wants to make sure that the painting bought today goes up in value over time—the artist’s critical reputation must increase and appreciate in future. Unfortunately, in Nepal, one can never really be sure about how good a particular Nepali contemporary artist is going to gain. Some well-known artists, even from within the hierarchy, could be the next media stars with fancy press coverage for everything but despite work that is predictable and pedestrian—something that Nepali friends and colleagues are too polite to tell them.

And so, in the absence of art-related journals, critics and experts who can assess the work and offer informed judgement, serious collectors, Nepal and foreign, early on want to take chances on the work of contemporary Nepali artists rather than an expression of goodwill, friendship and charity—hardly the foundations on which to build a thriving art market.

What, then, is an individual contemporary Nepali artist do? He can start by accepting that the market for art is a highly volatile one. He can then lower the supply of his paintings while looking for ways to signal his critical, as opposed to popular, reputation to the marketplace.

Failing that, he can take inspiration from Vincent van Gogh’s life: Van Gogh sold nothing when he was alive. Other artists who sold much more and are highly-valued today. But added by the work of historians and critics, Van Gogh’s reputation has become such that his paintings, the supply of which is fixed, are sold now for millions of dollars.

For Nepali contemporary artists too, rather than complaining about the wildly fluctuating current prices of their paintings (that could be reduced for higher prices later on), the more pressing challenge is to look in ways to establish a critical reputation so that their paintings continue to pull in money long after they are gone.
The demographics of new Nepali couples these days is any indication, Nepal is well on its way to becoming an integrated society. King Prithbi Narayan Shah described the kingdom he united as a garden of many flowers. Well, those flowers are getting cross-pollinated like never before.

Judging by an informal poll we carried out over the last marriage season, Nepali men and women are increasingly venturing beyond their caste-mates to find mates. And looking around Kathmandu it’s not all that easy anymore to fit people into neat categories of caste and ethnic orientation based on facial features and accents anymore.

Today’s intercultural couples are taking urban society by storm, even those that condone segregation. Two years ago when Monica Rizal, a Bahuni, married a Tamang, Chandan Lama, she recalls most people came to the marriage out of curiosity. “Things are changing. Now everybody is getting married intercaste. It’s such an accepted part of society in the city,” Monica muses. The Rizal and Lama households have readily accepted their children’s choice. Luckily, Monica’s family was not strictly Brahmin and Chandan’s own mother is a Bahuni and father Tamang, so there was precedence for inter-ethnic wedlock.

Monica and Chandan are well aware of the tolerance and leniency that urban life affords them. “I know there are still strong social barriers especially in the villages. But Kathmandu is becoming a melting pot and I don’t feel like we’ve broken any barriers except the conditioning that society has imposed on us since childhood,” says Chandan.

Couples whose parents had mixed marriages feel it’s easier to go through with it themselves for a variety of reasons, but at the core, it’s family support that make all things possible. Just ask Sheri and Satendra Thapa. Sheri’s father is Nigerian, her mother a Magar and her brother is married to a Sherpa. After they tied the knot, Satendra’s family did not demand the couple stay with them.

Recalls Satendra: “Growing up in Dehradun, I didn’t know about caste. Maybe because we were a minority, no one needed to know my father’s jath or thar. I married a Nepali and that’s it. It’s ridiculous—people have gone to the moon and come back and we’re still stuck on this jath thing.”

The concept of saving, keeping and maintaining ‘face’ is integral to Nepal’s collectivist social structure, and personal life is gossip for the neighbourhood. Villages are less tolerant of those who don’t live by the rules (see box, p9). In the order of things, almost all traditionalists view inter-racial marriages as even more galling than inter-caste unions.

“Families surely provide the foundation of a relationship.”
George Varughese

“Nepalis have to become one, and inter-ethnic marriages will do this.”
Madankrishna Shrestha

“It’s ridiculous—people have gone to the moon and come back and we’re still stuck on this jath thing.”
Satendra Thapa
Inter-caste, inter-ethnic, inter-racial. Nepalis are getting married all over the place.

“In any marriage give and take is important, and maybe more so in an inter-racial marriage.”

