



**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 117

Q. Now that their leaders have been released, should the students call off their agitation?

Total votes: 787

Weekly Internet Poll # 118. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree with the government's plan to arm civilians to fight Maoists?

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When Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani presented the national budget in July, many of his plans were predicated on peace. A month later, the ceasefire collapsed and it has been downhill ever since.

The government designed the budget with an optimistic scenario of peace, not a realistic scenario of continued conflict. Nepali will pay dearly for this in 2004: many with their lives, most with plummeting living standards.

The military now bites off a 20 percent chunk of the annual budget, shrinking the slice for education to 15 percent, health to five percent and only 0.5 percent goes for drinking water.

What's worse, even these allocations haven't been sent to the districts because of security concerns. Other resources and investments that would have helped kick-start economic activity have not reached targets, especially in rural areas.

It's a vicious cycle: without basic services, most young Nepalis have only two choices: join the Maoists or migrate. Most chose the latter, and by all accounts internal displacement and migration to India has reached crisis proportions. This will seriously hurt agriculture and accelerate the slide.

"Data shows Nepal's human development and poverty reduction achievements have been sharply interrupted by inadequate and insufficient access to basic social services," says economist Bishwambher Pyaku **continued p10**

## New Times

The new look *Nepali Times* this week also has exciting new content:

- p6 **NEITHER HERE NOR THERE** by Anagha Neelakantan
  - p7 **CAPITAL LETTERS** by Yubaraj Ghimire
  - p8 **LONDON EYE**
  - p21 **TEE BREAK** by Deepak Acharya
  - p23 **HEROJIG**
  - p24 **HAPPENINGS**
- Plus all the regulars.

# War economy

## Nepalis will pay dearly for continued conflict in 2004.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA



The view from Singha Darbar, looking west towards Bhadrakali and the Royal Nepali Army headquarters.

KIRAN PANDEY

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## NEWTON'S LAWS

Nepal's relations with the outside world seem to be governed by Newton's third law of thermodynamics: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So, as we get politically and economically weaker, outside powers get stronger. It is physically impossible for a country that is so dependent on the largesse of neighbours and overseas countries to be totally independent. We can remind ourselves about our brave and glorious past, we can go on ad nauseum about the fact that we were never colonised, but what really matters is how we manage our present. Do we grovel, or do we manage our affairs with dignity and self-respect and strive towards self-reliance?

There are some 'patriots' among us who are so sensitive about foreign interference that they don't notice we are walking around in rags. "We'd rather go hungry than be under the foreign yoke," is the credo of people who have never gone hungry in their life. Others go on bended knees to kowtow to friends and neighbours, only to selectively denounce outsiders. It is a hangover from the Panchayat past that national figures openly function as proxies of this or the other power. When there is so little self-esteem, don't expect outsiders to admire us, or respect our wishes.

Foreigners may not be actually micro-managing us, but it is clear they are more active than they have ever been in the past. Some of them have been speaking very bluntly about human rights violations, and tying future support and even a vital multilateral aid package to a restoration of democratic norms. There has been an unprecedented growth in military support in hardware and training. Some have slipped the aid in quiet, others boast about it. To be sure, there is also the shadowy involvement of the agencies of some countries that are not so innocent. People are asking: why detain and interrogate a party leader, and not the Maoists he went to meet?

Commensurate with this involvement, foreigners have also been dispensing advice more openly than ever before. So much so that some members of the diplomatic corps are embarrassed about the trend and have criticised their colleagues in public for overstepping diplomatic bounds.

In the final analysis, the active involvement of Kathmandu-based envoys in guiding events in Nepal is an outcome of the chronic failure of our own successive leaderships to do so. Besides, not all interference is bad. When outside entities speak out against Nepalis being disappeared, about the lack of due process, about attacks on the free press or democracy going into deep freeze, it should be welcomed.

Nepal's rulers may see it as interference, but for Nepalis it means at least someone is standing up for our rights. And if the foreigners use the 'aid card' so be it. After all, Newton's first law also states that an object at rest will remain at rest until an external force is applied to it.



NAREN

# Limited intervention

Bhutan had to act sooner or later against the ULFA camps.

**OPINION**  
Mahendra P Lama



The Bhutan government's military offensive to flush out Indian separatist militants from its territory is shrouded in secrecy and raises more questions than it answers. The first is: why now, 12 years after the militants set up camps inside Bhutan territory? What impact will this have on cross-border extremism elsewhere in South Asia? How will this unprecedented military action impact on Bhutan's own internal politics?

After counter-insurgency operations by the Indian military, the militants fled across the border to Bhutan. There were 3,000 guerrillas and their families in 30 camps inside Bhutan of which 13 belonged to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and five to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Both want independence from India and set up a nation called Kamatipur encompassing eastern Assam and northern West Bengal.

Was Bhutan trying to send a diplomatic signal to India not to interfere in the case of Nepali Bhutanis living in camps in Nepal for a similar period of time? We

must remember that the separatist militants arrived in Bhutan at a time of maximum security alert in southern Bhutan because this was the period during which the Nepali-speaking Lhotsampas were being driven out. It could be that the rulers in Thimpu at the time had their hands full and didn't want to rake up another front.

But things had got progressively worse. The militants carried out attacks on Indian territory and retreated to their camps in Bhutan. The Assamese and West Bengal state governments were at their wits' end, and finally New Delhi started turning the screws on Thimpu. The Indian prime minister is said to have told King Jigme Singye Wangchuk during a visit to Delhi earlier this year that he better start driving out the militants, or else the Indian Army would do it for him.

Thimpu was in a bind. On the one hand, the militants were becoming a threat to Bhutan's internal security, and on the other, the Indians were itching to come into Bhutan to destroy the camps—a move that would seriously undermine Bhutan's sovereign status. After weighing the pros and cons, the Bhutan government appears to have decided with India to launch a limited intervention.

India, of course, offered all the necessary logistical and other help for the operation. And it was all done hush-hush, no one really knew what was happening—not even the chief ministers of Assam and West Bengal. The only news the outside world had were reports that the Bhutan king and crown prince were leading the charge, and that Indian troops were monitoring the situation at the border. Even the Bhutan experts are quiet.

Bhutan had to do this sooner or later. The trans-boundary element in a region known for extremist activity was not tolerable,

and what if the refugees in camps in Nepal joined the militancy? What if Nepali Maoists influence also threatened the Bhutani monarchy?

Having razed the camps and chased the militants out, Thimpu will now have to keep them out. There is already considerable Indian military presence in Bhutan under the 1948 IMTRAT bilateral treaty, which is mainly designed to counter outside interference in Bhutan. But can Bhutan accept Indian presence directed at countering cross-border militancy?

If Thimpu had taken action 12 years ago, it wouldn't have had to carry out this military operation today. There may be a lesson there on the Nepali refugee crisis: if it delays a resolution there may be a much higher price to pay. In this age of globalisation, open borders and international media access, how long can Bhutan pretend that it is snug and warm inside its own woolen cocoon?

India must be grateful for what the Bhutanis have done to chase out its militants, but it must also seek a viable solution to its own separatist extremist problem. There must be a reason why there are ULFAs in Assam. In which neighbouring countries and for how long can India contemplate hot pursuit of its own militants? Delhi has to formulate a policy about frontiers. Borders are not just lines on the map for deployment of security forces. Trade happens through borders, so does smuggling, migration and the exchange of culture and history. Does India have a policy on this? 'Limited intervention' may not be enough in future. ●

Mahendra P Lama is professor at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This article is translated from his column in *Himal Khabarpatrika*. mahendra\_lama1961@yahoo.co.in

the noble elves have morphed into Orks now. Of course, drawing such parallels becomes an exercise in self-indulgence to appease our own sense of injured morality. But truly, about a year ago I had written to your paper voicing my faith in the king's actions to take the country out of the mess. I'd called it required chemotherapy and even assumed to scold those harsh critics. The editor sensibly edited that offensive phrase and inserted some euphemism. Now, as things stand (of course in hindsight), my intellectual naivete only went to underscore the depths of my own political ignorance of what was actually happening in Nepal. Egg on my face. It will be a long time before I venture forth an opinion and pontificate on what ails us and prescribe quicksilver cures from my Compaq.