Subarna Rai

family’s support and belongs to a culture that not only accepted his Japanese wife, Tokiko Sato, but immediately made her feel completely comfortable. During their small wedding ceremony in Chandra’s home village of Siklis in Lamjung, Tokiko wore traditional Gurung garb and family and friends came to celebrate their union. When Chandra went to visit Tokiko’s family in Japan, he found them very similar to the Gurungs. Later, Chandra challenged the traditional role of the father in Japan where he was a “househusband”. “I would be so tired when my wife got home, but I enjoyed it,” he recalls. “In any marriage give and take is important, and maybe more so in an inter-racial marriage.”

Chandra Gurung

but that’s precisely what’s happening as more Nepalis travel and live abroad.

Kala and George Varughese think of their union as complementing each other. Kala is the daughter of a Gurung soldier in the British army, born and raised in Brunei. George’s parents are Keralan Christians and educators. The only prerequisite they had regarding George’s wedding was that it be a Christian ceremony. In fluent Nepali, George says, “Nepalis are surprised I am married to a Nepali, but I was born in Gorkha and brought up in Nepal, so when I explain it to them, they are impressed.”

For Kala and George, the greatest obstacle hasn’t been society—it is government bureaucracy. Their Christian wedding led to 10 months in and out of government offices for a marriage certificate. With Kala in the final trimester of her pregnancy, they have to face another unpleasant reality: “My children won’t be eligible for Nepali citizenship regardless of how much we contribute to Nepal because my child’s father is a foreigner.”

Chandra Gurung

Marriage give and take is important, and maybe more so in an inter-racial marriage.”

Subarna Rai

Although Madankrishna Shrestha met his better half Yashoda at work. She was a Bahuni and he a Newari. They were worried their families would not accept their union so they had a small ceremony at Suryabinayak with just friends present. It took two weeks for their parents to come around which was followed by a traditional wedding with all the trimmings. “My father was understanding,” recalls Madankrishna. Inter-caste marriage was the focus of Madankrishna and Haribangsha Acharya’s telefilm Pandhra Gate. “My children know people are all the same, which is a very important attitude in today’s world,” says Madankrishna.

Then there was another famous couple: he a PhD in architecture and she a lecturer at Pulchok Engineering Campus. She came from an affluent Newari clan, he from a landed Bahun family in Gorkha. Later, he joined politics and she became a social activist. Hisila Yami and Baburam Bhattarai have a daughter: Manavi Yami Bhattarai. They live underground, but not because of their inter-ethnic marriage.
Judging Saddam

International participation is needed for competence and impartiality.

It is important that the US take the lead in this crucial aspect of state-building. It should read us to the UN in an even closer to those that, without providing for Saddam Hussein and the leaders responsible for the Rwandan genocide—and that tomorrow might be the option to bring to justice Slobodan Milosevic and the leaders of the Colombian and El Salvadoran congresses. An added benefit of internationalisation would perhaps be to make clear to the master of the country that, without providing for the protection of Iraqis, universal principles such as non-discrimination, fairness, and transparency.

For years, Iraq has only known the brutal laws of force and intimidation. If Saddam Hussein is to become a cornerstone in the building of a free, democratic, and reconciled Iraq, then the US, as the leader of the coalition that marked his decades of systematic persecution of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis that marked his decades of murderous misuse. However, the aim of his trial should not be only to bring to justice the dictator and his accomplices, but also to foster national reconciliation through the affirmation by Iraqis of universal principles such as non-discrimination, fairness, and transparency.

President George W Bush has stated that he would “work with Iraqis to develop a way to try Saddam Hussein that will withstand international scrutiny.” The way to address that scrutiny and avoid accusations of “victor’s justice” is to involve other international players in the exercise. To address the systematic violations of the laws of war and the crimes against humanity committed in the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes Region of Africa, or in Sierra Leone and Cambodia, the international community, with the involvement of the United Nations, set up international and internationalised courts. These institutions have finally established the principle that major violations of human rights and dignity are of universal concern and that the international community should actively participate in the quest for justice and reparation for victims. While no one doubts the willingness of Iraqis judges to try their former “head of state” in a national court, the novelty of such an effort and its political implications suggest some type of international participation for the sake of competence and, most of all, impartiality. Thirty years of brutal dictatorship have destroyed the very concept of justice in Iraq. For justice must mean more than the cries of “Death to Saddam” that now echo in some quarters around the world.

Harsh justice

Foreigners like Govinda Mainali serve a stiffer prison sentence in Japan.

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI

In TOKYO

R
eports about rising statistics of crimes committed by foreigners in Japan has put the spotlight on the vulnerability of non-Japanese in their host country’s justice and criminal procedures. "Foreigners committing crimes often get fair trial in Japan due to language and cultural disadvantages. With many of them lacking proper visas, they are already criminals when arrested, making them extremely vulnerable in this country," says Yasushi Kikashizawa, a human rights attorney. He says that foreigners tend to get heavy sentences as a result of poor interpretation during criminal proceedings and the use of confessions during police interrogations, where lawyers for the defendant may be absent. Activists also point to Japan's negligence in complying with human rights standards for prisoners, including the lack of medical care and the imposition of strict discipline. A new survey in October reveals that more than 34 percent of prisoners have been assaulted, and that foreigners are most affected by this. Meko Kyakuno, an activist, says her work with foreigners in prisons shows “deep-rooted racial xenophobia in the country against non-Japanese.”

Kyakuno belongs to the Govinda Support Group, a group of 12 Japanese volunteers supporting a Nepali man who was sentenced to life imprisonment in October for murder under the same rule. Kyakuno was convicted of robbery and murder of a Japanese woman. He was arrested in 1997 supposedly on the grounds that he overstayed his visa but was later charged for the crime.

The Tokyo District Court declared him innocent owing to lack of evidence in 2000. But before he could be deported home, he was re-arrested without explanation and thrown back in jail. He was then retried—and sentenced to death in October. Kyakuno says she decided to join Govinda’s support group because she is convinced that he is innocent. “His lawyers have long complained against the final judgement and accused judges of making a verdict at the expense of a foreigner,” she points out. With his life sentence, Govinda faces a future that has been described as a “living hell.” Kyakuno says the strict discipline meted out in Japanese prisons, has caused Govinda, like other foreigners, to linger behind bars without much hope. Govinda cannot even speak to family members when they visit because they must use Japanese or English, the languages understood by his prison guards. Letters between prisoner and family are also governed by the same rule. In addition, says Kyakuno, Govinda’s family does not have the financial means to spend long periods in Japan and must rely heavily on the support of Japanese activists who also do not have large budgets for such expenses. At the same time, she says Govinda is still lucky. “He has a strong support group and positive sympathetic media in Japan. Compare that to the thousands of foreigners who face the same severe conditions but must languish in jail with no support at all,” she points out.

The National Police Agency reports that more than 7,600 foreigners were arrested for crimes in 2002, up from 7,150 the previous year. Although the number of arrests was up 7 percent, it was only a minute figure in the overall number of arrests in 2002, the perception of foreigners being more responsible for crime continues. With prominent politicians in tow, the Japanese police have launched a widespread campaign to crack down on entrants from overseas.
World view 2004

World trends in the new year that Nepalis need to know, and worry about.

Imagining Musharraf

One of the major political features of the new year is likely to be the major democracies rethinking their mandates of their people in all areas, especially track. Following the failure of the WTO talks in Cancun, the Doha Round too could collapse if the North doesn’t open to the South. While the big fish test the Third Age of Globalisation, the fate of millions who go hungry every day will probably remain neglected.

The new year should herald in changes with a spat of national elections right across the globe, and whoever wins the one in the US, that country will plunge on an unparalleled unilateral force. Starting close to home with India, the largest democracy in the world would hold parliamentary elections in October. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who will it is the first time the non-Congress chief executive to spend five years in office, could bring home far ahead of the successes to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to cash in on the smear campaign on where they swept three out of four state elections. New Delhi’s pre-eminence in the world will held after the parliament will not be eclipsed in 2004.

Pakistan will have its moment of glory as the host of the SAARC Summit in January. While everyone will make nice for the media circus and despite easing of bilateral tensions, it is uncertain whether the two antagonistic neighbours will make a lasting breakthrough. In Sri Lanka, the power struggle between President Chandrika Kanamaratne and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe is not going to abate. But at least the Tamil rebels continue to observe the ceasefires despite tensions with the Sri Lankan army. The rest of Southeast Asia will also see a spate of elections presidential in the Philippines and general elections in Indonesia and Malaysia, the first in Malaysia after the departure of the charismatic Mahathir Mohammad.