Now, I believe in the power of prayer. I pray that sooner than later, peace will come about because we all desperately want it. I pray that wisdom will prevail and the principal characters will one day realise the folly of their war mongering, that a once small but great nation will rise above petty and self-serving power politics, cleanse itself of intrigue and corruption to regain its dignity in the brotherhood of nations. And, oh, that RNAC will be a model of customer service and efficiency, competing profitably and operating wide body jets across the oceans. Let us all pray.

**T Sherpa, Seattle**

**LAK**

Living in Kathmandu, we are largely unaware of the harsh realities that exist in rural Nepal. It is a tragedy that most of us in Kathmandu seem to be more worried about the festive hangovers than the dire state of the country as Daniel Lak points out in 'Vale of Forgetfulness and Unreality' (#175). The human right violations, constant fear of extortion, hardball interrogations have deterred even the few concerned ones that want to explore the situation outside the Valley. *Nepali Times* deserves appreciation and applause for updating readers with fair and balanced



# Another summit

All eyes are on Bajpai once more.

that stands for nearly 1.5 billion people—nearly one-fourth of humanity.

As current SAARC chairman, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has hopped, skipped and jumped all over the subcontinent this month when he should have been concentrating on fixing things back home. Other than prolonging his uncertain tenure, Thapa's prancing has failed to achieve much—for SAARC, or for his own country. His travels exposed the sad fact that to fly to some SAARC capitals one still has to transit Singapore and Bangkok.

When Thapa hands over the gavel to Premier Jamali this weekend at the 12<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit, he will have to begin exactly where the organisation was two years ago in Kathmandu. There have been platitudes, but no progress towards goals set by the Kathmandu Summit: "To give effect to shared aspirations for a

more prosperous South Asia, the leaders agreed to a vision of phased and planned process eventually leading to a South Asian Economic Union." The two biggest SAARC members who finally shook hands in Kathmandu and then resumed hurling barbs at each other must share the blame for undermining the viability of SAARC.

The SAARC's biggest challenge is that nothing will shake the belief of the foreign policy bureaucracy of its biggest member that the five smaller states (who all border India but don't share a contiguous border with each other) are ganging up against India. Such conviction makes India defensive when it should be the one taking bold initiatives.

Dhaka has lost all hopes of making SAARC work and has decided to focus on BIMSTEC instead. This look-east sub-regional grouping is free of Indo-Pakistan acrimony and has greater chances of economic cooperation. Even after badly bruising itself in Afghanistan, Islamabad is still pinning its hopes on profiting from Central Asian oil and gas transiting its territory. Sri Lankans have always felt more affinity to ASEAN than to the geographical accident that placed it 50km off the tip of south India. Nepal is waiting for China's railroad to arrive in Lhasa. That leaves Male and Thimpu (combined population: less than two million) in favour of South Asian Economic Union.

Offlate, Prime Minister Atal Behari Bajpai has been hinting about a regional Customs Union and even a Common Currency.

But as usual, the Indian premier is probably being more lavish with his promises than he would be allowed by his own babudom. Unless India begins with a generous gesture of goodwill towards its smaller neighbours, there is no way the economic cubs of the region will be able to keep pace with the galloping lion claiming to lead the pack. The non-reciprocity of the Gujral Doctrine wasn't charity, it was based on the sound economic principle of India acting as a powerful economic locomotive.

The other chain that has kept South Asia shackled is New Delhi's enduring obsession with military security. Since Islamabad also refuses to grow up from its juvenile fascination of nuclear firecrackers, it is still only 15 seconds to midnight on South Asia's nuclear doomsday clock. Here again, it is India that has the bigger responsibility of defusing tensions. If it doesn't do so on its own, outside powers will make it before long.

Just as the famous handshake that stole the show in Kathmandu, in Islamabad too all eyes will be on Bajpai. But this time he and Gen Musharraf better come up with something more tangible than the Lahore Bus or the Agra Breakfast. Apart from the importance of de-escalating the conflict along the Line of Control in Kashmir, there is one more thing that they can do to atone for their past misdeeds: begin the process of moving towards a common South Asian Rupee.

Despite doubts here among our economists, the South Asian Rupee has the potential of becoming the currency of goodwill in the region. And for that too, it is New Delhi that must take the lead. ●



SUBHAS RAI

## LETTERS

### LET US PRAY

For once I tend to agree with CK Lal's assertions in his 'State of the State' column about our national proclivity for delving too much into our past to explain away the ills of the present ('Boom, gloom and doom', #176). Doomsayer or not, it feels that we have been cursed with Frodo's burden (to draw an analogy from the ever popular Lord of the Rings trilogy), with the evil eye burning into our daily consciousness and poisoning our minds. Nary a chance of Middle Earth surviving and a monarch, whom we once trusted and equated with the moral fortitude of the reluctant hero Aragorn, looking more like Saruman in the public perception. The proverbial ring of power has corrupted all our erstwhile heroes of the democratic movement, so much so that they now are nothing but ghostly Ringwraiths. As for all us, we see ourselves as those Hobbits, hopelessly reminiscing about what was once truly our Shire. Sadly that Shire no longer exists and a lot of

voices are starting to be heard.

**D Drevo, email**

acknowledge a shared humanity.

**Brian Gilligan, Patan**

### SMELLING

Narendra Newar's 'Glued to the streets' (#176) brings welcome light to a problem which is familiar to anyone who walks city streets. Newar is correct in saying that the children who sniff glue do so to escape hunger, cold and loneliness. However, I would be concerned if your readers mistakenly believed that the solution lies only in controlling access to glue. Street children without glue will still be street children, and they will continue to be hungry, cold and alone. Given the range of common consumer goods that can be inhaled for a cheap and quick 'high', controlling glue would take a lot of effort and produce little in the way of results. The answer lies in combining product control, prevention and treatment, with the opportunity for street children to build a life worth living. And this ultimately means that we all need to take responsibility for these children and

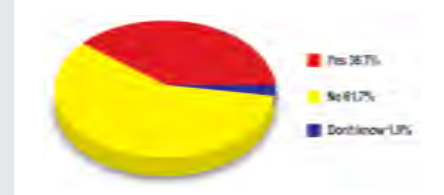
### WEIRDER

With each issue of *Nepali Times* Kunda Dixit's 'Under My Hat' column keeps getting weirder and more outlandish, so do his hats. How does he get away with it? Does he own the paper or what?

**SS Pal, Kathmandu**

### CORRECTION

A layout error led to the wrong poll results being posted in #176. The correct question and pie chart should have been: Is a military solution the only way to resolve Nepal's insurgency?







Maoists fill the vacuum left in VDCs in the midwest.



Election campaigning, Maoist style, and hammer and sickles flying over the Binayak temple complex in Achham.



"I contested in the Maoist election because that was the only way I could help the people."

— Jagat Bahadur Rawal, ex-UML cadre who was recently elected head of village peoples' government in Chaphamandu

# Elections in Maoland

MANOHAR SWAR and KARNA SHAH in ACHHAM

Jagat Bahadur Rawal used to be a UML party worker at Chaphamandu in Achham. This month, he stood as an independent candidate for the head of the 'people's government' in his village, defeating his Maoist rival by 125 votes.

"I am not a member of the Maoist party, and I contested in the elections because I wanted to protect the interests of my constituents and this was the only way I could do it," Rawal told us. But it doesn't look very likely that Rawal can do what he wants in his new post. Election or no

election, it is only the Maoist writ that runs here. Across the villages of Achham, Kalikot and Bajura in the Maoist-controlled heartland of mid-western Nepal, it is election time this month. The Maoists are filling the vacuum left after the Deuba government declined to extend the terms of elected local councils two-and-a-half years ago.

To counter the government move to nominate VDC members, they are conducting their own elections for village and district 'people's governments'. Sixty-two of the 75 VDCs in Achham have

held elections, of which 23 polls were held with votes being cast, in 30 the Maoists won unanimously, and in eight villages, local representatives were appointed by the Maoist party. In Kalikot to the north, independent candidates have won some positions in four village-level elections while the Maoists have swept all positions in 13 of the VDCs.