One of Nepal’s major donors, the EU, will expand to 25 members from its current 15 on 1 March 2004. The new EU will hold a new constitution while France and Germany try to emerge from under the US shadow in foreign policy and defence affairs. Britain is expected to register a modest economic growth of 2 percent while keeping the inflation at around 1.6 percent. The Labour government is likely to crack down on illegal asylum seekers but open doors for skilled migrants.

In Russia, bolstered by the main threat to global peace and development will still be the US. While chances are slim that Osama bin Laden will be “smoked out” by US forces, al-Qaeda and its allies will still wreak havoc, in insidiously effective ways and the democratisation of Iran will continue to top the world public debate forum.

2004, China, the other emerging global power, will major changes in its economic growth (8.2 percent) while attempting to maintain political stability. The country’s constitution will guarantee some sort of private-property rights in March and people will be issued passports more easily, possibly resulting in a huge outflow of Chinese tourists. Nepal, however, will be unfortunate for the boom, despite being the first South Asian country to be declared an outbound destination for Chinese tourists.

Nepal’s biggest bilateral donor, Japan, is likely to register a modest economic growth between 1.2-1.5 percent. Having won parliamentary polls, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will be preoccupied with the security policy. Though one-fifth of the Japanese population is 65 or over, there is still strong resistance to opening its labour market to foreigners. The perception of the US is that of an unbridled superpower.

The economy will continue to be driven by the SAARC constellation will not be a device in the case the US and its allies continue to be occupied with the Middle East. Economies in the India-Pakistan relationship, which apart from Iraq and Afghanistan have made Musharraf even more important in the international coalition fighting terror that now badly wants Pakistan to make up with India. Musharraf, as it has happened in the past, engagement is in just that effort. He is also the only one that the US wants Pakistan to trade its schemes for South Asia as well as Central Asia.

For that, it is essential that his regime is consolidated at home and then it will be changed. But inside Pakistan, Musharraf is belatedly, though he has support from the United States, British, Chinese, Russian, some Europeans and even the Indian and Israeli governments. How or why is his support at home so patchy and uncertain while all major nations are ready to keep his regime afloat?

The reasons are several. First, the manner of his coming to power and the nature of this regime have forced the Commonwealth to keep Pakistan’s membership suspended. He triggered the prime minister’s resignation on setting power the way he did; he was a dismissed officer of the Pakistan Army, dismissed by competent authority. Instead of obeying the prime minister’s orders, he staged a coup, overthrown the organic law of the land and the then prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. In addition, he arbitrarily amended the constitution to permit himself to remain army chief and president, able to dismiss all elected governments and assemblies. Most major parties refuse to recognise the legitimacy of his presidency or that of this amended constitution.

This confrontation, dubbed by many as a fixed fight, is not likely to bring any significant change in the situation even if all the demands of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)—the alliance of six religious parties—are met by Musharraf. He would remain in power with all of today’s powers. The MMA now controls 20 percent of the parliament, has its own government in the North West Frontier Province and comprises a large chunk of Balochistan’s provincial government as results of October 2002 polls.

For the two, political purposes, are seen in partners in the army’s major enterprises. This is one reason why many say MMA stands for “Military-Mullah Alliance” and why the harsh MMA rhetoric of opposing the Musharraf regime lacks credibility. The MMA’s rise is often said to be Musharraf’s gift to Pakistan. In all seven elections in Pakistan until 2002, religious parties, all together, never got more than eight percent of the national votes. Thank to 11 September and the US invasion of Afghanistan, the toppling of the Taliban regime made a darling of all religious parties. But today, Musharraf is opposed by all the major mainstream parties.

It is actually a three-way division among the major parties the largest party to emerge from the October 2002 polls, under a controversial legal framework, was the Pakistan Peoples Party led by exiled former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, then by the Pakistan Muslim League of exiled former prime minister Sharif. It (IPS)
The disappeared


In the eight years since the Maoist insurgency began, the bell has tolled for thousands of Nepalis. For families of those who have gone missing, there is no closure, no permission to grieve, but the hope that someone is still alive. The following is a list of 808 disappeared since 2000 by both sides. It is based on information from a number of sources, including families, relatives and other organisations and does not include those not reported to the National Human Rights Commission.

Faux pas

Debdas Basnet, 21 December

When Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa displaced at Dhaka Airport earlier this week, his Bangladesh counterpart Begum Hasina Wajid and other ambassadors were there to welcome him. The Bangladeshi prime minister had already offered to co-finance a Thapa bouquet. Immediately after that, she greeted him with her hands joined in a namaste gesture. In the meantime, Thapa passed the bouquet to one of his aides and offered another. The Bangladeshi chief executive was still standing with her namaste, while Thapa kept his hand out. Neither he knew what to do next, or when an aide whispered something in Thapa’s ear. Then Thapa then returned the namaste and gave the idea of thanking hands. This little fiasco took about 30 seconds and cast some doubts on the full footage with cuts in the evening.

Second chance

Nepal Samacharpatra

20 December

Orighted by the insurgency, the fate of Nepalese children hangs in balance. Their rehabilitation has been a priority topic for discussion, and few girls have been lucky enough to be in school, even though it is leafed with miles of education. Eleven Nepali children are enrolled in the Michael Jogi Memorial and Medical Institute in the Indian city of Chennai. Five of them are from Hamli, one each from Kabhre and Kanchanpur and four from the Bhutanese refugee camps in central Nepal. Thirty more Nepali girls have been orphaned by the ongoing conflict as they enrolled in the school by mid-2004.

Scott and the Sherpas

Kantipur, 21 December

“it is not possible without the Sherpas,” Lekh Prasad Gyawali, a veteran Sherpa mountaineer, said. “as soon as they get back to the village, they forget about them. Other than a few like Edmund Hillary and Junko Tabei, most summiters usually rarely come down their climb without a thought for those who made it possible. Now there is one more person who is showing his thanks in concrete ways. British mountaineer Doug Scott is involved in building a porter shelter in Machermo in Gokyo valley, three days and a peak from Namche Bazaar.”

Scott saw that portersuffer the trust when they are hired by disorganised and cheap agencies. Since there are very few houses in Machermo, there’s no enough room for the porters. “We started the shelter to protect the porters from the cold and other hardships,” says Scott, “the cold and high altitude endurance’s theirs.”

According to the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG), in the last decade on 12,000 porters die each year in the Himalayas. The proposed shelter will cost Rs 5.8 million and is at about 5,420m on the route to Cho La peak, considered one of the toughest trekking passes. Two hundred trekkers go there annually despite the high risk of extreme cold coupled with high altitude. “This shelter will provide a great of relief for the porters,” says Ang Dhiring, president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, who had also helped set up such a shelter in Lobuche and the Everest region. Scott plans to hire a medical doctor and a nurse for the peak tourist season and has been helping porters through Community Action Nepal.
“Man-eating Gurkhas!”

I arrived in Delhi from my battalion on 20 October 1932. In the course of our six-month training, war had broken out in Afghanistan. I joined the ranks of the Gurkhas in the rush of enthusiasm. There were strict orders from above not to send recruits to the front if they had not worn a uniform of eight months. On that notice, we took out north to Landikotal in Pakistan. The war lasted till 1934 and afterwards we were sent to Delhi. In 1934–35 fierce fighting began at Landikota in Baluchistan, which was now in Pakistan. In that war Subedar Mehr Singh Gurung of Parbat was killed. His brother Prem Bahadur Gurung of the same regiment came through unscathed. In 1937, we were once again sent back to rest.

There were sous of the world, Germany, Italy and Japan joined hands to crush England and America. Gradually, a full-scale war was started in 1939. Initially, it was just a propaganda war. Hitler made a propaganda film depicting the sky filled with tanks, on every inch of the land filled with their tanks and the sea with their ships. This was to the extent that quite a few viewers couldn’t bear to watch the whole movie and left the cinema. For their counter-propaganda, the British made Gurkha soldiers shave their heads to keep the hair as thick as possible to resemble a wireless antenna. They spread rumours that these soldiers were the sons of fallen enemies.

There was also a rumour that the Gurkhas, whose relatives were Gurkhas, sending our soldiers that their lives were worth only Rs 16 and called us to eat and car with them. The greatest battle was fought in Africa. In Tunisia, we fought or three years against Hitler’s troops. Their men were doped, brainwashed by Hitler. The German did not marry short women and always looked out for tall, healthy women. When women came in, they cut off the head to reduce and seduce women, with them it was the opposite. The women folk looked out for men who were tall and young. In general, their men married by 35, the women by 25. The parents are happy with their daughter’s choice. The British had the notion that coloured people could not run such a vast continent and so carried small arms to Africa.