These are not 'normal' elections. The Maoists have their own election commission which drafted guidelines for the polls. One of the rules bars "capitalists, middlemen, civil servants, cheats,

spies and anti-people elements," so that only "anti-imperialist, nationalist, pro-people, pro-democratic, progressive and independent candidates" can stand for elections. And since it is the Maoists who decide who fulfill these criteria, it is clear that unless candidates have support of the party they cannot run.

For some, this smacks of Panchayat election rules in which only candidates vetted by the Back to the Village National Campaign and who were members of various class organisations, and therefore conformed to the Panchayat



"This country can't continue like this."

— Hari Bhakta Bajgain, educationist

ideology, could stand for elections. Few local political party leaders have ventured to their villages in the Midwest in the past four years. Interestingly, it was Maoist leader Prachanda who entreated political parties last month not to doubt his group's commitment to competitive democracy.

In Achham, local Maoist cadre point to the victory of independent candidates as proof that the elections have been free and fair. Asked about the lack of development in the villages, a member of the Seti-Mahakali National Liberation Front, Gopal

Chand, tells us that the priority now is the revolution. "We are at war. We are preoccupied with fighting, not with development, and we are still learning about governance."

The local people's governments are using local voluntary labour to build bridges, maintain trails and construct public latrines. "We have done more than what they did in 12 years after spending six million rupees," says No. 4 Area Secretary, Prashant. But a government-nominated VDC secretary of one of the few villages where they still remain, is skeptical about development taking place just with voluntary labour. There has been no money from the government and NGOs for years now, he says, and there is no money to buy equipment and for maintenance.

The District Development Committee of Achham is gearing up to re-start road construction. DDC chairman Dipendra Raj Poudyal says he doesn't mind who builds the road, as long as it is built. "Our experience is that the Maoists themselves laid down their guns to participate in the food for work programme," he tells us.

Aside from the belt between the district headquarter of Mangalsen to the airfield in Sanphebagar, there is no government presence in the rest of Achham, except for teachers and health workers. No outsiders are allowed into the Maoist 'base areas'. Any outsider entering a village is either a Maoist or a teacher. Everyone else is presumed to be a government spy. In village after village, there are only the very old or very young. There are no teenagers, no young adults. Any young men and women remaining are either Maoists or connected somehow to the party.

Maoist militia walk around openly with their guns. Most schools are empty, and have been converted into barracks or area offices. Achham's long-suffering villagers had got used to government neglect, now to have got used to being forced to feed the Maoists. "We are really sick of this, we have to give them food, we have to do what they say," says



## M-16s in Maoist hands

They are dressed in combat fatigues and present lal salaams. Comrade Shyam, vice commander of the first battalion of the first brigade of the Maoist Western Division, gets up on a stage festooned with red banners to proudly display his captured M-16 rifle (see pic).

This is the first time that Maoists have shown that they have captured some of the army's newly-acquired American rifles. Army sources admit the Maoists have taken away some M-16s after ambushing security patrols, but say they do not have supplies of the 5.52 calibre ammunition that the guns require. The army has also lost a few Israeli Gailil rifles which can use the same calibre bullets as SLRs for which the Maoists have plenty of bullets.

In a press conference two weeks ago in which the military announced an amnesty for Maoist who surrendered, the government

said it would pay Rs 50,000 for every M-16 or Gailil returned.

Present Maoist strategy is to attack security patrols where they are most vulnerable—on mountain trails or on the highways—with landmines and wire-detonated booby-traps. The army says that after suffering serious defeats, the Maoists have abandoned frontal assaults on military and police bases, and credits its better intelligence and the ability to intercept and cut Maoist communication links.

However, the Maoists hold sway over large areas of the country where government presence is non-existent, where they are strengthening their political work (see, 'Elections in Maoland'). Security analysts say the Maoists could be running short of weapons and ammunition for their new recruits and don't rule out a big attack on a base in the near future to loot an armoury or two.

## Year of the truly weird

HERE AND THERE Daniel Lak



An arbitrary 12-month period comes to an end, and what do we have to look back on with anything other than fear, loathing and regret?

What a year it's been. First off, no need to split semantical hairs over Nepali years, mis-measured millennia or whatever. But no one could argue that the past twelve months have not been seriously strange, downright weird.

Here in the Himalayan kingdom, it all began much as it is right now. With mist and cold and with gloom, or at best, uncertainty about the future. A Maoist war was marching on. A shaky collection of has-beens, technocrats, wannabes and political cast-offs formed a government with no authority. Early enthusiasm for the king's dismissal of Deuba had well and truly waned.

In late January, the Kathmandu elite—the people who think they matter in this country—discovered national unity by getting gloomy themselves. Over the tragic murder of Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife and bodyguard.

Paradoxically though, within days we were over the moon. Ceasefire! Peace in our time! Negotiations! User friendly Maoists and a government minister who seemed to know what he was doing. Narayan Singh Pun's accomplishment in setting up the last round of peace talks remains the single most positive achievement



MINI BAJRACHARYA

of the last year.

But the inevitable happened. Squabbling broke out in government ranks. A weak prime minister who once admitted to me in a television interview that he "wasn't used to working very hard" fell victim to his own inability. The country's hopes for peace faded although—stubbornly—the ceasefire held.

A new, hard-line RPP splitist government took the king's salt. Agitating political parties finally started to realise that a few citizens wanted some humble pie eaten.

Nepali hope sprung eternal. 'Peace, peace and peace' was the government's ostensible mantra. But in late August, as long delayed peace talks resumed in Nepalganj and Dang, the security forces massacred about 20 people in Doramba—an event they have yet to explain to the people. War resumed shortly thereafter.

Kathmandu rediscovered fear in September. Rumors of a 'hit list' circulated. It became perversely fashionable to boast that one was on it. Ministers, ludicrously, were given an official directive not to

venture beyond the Ring Road. Slowly, as more human rights abuses by the security forces came to light, it became obvious that the government meant to win this war with force. The Royal Nepali Army was confident. Even the police seemed more able on the field of battle. Eventually, an increasingly emboldened Nepali media uncovered incident after incident where the state was illegally killing or detaining its own citizens. Amnesty International said Nepal had more disappeared people than any other country in the world. The government's response was to set up a human rights cell in the prime minister's office, a clear attempt to bypass the National Human Rights Commission.

So as an arbitrary twelve month period comes to an end, what have we got to look back on with anything other than fear, loathing and regret? Well, not much.

The media got better in 2003, so did human rights activists. Nepali films like *Bhedako oon jasto* and *Numafung* wowed us, distracted us from the carnage and entropy. Deep Shrestha and others rocked the country in a fabulous peace concert. Various business ventures came and went, a hundred thousand more Nepalis went abroad to earn hard currency and escape the war.

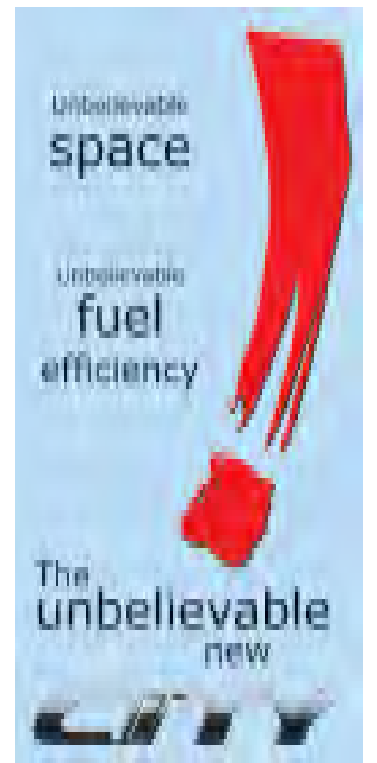
Anything I've missed? Either positive or negative? Letters are welcome because I'd sure like some help in figuring out just what the hell happened in Nepal in 2003. ●

## 'Dumping'

There is an English word that has entered the lexicon of the Achham, and they say it with dread: 'Dumping'. It is the most extreme form of execution among the brutal methods used to eliminate class enemies.