Now we will talk about the fighting that took place at Landikota. Altogether 22 regiments were stationed there. After the officer passed down from Gurkha, they would establish a Gordonwall, Kalikand and Manakamana temple (pictures we called them) inside the barrack compound and if he happened to be from Syangja, then the pickets bore the name of famous deities of that place. A picket was something like house made of mines that no bullet could pierce. However, that too was attacked. There was a jandar called Kukku from a place called Grounds in Lamjung. He was a Guerilla soldier who cut the ropes of enemy tents, entered it and killed them with a bayonet. One regiment relieved another. One over Gurkha regiment had 308 men. They were granted leave from time to time but shorter leave had to be spent in the unit. ◆
FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- Divine light of Tibet Photographs by Gabriela Mayorskina till 5 January at Lazarim Gallery Cafe. 4248549
- Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gillerman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- The Land I Love Photographs Kim Hong Sun till 16 January at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4426894
- Photographs of working children by children Exhibition from 27 December at Bagikkhan, Patan. 

EVENTS

- Sinners in Heaven New Year Eve blast at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Details. 4248999
- Style Nepal Fashion show by Sunimu Boutique and party, 6PM on 28 December at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Details. 4441073, 4250913
- Bring your wine along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Cafe, Thamel.
- Ring in the New Year Dinner and live band Single Rs 1500, couples Rs 2500. Special overnight packages at Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479488
- Celebrate at the Hyatt 31 December - buffet with live band at The Cafe, seafood dinner at Ritz Restaurant, three DJs at Ritz Bar with logging bartenders. 4491234
- Homestyle cooking by Japanese chef at dan Ran Japanese Restaurant, Jawalakhel. 5521027
- The Vegetarian specialties at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- Cafe U Japanese home-cooking, cakes and coffee. Opp British School, Sanepa. 5523383
- Malay, Singapore food at Singma, Jawalakhel. Lalpur. 5520024

GETAWAYS

- New Year Chimes overnight stay with dinner and dance featuring The Heartbreakers. Prior reservation recommended. Godavari Village Resort, 5506675
- Golf in the Valley’s last pristine forest. Gokha Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- Alcatraz flying adventures with the Avia Club, Pokhara.
- Shivapuri Heights Cottage at the edge of Shivapuri. Email: info@escape2nepal.com
- Weekend Special for Rs 3000 per couple, Park Village Resort, Budhanikantha. 4375280
- Magnificent mountains and deluxe tents at Adventure Tented Camp & Country Kitchen. 4416992
- Christmas in the jungle at Jungle Base Camp. 061-5321211 Email: jungle.trekking.com
- Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagao gourmet meals, board and transport. Highland Travel & Tours. 4253352, 4253003

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

PM10 levels in Kathmandu are now approaching dangerously high levels, although not as bad as the World Bank report makes it out. The concentration of particles small enough to enter the lungs and stay there in heavy traffic areas like Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital are nearly 50 percent higher than last week. Even Bhaktapur Square is showing levels higher than the national standard of 120 micrometres per cubic metre, all caused by winter inversion over the Valley.

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A notable event of this week’s weather is the rapid growth of the winter fog cover in northern Indian plain and Nepal’s western tarai. This annual phenomenon is caused by the intrusion of cold dry air from the northwestern over the east basin. But a high pressure zone is keeping fog conditions away from the central and eastern tarai for now. So no respite from the two-month-long winter drought with no major westerly system sighted on the horizon. This means continued morning smog in Kathmandu with sunny and breezy afternoons. The first night frost will be seen on the Valley outskirts.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

BOOKWORM

Eleven Minutes Paulo Coelho
Harper Collins, 2003
Rs 42

Maria, a young girl from a Brazilian village, is left heartbroken after her first innocent brushes with love. She becomes convinced she will never find true love, that "Love is a terrible thing that will make you suffer…"

Coelho’s gripping and dating new work explores the sacred nature of sex and love, inviting us to confront our own prejudices.