After listening to the verdict against him, the victim is forced to dig his own grave in which he is then buried alive while being beaten and forced to answer questions from interrogators. An eye-witness to a 'dumping' execution says he watched an ex-Maoist guerrilla, Bishu Saud, being executed by this method last year. He was accused of being a traitor.

The Maoists also run a hard labour camp in Shantada where inmates are forced to break stones all day. They include six Maoists accused of rape and a prisoner.





# Pressure-cooker life

At dinnertime there is the distant passive-aggressive hisses and sputters of pressure cookers erupting all over town.

**NEITHER HERE NOR THERE**  
Anagha Neelakantan

A winter dusk. Cold air blows through the permanently cracked open windows of one of the smarter #26 buses. This one is a colour South Asians of a certain stripe like to call 'sky blue'. In reality it is a little darker, less easy to define, one of the triad of colours people choose when they eschew elegant whites and creams for their walls. The others are, of course, the now infamous Bakery Green and the candyfloss or India pink of a once-successful momo shop now sadly going to seed at a Dhalku chowk.

Until the smart new white buses came along with their slipcovered seats this bus was one of the natter 26s that chug along from Patan Dhoka to Tugal and back with an odoriferous stop pause at Purano Buspark. It is usually a nice way to unwind, sitting in this semi-twisted hunk of blue metal that sports a natty navy stripe, but today it seems rather colder than my half open window and the missing door would suggest. And colder in a manner seemingly designed to pierce innocent passengers in the back of the neck like a guilt-inducing grandmother muttering about Marriage and Duties. On closer inspection, a considerable chunk of the large rear window is missing.

The draught only intensifies the slightly out-of-body feeling caused by the dim light inside the bus, the half-light from slow moving streets of candles trying hard to illuminate little piles of frozen vegetables for the evening shopper rushing home, the occasional hallucinatory and

oppressive brightness from a billboard or large store, the headlights and indicators that seem always to appear through an astigmatic haze. All this and the smell of warm woollen bodies, of tea-steeped mouths, and dry roasting beans and legumes, and the sense that a dense, foggy night is about to bear down combine to create a distinct sense of being hemmed in, doomed forever to hear timid conversations between loutish young clerks and girls from Campus.



I'd be surprised if every resident of this otherwise wonderfully liveable city doesn't feel at times like these like a sailboat, buffeted by the competing winds of darkest angst and wildest euphoria. Actually, I'm not really sure where the wild euphoria comes in, but it is likely some kind of big loud nihilistic bwahahaha laugh at the absolute futility of anyone's life at 6PM on a wintry night. The only salvation seems to lie in consuming nourishing liquids and being stupefied by vast quantities of food in the presence of a few solid folk.

The problem arises with the food. One must, unavoidably, sometimes eat at home. Eating at home is fine, grand, but being in any

neighbourhood in a South Asian city around dinnertime is dangerous. To me it means one thing—the distant passive-aggressive hisses and sputters of pressure cookers erupting all over town. Of course we've been conditioned now to equate the nasty things with explosive devices, which goes to show that they are inherently evil in any case, but if you can't help listening carefully to the sounds, as I know many people do, this is what you hear and see: domesticity, routine, discontent, confined spaces, unfulfilled plans, whether for the day, week, or year, an oppressive bubble encompassing and confining everything. This sound ranks high on the list of things that makes people laugh bitterly and look from the bread knives to their wrists. This sound on a slightly unreal winter evening has, I'm sure, sent many sobbing into the night. This sound on a winter Sunday evening is something I do not care to contemplate. Down that dark and empty trail lies complete breakdown.

Lucky for us that Kathmandu has managed to take the sting out of the worst of this by instituting the otherwise annoying working Sunday. The lack of doom surrounding Sunday evenings might explain why so many people move here from other places. The battle is slightly more winnable now. So, for fellow sufferers from pressure cooker-induced doldrums, and any other right thinking person who wants to focus on lovely crisp mornings instead of trying to fill maddening evenings with Activities, I return next week with a cheerful, lighthearted, yet warming winter dinner menu that involves no pressure cookers. ●

# Nightmare in New Delhi

Harassed passenger warns fellow-Nepalis: avoid New Delhi airport.

The interrogation of senior UML leader Ishwor Pokhrel at New Delhi airport this week grabbed media headlines, but all television cameraman Baikuntha Maskey could do was dash off angry letters about his ordeal.

Maskey was transiting New Delhi airport on his way to the United States with his wife, Bimala, on 8 December. After arriving from Kathmandu on the night flight, they had a six-hour layover while waiting for Air India AI 111 to New York. At about midnight, an Air India staffer with two security officers asked for their passports and rudely accused them of having a forged US visa.

"This Air India guy named Sunny was abusive, and didn't want to listen to a word we said to explain that our visas were duly issued by the US embassy in Kathmandu, that they were valid for five years and we had visited America in 1999 on the same visa," the 55-year-old Baikuntha who works for Reuters TV recalled.



Baikuntha Maskey and his wife, Bimala, back in Kathmandu after their ordeal at New Delhi airport with their passport.

From this point on, things started getting even more nasty for the Maskeys. An officer from the US embassy in New Delhi arrived to check his visa and also pronounced it fake. "He refused to believe we got the visa in Kathmandu, and didn't want to call the embassy in Kathmandu to verify," Bimala Maskey said. The embassy official then escorted them back past the immigration desk and cancelled the US visas on their passports.

By now, the Maskeys were not just completely mystified about why they were being picked upon, but also getting really worried that they may be detained. The Air India staff and security personnel kept taunting them with threats of three years' imprisonment for fake visas. "They tried their best to make us feel like criminals," Maskey said.

They ended up spending the night at the airport's transit area to wait for the Royal Nepal Airlines flight the next evening. After 24 gruelling hours at the airport, and when the flight back to Kathmandu was finally boarding, the dreaded Air India staff and security guards returned to demand their passports and harass them again.

After getting back to Kathmandu, the US embassy immediately re-issued the Maskeys B1 and B2 visas valid for five years free of cost. The couple have now resumed their delayed holiday in New York, but not before writing a strongly-worded letter to the US embassy in New Delhi, saying: "We would like to draw your attention to the harassment and inconvenience, huge financial loss as well as mental torture we endured." The Maskeys have asked that the matter be probed and appropriate action taken against the embassy official. They have also demanded compensation for financial losses and for "character assassination". The letter is copied to the External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi and the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu.

Says Maskey: "We really don't know why we were victimised like this, but all we want is to warn other Nepalis of the kind of treatment one can expect at New Delhi airport these days."



The king and political parties disregard co-existence at their own peril.

CAPITAL LETTER  
Yubaraj Ghimire



# Unwise divergence

Reports from the flaming fields in the west and streets of Kathmandu suggest the voice and message from the two places have started to converge. The blood-stained soil of the west and the streets in the capital echo with calls for a "Republic Nepal". However, there is one fundamental difference between the character and commitment of the two voices.

The Maoists are avowedly pro-republic and want monarchy even within the constitutional status scrapped, whereas the student union leaders who raised the anti-king slogan at Ratna Park recently are pro-constitutional monarchy by conviction. But politics is not always about commitment. It is, at times, guided and directed by reaction.

Political parties and pro-democracy forces both inside and outside the country perceive the king to be moving beyond the spirit and boundary of constitutional monarchy. But the Kathmandu street protests were done neither in coordination with

the Maoists, nor did it contain their ideological fury and hatred towards the monarchy. At most, it was a warning in an uncharitable manner that a regressive attempt against democracy by the king would provoke a formidable protest from the people in a form not yet imagined.

The fact that the slogan of 'Republic Nepal' was raised by student leaders affiliated to the Nepali Congress and the UML—both committed to multiparty democracy and the constitutional monarchy, was borne out of deep suspicion about the role and of the king in the post-October Fourth royal takeover. But the anti-monarchy and the anti-king slogan should be viewed independently of the armed insurgency spearheaded by the Maoists. To that extent, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa has been able to

demonstrate political acumen in ordering the release of the arrested student leaders and withdrawal of the charge of sedition against them.