Courtesy: Mandalal Book Point, Kantipur, 4277114, mandalal@ccl.com.np

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Full circle

Ancient Himalayan Buddhist art is the hot new attraction in Los Angeles this new year.

Almost four decades after the last travelling Nepali art exhibition to the west, The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art is on display at Los Angeles. This unparalleled collection of almost 160 Nepal, Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian masterpieces, some dating back 13 centuries, has been well received by media critics and some 20,000 visitors have thronged to the museum.

Co-curator Dina Bangdel, assistant professor at Ohio State University, is ecstatic: “Given the political situation here, I feel that this exhibition has established for Nepal a much needed positive presence in the US with a very favourable response,” she told us. “With Nepal so much in the forefront in the US, we should take pride in our cultural heritage.”

The exhibition focuses on the context of the art and translates Himalayan Buddhist practices into physical form. Bangdel and colleague John C Huntington have also published a catalogue Circle of Bliss that helps visitors understand the art that flows from the Himalayan Buddhist tradition.

Modern art museums almost always leave interpretation—whether we invest art with meaning or not—to the viewer, so this guided exhibition to an understanding of the display is a rarity. Meditational art is both meaningful and with purpose: their creators knew the function of each piece was solely to aid the practitioner to attain enlightenment.

The exhibition focuses on Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi, regarded by Buddhists as key Tantric mediation practices. The artwork is exquisite and each piece was solely to aid the practitioner to attain enlightenment. The Circle of Bliss will leave Los Angeles County Museum of Art on 4 January and travel to Ohio.

The exhibition has established for Nepal a much needed positive presence in the US and the circle of Bliss will leave the county museum on January 4 and travel to Ohio.

David Cloud

The following are traffic rules for Kathmandu Valley updated in December 2003. The following rules shall remain valid for the next six months, unless otherwise notified by the authorities. Violators will be punished.

1. The biggest vehicle has the right of way.
2. The craziest driver has the right of way.
3. The driver looking the other way has the right of way.
4. The white line has the right of way.
5. Pedestrians running flat out across the road have the right of way.
6. The motorcycle driver that goes the farthest way across the solid white line has the right of way.
7. A taxi making a U-turn from the extreme right hand lane to the extreme left hand lane has the right of way.
8. On Ring Road, a vehicle coming around a blind curve on the wrong side of the road has the right of way.
9. People walking down the middle of the lane with their backs to the traffic have the right of way.
10. Motorcyclists heading the wrong way have the right of way.
11. Pedestrians walking casually across the road looking the other way have the right of way.
12. Buses pulling out have the right of way.
13. Buses pulling in have the right of way.
14. Buses going the wrong way have the right of way.
15. Buses backing up have the right of way—unless they meet a crazy driver or a driver looking the other way or a cow or a pedestrian running flat out on a driver going the farthest way across the solid white line or a taxi making a U-turn or a vehicle coming around a blind curve on the wrong side of the road or people walking down the middle of the lane with their backs to the traffic or a motorcycle heading the wrong way or pedestrians walking casually across the road looking the other way.
Under My Hat
by Kunda Dixit

What is this country coming to? Do I now have to bribe you to read this column, or what?

However, since it has now been established through several leadership polls that no one is actually reading this stuff, guess I can get away with writing the most outrageous stuff about the pillars of our society, of which at last count there were four. So here goes: BEEEEEEEP is a monkey, the BEEEEEP is an ass and so are the other BEEEEEPs in the BEEEEEP, the LONG, BEEEEEEEP and ANOTHER EVEN LONGER BEEP are a bunch of @$%*/+&s. LONG BEEEEEEP and ANOTHER EVEN LONGER BEEP are a bunch of @$%*/+&s. BEEEEEEEEP is a monkey, the BEEEEEP is an ass and so are the other BEEEEEPs in the BEEEEEP, the LONG, BEEEEEEEP and ANOTHER EVEN LONGER BEEP are a bunch of @$%*/+&s.

Thank Pashupatinath that the press is still independent in this country and freedom of expression is guaranteed by our constitution, otherwise I would not be allowed to make the aforementioned unprintable in a newspaper that is also read by minors) that, as a part of their belt-tightening and cost-cutting efforts, companies will henceforth not be able to offer any more bribes to government officials and politicians.