This, however, will not lead to a resolution of the current political impasse that demands a much more sincere and conciliatory gesture from the king and political parties. The monarchy in Nepal, no doubt, still represents certain tradition and faith, and in the minds of many, has the sole responsibility of rescuing the country in times of crisis. Some even believe he is bestowed with divine power.

There have been petitions dispatched in impressive numbers—voluntarily or inspired—by such Nepalis to the royal palace secretariat urging for king's direct intervention. The king is promptly informed about such requests since they also reflect the mood of palace staff guided more

by selfishness than the prevailing rule of law.

They will be able to exercise extra-constitutional authority only if the king becomes all-powerful again, and Singha Darbar as well as the parliament cease to be in the way as envisaged in the 1990 constitution.

What they will not advise the king is that these same petition writers will not come in an organised way on to the streets to counter the political parties or the Maoists, should the slogans for republic become more strident. If the king is guided more by these motivated sentiments than pragmatic wisdom and the spirit of the constitution, it will just pave the way for a more bitter battle between him and the political parties.

Despite their failings in the past 13 years, internal and external pro-

democracy forces should support the cause of the political parties, even grudgingly. An ambitious king can only derive limited advantage of the past failings of the parties, that too for a limited period. But that advantage should ultimately be turned and translated into advantage for the people.

In the past 15 months, the king has made many public pronouncements about his commitment to multiparty democracy and the constitutional monarchy. The way to apply this is to invite political parties to the negotiating table to seek an understanding on how to bring the constitutional process back on track. Failure to do so now may nudge the parties ever closer to the group currently setting rural Nepal afire. The king and political parties disregard co-existence at their own peril. ●



# The Shang has left Rila

lifestyle and image overhauls. Nepal and the actors in its Greek tragedy should also adopt some resolutions. It is needed as the country's image slides further in the global PR index. Nepal has joined the banana republic league, competing with basket cases from other conflict zones. Surely we don't deserve to be in that league.

Bruising headlines and countless dedicated column inches in broadsheets bear testament to this new profile. There used to be a time when the Londoner's romanticised view of Nepal was the land of Mt Everest, white crystalline Himalayan peaks and majestic temples, subservient and brave Johnny Gurkhas, poor and placid natives ruled by an absolute feudal god king. Those images and the parodies are now so last century. Today, there is a darker picture: an ailing country suffering from aid dependency syndrome coming to terms with political seismicity and failure.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the British media has a new perception of Nepal: the land of fighting (in the courts) Johnny Gurkhas, people's war and human rights atrocities,

rampantly corrupt and visionless leaders, banana democracy and a realm tainted by massacre. The country has lost its innocence and its sheen, shang has long left rila, the myth is a distant memory. The country needs to change, adapt and reinvent, and the timing could not be more appropriate to stem this regression. If we don't seize this moment and traverse the high pass of peace, Nepal will be left further and further behind.

The key stakeholders in this drama have to realise there is no military solution and no going back to the discarded system of the *ancien regime* or to failed and selfish geriatric politicians. The gung ho army, the increasingly influential procurement agents and the military advisers have to concede that the grievances behind the conflict cannot be defeated militarily. They can only be defeated by diverting those resources being ploughed into finding a military solution.

Those Maoists with their fluid principles should probably rent another cause and migrate down south for the winter to their keeper. What do they achieve by taking the country

back to Year Zero? Prolonging the struggle can only undermine the very interests and the development needs of the constituent base they allege to serve. The cause of this struggle is now in mainstream politics and the agenda of the multilateral development agencies.

Nepal has to catch the slipstream of the economic dynamism and optimism spreading in the region and present a confident and a contemporary image. Investment, tourism and development can only manifest in a nation at peace with itself. Nepal has to spiritually cleanse itself of its past misfortune by looking back at its rich tradition of tolerance, understanding and compromise.

Misogi is a traditional Shinto bathing ritual for purifying the mind and body, usually performed at the start of the year. The hour is here, Nepal and its leaders (political, RNA and PLA) should perform misogi and be agents of change. Let 2004 be a year of the Nepali renaissance. ●

Joti Giri is an utility professional in London.



London Eye is the first in a rotating column in this space every week that is written exclusively for *Nepali Times* by various London-based Nepal-watchers.

LONDON EYE  
Joti Giri



am regularly probed by Londoners about the state of Nepal. Frankly the hole couldn't be deeper for me, when I have to don the role of a chief apologist to spin and dispel the message of doom, gloom and imminent disintegration of my motherland.

The new year inevitably brings resolutions with many going on an overdrive with

2004 is here with a bang, literally in the case of this publication, with the launch of a reformatted weekly. Will 2004 hold more hope than the year just gone by, or will our country dig an even deeper hole? I



# SAARCONOMY

## A regional trade bloc is the only way forward.

ECONOMIC SENSE  
Artha Beed



The powwow has begun. Experts are still pontificating, but there is an electric snap in the air. After many years, South Asia is waking up to the potential of SAARC as a forum to strengthen economic ties rather than getting bogged down in regional geopolitics. There is talk of a unified currency and of course, making SAFTA a reality rather than a seminar peg. Will the 'talk more, do less' leaders of South Asia take up the challenge?

From the last SAARC summit in Kathmandu till date, there have been some significant developments in the region. India's economic outlook and growth have made the world sit up and notice the opportunities for synergy in the region. India's interest in ASEAN, by opening air routes and building transnational highways, points in the future direction of this superpower. There is a thaw on the political front too, however slight, between Delhi and Islamabad. The two antagonists discovered they are losing huge amounts of trade dollars because of the conflict. Should they redress this imbalance, it would add a new dimension to the politico-economic scene in the region.

If India could overcome its adversity towards China (and the two also share a war) for a piece of the regional trade and economy, surely the same formula can work with Pakistan. India's greater proximity to China provides a new spectrum of opportunities for the region. Yes, there are individuals in South Block who would still want politics to be the main agenda in the region, but propagators of free trade

are on the inside track.

Nepal with its own political mess, stands as a bystander to rapid developments in the region. While we could have provided the neutral venue to start regional trade policies and activities, Nepal is now sidelined. Although we have voiced our bit on a unified currency, most of the rhetoric is tied to vague and unfounded fears of neo-imperialism.

will get the attention of Nepali business people. The South Asia trade movement is built on strong lobbying by India and Pakistan. Perhaps our fear keeps us from seeing the benefits of seizing more opportunities.

They range from tourism and travel to Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). Nepali tea can freely move to Pakistan through



SUBHAS RAI

We, who have a fixed currency regime, find the gumption to disregard a unified currency. The proposed South Asia 'Euro' would not make a big difference: in fact it could bring more fiscal stability to the region.

The Nepali private sector that led the SAARC-isation of trade and industry through the formation of unified body, is now caught in its own politics. The election fever that infects other national trade bodies

India, and Sri Lankan spices can find its way to the Himalaya without hassles. Manufacturing bases can be located to serve portions of the region and the service industry will not have political boundaries. The WTO will bring in many ways that have not been anticipated. Taking a united stand puts us in a better position to negotiate. So, to all the unbelievers, a regional trade bloc—under SAARC—is the only way forward. ●

### BIZ NEWS

#### No joyride

Three months after the revival of the Kathmandu-Bhakatapur trolley bus service that was closed three years ago, plans are afoot to make it turn a profit. Kathmandu Metropolitan City and Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA) signed an MoU on 19 December in which KMC requests KEVA to develop a business plan for the trolleybus system which will be based on a CEMAT study, which was commissioned by Winrock International. KEVA commissioned the study immediately after the course of the trolley bus services in December, 2001. The Ministry of Labour and Transportation Management has separate agreements with KMC, Madhyapur Thimi and Bhakatapur.

#### Talk it easy

Since its management was revamped eight months ago, ServingMinds, the pioneer call centre in the Kingdom, is seeing the good times roll. Orders for expansion of capacity from existing clients are on the rise and the company has just signed on three new clients. The new contract means ServingMinds will immediately take on board at least 300 new hires on location.

Head of HR at ServingMinds, Gitanjali Rana Gurung, says the company offers a great opportunity to recent graduates interested in careers in the global marketplace. Priding itself on its professional standards, each staff member undergoes an orientation and training program geared to providing quality service while developing their own skills. And there are on-the-job perks like transportation to and from work and meals.

Judging by the success of call centres and BPO businesses south of the border, president of ServingMinds, Ashish Kapoor, feels Kathmandu can follow suit, generating thousands of jobs. According to Kapoor, the agents' success and the growth of the venture, co-promoted by Mercantile Group, is evidence that the international call centre business is here to stay.

#### NEW PRODUCTS

NEPALI BIKES: We may have yet to send a man to the moon, but by golly we've made our first motorbike! Cosmic Yingang Motorbikes, the first ever bike to be manufactured in Nepal, has been launched under the brand Cosmic Yingang Motorcycle Manufacturing Company (CYMMC). Manufactured at Bardaghat at Nawalparasi, the bikes come in two models, YG 100-12 and YG 125-11 and are priced at Rs 59,999 and Rs 74,999 respectively. The bikes come equipped with patented fuel saving device and have other special features like two-clutch system, disc brake, gear display, alloy wheels, a two year or 18,000km warranty. Actor Rajesh Hamal is the brand ambassador.



NEPALI NUTS: The amount we spend on imported snacks is definitely not peanuts, so it does seem logical to switch to a Nepali brand that offers great taste, good quality and money back to the country. Maruti Peanuts from the ATC group is available in honey, roasted and salted flavours. The manufacturers are confident their product will meet the exacting standards of snackers in the Kingdom.



CHINESE FOOD: Everything about China & World Restaurant at Kamaladi is on a very big scale—a buffet capacity for 228 people, the lunch buffet has 40 items, dinners an extravagant 60, both priced at a reasonable Rs 280 and Rs 380 per person. Groups of more than five can avail of a 15 percent discount, and while the menu is predominantly Chinese, there is Indian and Nepali cuisine on offer too. And as a truly new freebie, newlyweds can score a free car to ferry them to and from their party.



<p><b>Mandala House</b> APARTMENT HOTEL Luxury Apartments At Comfortable Rates</p> <p>Baluwatar, Kathmandu Tel: 4419412 (9:00 am - 6:00 pm) 00412-26635 (after 6:00 pm &amp; Saturdays) E-mail: mandala@wfnk.com.np Web site: www.mandala.com.np</p>	<p><b>EVEREST</b> HOTEL</p> <p>THE GREAT ESCAPE EVEREST COFFEE MILL Premium Roast Coffee</p> <p>The Great Escape Center 1012 Bldg. 1013 Bhatbhateni Kathmandu, Nepal Tel: 001-977-1-4221111, 4221112 Fax: 001-977-1-4221113 E-mail: info@greatescape.com.np www.greatescape.com.np</p>	<p><b>EVEREST COFFEE MILL</b> Premium Roast Coffee</p> <p>The Great Escape Center 1012 Bldg. 1013 Bhatbhateni Kathmandu, Nepal Tel: 001-977-1-4221111, 4221112 Fax: 001-977-1-4221113 E-mail: info@greatescape.com.np www.greatescape.com.np</p>
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# Revenue is up, so is human misery



KIRAN PANDEY

from people who have migrated in with all their savings to flee the violence. Banks are bursting with money, with nowhere to invest. "There is a huge problem with liquidity," one senior banking executive told us. "We have too much of it."

Experience of countries like El Salvador and Sri Lanka, where civil wars were more intense than in Nepal, show that even during conflict, the government can adopt policies to reduce human suffering. "Despite the war, access to food, basic health care and primary education need not be impaired," says Pyakuryal.

For that, food and medicine should not be regarded as weapons of war. The government is under pressure from some donors to allow service delivery and relief directly to Maoist areas. After refusing point blank, there are indication officials may be relenting. (see box) ●

## Donors go direct

Donor agencies have convinced the government to allow them to work in Maoist strongholds to take food, health and infrastructure.

The German aid agency GTZ and the UN's World Food Program (WFP) will soon launch a food security and rehabilitation project in 15 VDCs of Rukum and Rolpa. "If we go to such places under the government network, the Maoists do not cooperate, that is why we are going directly," an official said.

WFP's 'Quick Impact Program' has been going on in seven conflict and food deficit districts. "We prioritise villages with lower caste people and difficult access," said GTZ's senior regional coordinator Surya Nepal. From its new regional office in Ghorahi, GTZ will also be involved in reconstruction, irrigation and repair of roads.

The government has deployed mobile teams to take basic and even legal services to remote rural areas where government offices have closed down because of Maoist activity. Although the mobile teams get a lot of air-time on state media, it has been implemented at only a few places.

National economic prospects are no less gloomy. A FNCCI report shows 35 of the most important manufacturing industries are operating at half their production capacity. Worst hit are textiles, utensils, cement and cotton.

Still, cities are flush with cash

from p1

The finance minister has been trying to put a brave face on all this by citing improvements in macroeconomic performance with a notable 15 percent increase in revenue this year. Lohani told us "Production has gone up and so has fiscal balance and trade, we are moving in the right direction." The Nepal Rastra Bank's latest review cites exports increased nine percent compared to a 19 percent decline last year.

But what is worrisome is that a vast majority of Nepalis are suffering from conflict, dislocation and a serious decline in incomes.



Searching, and not finding, the ideal Nepali Woman.

## From historical damsels to rebel chelis

NEPALI PAN  
Neeta Pokhrel



"Are you really a Nepali? But you do not act like one." Having heard these remarks umpteen times (from various camps and sects, and all in an urban context) I finally decided to embark

on a quest for the ideal Nepali female. What is a real Nepali woman? What did I have to do to 'belong'? At the end of my exploration, here is what I have found:

### Historical damsels

One must start at the very beginning with historical Nepali women: Sita, Gargi, Bhrikuti and the like simply because our society has an unshakable hang-up about them. I asked a character pundit what was so Nepali about these mythological figures, what was the essence of the Nepali female character? He pulled out the Sita Scale, according to which you can rate a woman on how she embraces the concept of shame, honour, guilt and self-worth as defined by values still prevalent in our society.

Nah, you may say, the urban Nepali woman has moved on, she is not shackled by these outdated values. Wrong. If it wasn't for this hang-up and brainwashing would Shrishia Karki have hung herself last year? Probably not.

### Martyred mothers

"Every woman is a mother," they say. Fair enough. My only problem is that I do not have the prevailing Joan of Arc quality of Nepali mothers, which would allow me to be perpetually martyred for the greater causes: my husband, my children—especially my sons—my house and everything else but me.

I would like to take a moment here to thank Bollywood (and now Kollywood) for its unfaltering dedication to produce an eternal galore of role models for the mothers of this subcontinent. Come hail or storm, or fast-paced mobile clutching Indian generation next, when it comes to the mothers, they are still martyred, grieving, and recounting their fate and sorrow. If you wondered where your mother learnt that emotional blackmailing tool, wonder no more: she got it from the silver screen. Our wise mothers know that nothing has a greater social appeal and resounds better with people than *dukha*.

### Sir Madams

These are the empowered and gender stigma transcendents. In the West, women used to burn bras and grow armpit hair 25 years ago. Today, our women start NGOs and say stuff-it to the kitchen to watch the Hindi serial, *Kasauti*, where a bunch of thoroughly empowered women do all sorts of revolutionary wheedling.

With all these empowered women infesting the workplace, things have become a bit topsy-turvy. Recently, staff in an office in a tarai town were so taken aback by a female engineering specialist that they ended up calling her 'Sir Engineer'.

### Mrs Post-graduates

The days when urban girls and young women didn't get a chance in higher education is gone. All parents now want nothing short of a post-graduate degree for their daughters. "Why a Masters?" I asked one father. Is it because these progressive parents believe that their daughters need to stand on their own feet? He laughed at me. "Nobody would marry my daughter if she didn't have a Masters degree." A masters so she can get married to a lord and master.

### Rebelling Chelis

I take my hat off to actress Jharana Bajracharya for publicly admitting that she has sex appeal, and yes, she is proud of it! Brave Jharana does not believe in the Sita Scale. And there are the underground women's group calling themselves 'Charitraheen Chelis' who dare to reveal that Nepali women actually are in control of their own sexuality.