An emergency meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday looked at various ways in which the government could deal with this unexpected development that removes one of the most efficient methods so far devised to spread the wealth around. The no-bribe policy by business has already lead to a snowball effect on consumer spending, forcing the Finance Ministry to revise its premature announcement of an annual GDP growth rate of 4 percent drastically downwards. Officials now have no recourse but to announce an escalating agitation culminating on a relay hunger strike at their places of work which will entail officials foregoing their afternoon tea break on alternate working days. If that doesn't prompt businessmen from lifting their ban on bribes, then may Pashupatinath save us all.

With those formalities now out of the way, and permission from Madam Chairperson, I would soon like to turn to the next item on the agenda, which is the economic crisis triggered by a joint public strike of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Nepal National Chamber of Commerce (NNCC) for which there will be an escalating agitation beginning in the new year starting with a dot pen-down strike at all offices, a sit-down strike at the gates of FNCCI, which will make her one of the highest qualified engineers in Nepal. "It’s sad that there isn't enough encouragement for engineers in the country," says Pushpanjali, laminating a tight job market. She is undoubtedly the most famous daughter of her village of Gaikhur in Gorkha. She was the only girl to pass the SLC while most of her friends dropped out of school in grade five. When she moved to Kathmandu and joined Pulchok Engineering Campus, there were only two girl students. After graduation, when her friend chose to become a lecturer, Pushpanjali decided to become an engineer. Pushpanjali hasn’t been home to Gaikhur in five years, and plans to visit soon.

Says Pushpanjali: "As long as you can prove yourself, work hard and not show your weakness, no one can ever look down on you as a woman."

Kunda Dixit

Ms Engineer

Pushpanjali Khanal proves that it’s not just a man’s world. Without even trying to be a symbol for the sisterhood, this 34-year-old is the only female engineer at the Department of Roads (DOR). There are about 200 female engineers in Nepal, but most hold desk jobs, draft designs or are academics. Pushpanjali, however, chose to work in mainstream engineering. "Women tend to think that this is a man’s work and it’s tough being a real engineer at construction sites in remote areas, but this is what I enjoy most," she says. A decade ago when she joined DOR as one of its youngest engineers, Pushpanjali recalls receiving almost respect for her professionalism from male colleagues. Pushpanjali didn’t have to battle a glass ceiling—there wasn’t one.

Her suggestions and ideas were encouraged and accepted by her male colleagues and senior officers. Five years ago she bested her male peers to win a scholarship for a master’s degree from the University of Surrey in England. Pushpanjali’s next aim is a PhD, which will make her one of the highest qualified engineers in Nepal. "It’s sad that there isn't enough encouragement for engineers in the country," says Pushpanjali, laminating a tight job market. She is undoubtedly the most famous daughter of her village of Gaikhur in Gorkha. She was the only girl to pass the SLC while most of her friends dropped out of school in grade five. When she moved to Kathmandu and joined Pulchok Engineering Campus, there were only two girl students. After graduation, when her friend chose to become a lecturer, Pushpanjali decided to become an engineer. Pushpanjali hasn’t been home to Gaikhur in five years, and plans to visit soon.

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(Parashotw Neqar)

Pushpanjali, my first Jeeves to a Jeeves. The man's work and it's tough being a real engineer at construction sites in remote areas, but this is what I enjoy most,” she says. A decade ago when she joined DOR as one of its youngest engineers, Pushpanjali recalls receiving almost respect for her professionalism from male colleagues. Pushpanjali didn’t have to battle a glass ceiling—there wasn’t one. Her suggestions and ideas were encouraged and accepted by her male colleagues and senior officers. Five years ago she bested her male peers to win a scholarship for a master’s degree from the University of Surrey in England. Pushpanjali’s next aim is a PhD, which will make her one of the highest qualified engineers in Nepal. "It’s sad that there isn't enough encouragement for engineers in the country," says Pushpanjali, laminating a tight job market. She is undoubtedly the most famous daughter of her village of Gaikhur in Gorkha. She was the only girl to pass the SLC while most of her friends dropped out of school in grade five. When she moved to Kathmandu and joined Pulchok Engineering Campus, there were only two girl students. After graduation, when her friend chose to become a lecturer, Pushpanjali decided to become an engineer. Pushpanjali hasn’t been home to Gaikhur in five years, and plans to visit soon.

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