# Gallery mine

NARESH NEWAR

If neighbourhoods can be said to have a personality, then Lazimpat of late acquired a rather artsy one.

This thin artery that runs past various embassies, VVIP residences and hotels has suddenly sprouted a number of interesting little galleries and cafés, attracting a vastly different crowd from the usual visa penitents. The most recent, Gallery Nine, is different.

Nine creative Nepalis and one Korean got together one day and decided they needed a common space to grow, nurture and share: Manjushree Thapa, Viplob Pratik, Mani Lama, Sudarshan Karki, Deepak Thapa, Ashmina Ranjit, Basanta Thapa, Bandi Nima Sherpa, Tashijangbu Sherpa and Kim Hong Sung. All of them are art lovers and include painters, photographers, authors and even a poet—bound by a common love for art and literature.

Gallery Nine chose the environs of Snow Lion, a landmark Kathmandu hotel

from the early days of tourism, to set up shop. They wanted a meeting place that welcomed artists, both old and new. "We want to exhibit everything that was neglected in the past by other galleries because a lot has to be done to promote Nepali art and literature," says poet Viplob Pratik.

Inaugurated in April 2003, Gallery Nine is already unique for showcasing the work of those who received neither opportunity nor encouragement. 'Art' here covers the entire spectrum from music to dramatic monologues. There is no fee for exhibitions, but the gallery does take a commission from all sales to cover overheads like the curator, caretaker and cleaner.

"There is a lot of great local talent here but they are shy to show their work," says ace photographer Mani Lama. Narendra Pradhan did a joint photo exhibition for the first time with his father and he was surprised by the reaction. "When they bought his pictures right off the wall, he realised his worth," says Lama. All nine agree this is the kind of impact that their gallery

wants to make—talent that is respected and not wasted. "Each time you press that shutter is precious for a photographer, and if you don't share that moment with others, then it's your loss," says Lama, who is considered one of the best documentary-photographers in the kingdom.

Gallery Nine has a deliberately low profile. The owners are not publicity keen, fearing the spotlight could kill the intimacy, the real essence of their gallery. "All we want is to give it an aesthetic shape. Commercialising it will only turn this into an ordinary art gallery," says Pratik. The simplicity and low key ambience work, making it aesthetically pleasing without being antiseptic. Gallery Nine has a distinctly cosy-home vibe.

The team is now planning a café so that lovers of music, paintings, photographs, literature and films can slake their hunger for art and more corporeal sustenance in one place. At a time when other galleries are closing, the investors of Gallery Nine are in it for the long haul. If costs escalate they

have already decided it's a price they are willing to pay for art's sake. "We will never close down," says a determined Pratik, who, like the other eight, earns a modest income and has invested his personal savings into the project.



In the past eight months, Gallery Nine has held about 18 exhibitions and is booked through January. An exhibit of political cartoons by Batsayan has just concluded. Now, international artists are showing a keen interest in showing there. Korean photographer Kim Hong Sung's *The Land I Love* is exhibiting till 16 January. It will be followed by another Korean artist's calligraphy. "This is just the beginning, and while fulfilling the artists' needs we hope that those who come to Gallery Nine leave us with something special too," says Lama. ●

Open daily 11AM to 6PM, except Monday.  
Gallery Nine, 544 Narayan Gopal Sadak,  
Lazimpat 4428694 gallerynine@wlink.com.np



Lazimpat's hottest new gallery is a cosy new home for the arts.

Staff at Gallery 9 pulling down the cartoons of Batsayan on Tuesday to make way for an exhibition of photographs of Nepal by the Korean artist, Kim Hong Sung that will be on till 16 January.

MIN BAJRACHARYA





# Birds of a feather

SRADHA BASNYAT

**K**athmandu is one of the few capitals in the world where the suburbs border a national park. The other one that springs to mind is Nairobi.

Dominating the capital's northern horizon is the Shivapuri National Park, a walled sanctuary that doesn't just protect an awesome biodiversity, but also the vital watershed for Kathmandu Valley with springs that feed the Bagmati and Bishnumati.

Designated a national park two years ago, the 144sq km mixed forest of oaks, pine, birch and rhododendron, countless varieties of orchids and 3,000 types of flowering plants is home to 102 species of butterflies and a number of dragonflies. Within the 111km walls of the park, thrive 20 percent of all the orchid species found in

Almost one-fourth of 850 bird species in Nepal are found on Shivapuri National Park.

Nepal. Come rhododendron season, the park is ablaze with red, pink and white and on the forest floor, more than 129 species of mushrooms have been identified. This is also a birdwatcher's paradise with 177 species that either live or stop over here on their migratory route—almost one-fourth of all the bird species found in Nepal.

Geography has everything to do with it. Nepal's leading ornithologist, Hari Saran Nepali, explains: "Birds don't like very cold climates. At Shivapuri, the base of the south face starts at 1,400m and the base of the north face at 500m. It's ideal for birds that travel south in winter

and north in summer." Instead of migrating large distances, the birds simply fly up or down the mountain!

Nepal is home to 850 of the world's estimated 9,000 species of birds. Shivapuri is special because it is an undisturbed forest, unlike Godabari where regular dynamiting for marble scares off both birds and humans. Nepali is sad to note that several species in Godabari have become so rare as to warrant concern over extinction. In 50 years of birdwatching, he has seen the numbers of the slender bill scimitar babbler, blue winged laughing thrush, gray sided laughing thrush, bar tailed cuckoo dove, mountain hawk eagle, booted and black eagles and the white georgeted flycatcher fall alarmingly.

There are nine species on the government's protected list, of which the cheer pheasant, lesser and Bengal floricans, monal and sarus crane are among the 29 globally endangered bird species. Nepali has only seen the slender bill scimitar babbler on Shivapuri. "Though these birds should be seen along the Valley rim according to the range, this could indicate there are very few left," he says. But there is a problem with drawing such conclusions because longterm studies are absent. In 1961, Nepali recorded a sighting of a blue winged laughing thrush in Shivapuri. The next time he recorded such a sighting was in 1986, at Godabari. But the same bird is almost common in the Makalu-Barun area. Research



Crested Serpent Eagle



White-throated Kingfisher



Blue-throated Barbet



Coppersmith Barbet

Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker

Flocked together recently on Shivapuri to carry out a bird census.

requires funding, hard work and dedication. Nepali knows there are too few who are willing to devote their lives to Nepal's birds.

Nepal Nature.com was started by Karna Salya, a forester by training and president of KGH Group of Hotels and Resorts, who is interested in using the expertise of specialists like Nepali to promote birdwatching. On Christmas Day this year, it organised a half-day Christmas Bird Count. Starting from verdant Park Village Resort, birdwatchers walked around its six acres and immediately, Nepali spotted a red-vented bulbul perched on a tree. From an electrical wire, a kingfisher created a splash of colour in brilliant

turquoise as it took flight.

From the hotel, it is a 10-minute drive to the gate of Shivapuri National Park, accessible for Rs 10 each (Rs 250 for tourists). Armed with binoculars (7x40 with a 8.6 degree wide angle is best), park warden Phanindra Kharel headed his group down the forest trail and up to cross a little stream. A colourful danphe, Nepal's national bird, crossed the trail leisurely, unaware he was being watched. Kharel pointed out wabblers shuttling from branch to branch so quickly that our eyes could barely keep up. By the end of the morning, the visitors had counted 52 species of birds.

Kharel is proud of Shivapuri's



Peregrine Falcon

achievements in the past two years. "From 1984 there has been a total rehabilitation of erosion and bare patches. The wildlife has increased, leopard numbers have gone up and so has the volume of water, indications that the natural environment has improved."

The park, so close to Kathmandu, is ideal for special interest tourism. Rajendra Narsingh Suwal, managing director of Nepal Nature.com, says, "Nepal is ideal for watching monkeys, and butterflies like the rare Kaiser-i-Hind that appears for only one summer month." The relict dragonfly, found only in fossil form in Japan, is still flitting around the hills of Shivapuri today.

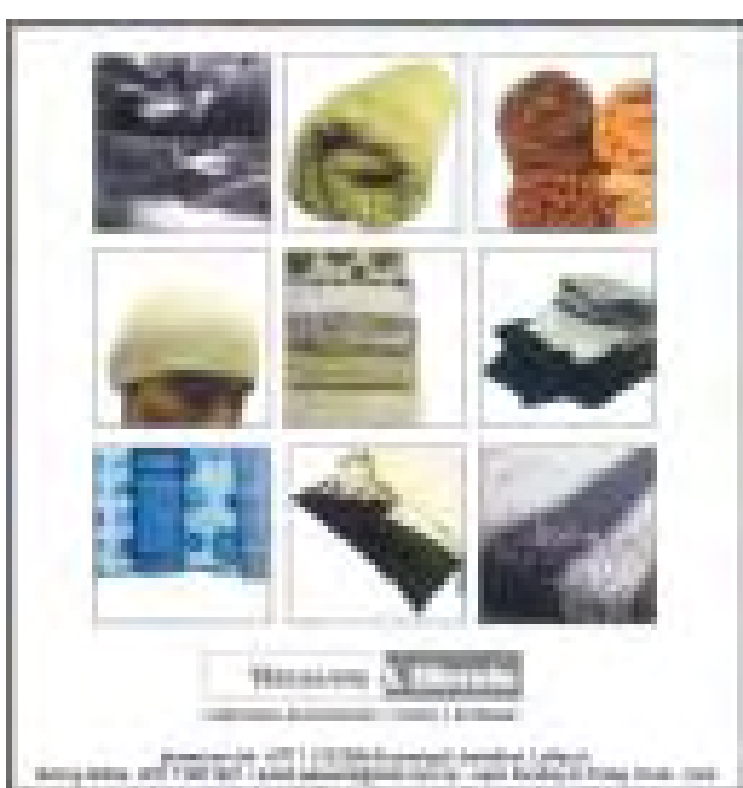
www.birdlifeneal.com  
www.nepalnature.com

## Kosi birds

It's that time of year when seasonal birdwatchers throng to Kosi Tappu to catch migratory birds as they flock down from Siberia through the Tibetan plateau down the Arun gorge to warmer climes. Ducks and geese are especially fond of the reservoir created by the Kosi Barrage, 88m above sea level—Nepal's lowest point. Some 467 species of migratory and resident birds have been sighted here, sometimes in flocks of 50,000 migratory waterfowl at a time. Birdlovers can expect to see any of 30 varieties of shore birds, 114 kinds water birds, 20 duck species or a couple from the ibis family. The 175sq km reserve is also the largest heron sanctuary in Nepal.

This year's annual Migratory Birds Festival is from 18-25 January.

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY HIRA LAL DANGOL AND SHARADA DANGOL







# School heritage

Not everyone agrees with a plan to demolish St Xavier's old school building.

MIN BAURACHARYA

SUNIL POKHREL

Demolition work has started on an old school building that has been Jawalakhel's landmark for nearly a century despite calls from old students and teachers that the building should be preserved. The former Rana palace was built in 1912 by King Tribhuban for his daughter when she married Tara SJB Rana, who then sold it to the

Jesuits in 1954 to house the newly-opened St Xavier's School. Over the decades, thousands of Nepali boys have studied in the building's high-ceilinged classrooms. It is now deemed to be structurally unsound, but there is disagreement about whether it should be replaced with a new building, or the existing structure strengthened. "The old building served well for a good number of years, but since the safety of

students and staff is of utmost importance, we have no alternative but to pull it down," says principal Fr Lawrence Maniyar, spreading out the blueprint of a new building that will replace the old one. Engineers called to inspect the building determined that even a small tremor would bring the 11-room structure down. Lawrence says it will be cheaper to tear down the building and construct a new one, rather than carry out



Demolition men start tearing down the roof of St Xavier's school on Wednesday. It will be replaced by a new building by architect Bibhuti Man Singh (above).

an expensive renovation. But for old students of the school as well as teachers, there is an emotional attachment to their alma mater. Some of the critics of the demolition plan are Lawrence's own faculty colleagues, who say the building is a part of Nepal's architectural heritage and Jesuit history. Vijaya Man Singh, of the class of 1977, says: "The building is a landmark, its value cannot be counted in money alone." His classmate, Bidesh Shah, agrees: "At least the front façade should be maintained."

Architect Bibhuti Man Singh, who has designed many of Kathmandu's modern buildings, contests the argument that the Jawalakhel palace had much historic value as some of the better-known Rana palaces in the Valley. "It didn't have much stylistic unity in architectural terms, it was more walls than space," says Singh. His design for the new building has a brick façade and tries to keep some of the classical elements of the old building with Corinthian columns and cornices, while integrating it with an indigenous exposed red brick façade.

St Xavier's is presently on a fund-raising drive to finance the new four-storey building, which is estimated to cost Rs 110 million. The new building will be multi-use and facilitate the school's expansion plans. ●

**Dead House**  
 CD  
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**KALNIA** Picture Frames  
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 Kalnia Picture Frames

**EPSON**  
**MERCANTILE**  
 PROJECTOR  
 TRUE COLOR?

# SAARC chasm

RANJIT DEVRAJ in NEW DELHI

The two assassination bids on Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf in December cast a long shadow over the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), easily one of the most jinxed of regional groupings. The heads of state of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives are scheduled to meet in Islamabad on 4-6 January in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. The South Asian summit is due to take place after several years, getting underway in a mood of apparent reconciliation between India and Pakistan.

Hopes are high that amid this more conducive environment, the summit would allow the smaller members of SAARC a chance to address serious socio-economic problems facing the 1.5 billion people who live in one of the world's poorest regions. In a bid to allay apprehensions on whether the summit would take place at all Pakistan's foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar announced at a news conference in Islamabad on Saturday that "there has been absolutely no change of plans".

Khokhar, who served a term as Pakistan's high commissioner in New Delhi, was emphatic that there would be "tight and stringent security arrangements during the entire summit period". Within hours of the Christmas Day assassination attempt, the second in the cantonment town of Rawalpindi in

11 days, Indian foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna condemned in a statement the "heinous terrorist attack against President Musharraf in Rawalpindi which took many innocent lives and injured a large number of civilians".

The official statement curiously omitted his army rank of general, mention of which usually serves as a subtle but convenient reminder that the president heads what is essentially a military government. While most analysts in India believe that the attacks are the handiwork of extremist elements, it is unclear if they were a reaction to Musharraf's compliance with directives from the United States that he crack down hard on elements of the Taliban or to his newly softened stand on the long-disputed territory of Kashmir, or both.

Musharraf recently made, then retracted, a statement that Pakistan was willing, as a mark of "flexibility" toward India, to drop its longstanding demand that the future of Kashmir be decided by a UN-mandated plebiscite in the Muslim-majority territory. Some Indian leaders and analysts have taken the view that Musharraf only has himself to blame for the assassination bids and that they are the direct result of Islamabad's support for Islamic extremism as 'an instrument of state policy'.

"We have been publicly telling Pakistan that those who start terrorism can end up facing it themselves," Defence Secretary



This is easily one of the most jinxed regional groupings.

George Fernandes said on Saturday. He was visiting army formations close to the Indo-Pakistan border, where a ceasefire has been in place since 24 November as part of a series of confidence building measures ahead of the SAARC summit. By its charter, SAARC avoids contentious bilateral issues. But Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has said the summit did offer a "good beginning" as well as a chance to see if Pakistan was "serious about giving up an attitude of enmity towards India".

PR Chari of the independent Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) said he was not at all surprised by the assassination bids that he saw as a direct consequence of Musharraf's complicated game of "running with the hares and hunting with the hounds". According to Chari, the main reason why SAARC has never

quite taken off is Pakistan's attempts to use it as "yet another international forum for anti-India propaganda" and "settle the Kashmir dispute on its own line of thinking".

India, he maintained, would be better off concentrating on "subregional cooperation" with other members of SAARC and alternately concentrate on other regional groupings such as the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) or BIMSTEC, the acronym for the Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation.

For its part, Pakistan has accorded more importance to its relations with Islamic countries to its west and north including Afghanistan, Iran and the oil-rich sheikhdoms, although its shares deep historic and cultural ties India and other members of SAARC. Vajpayee is committed to attend

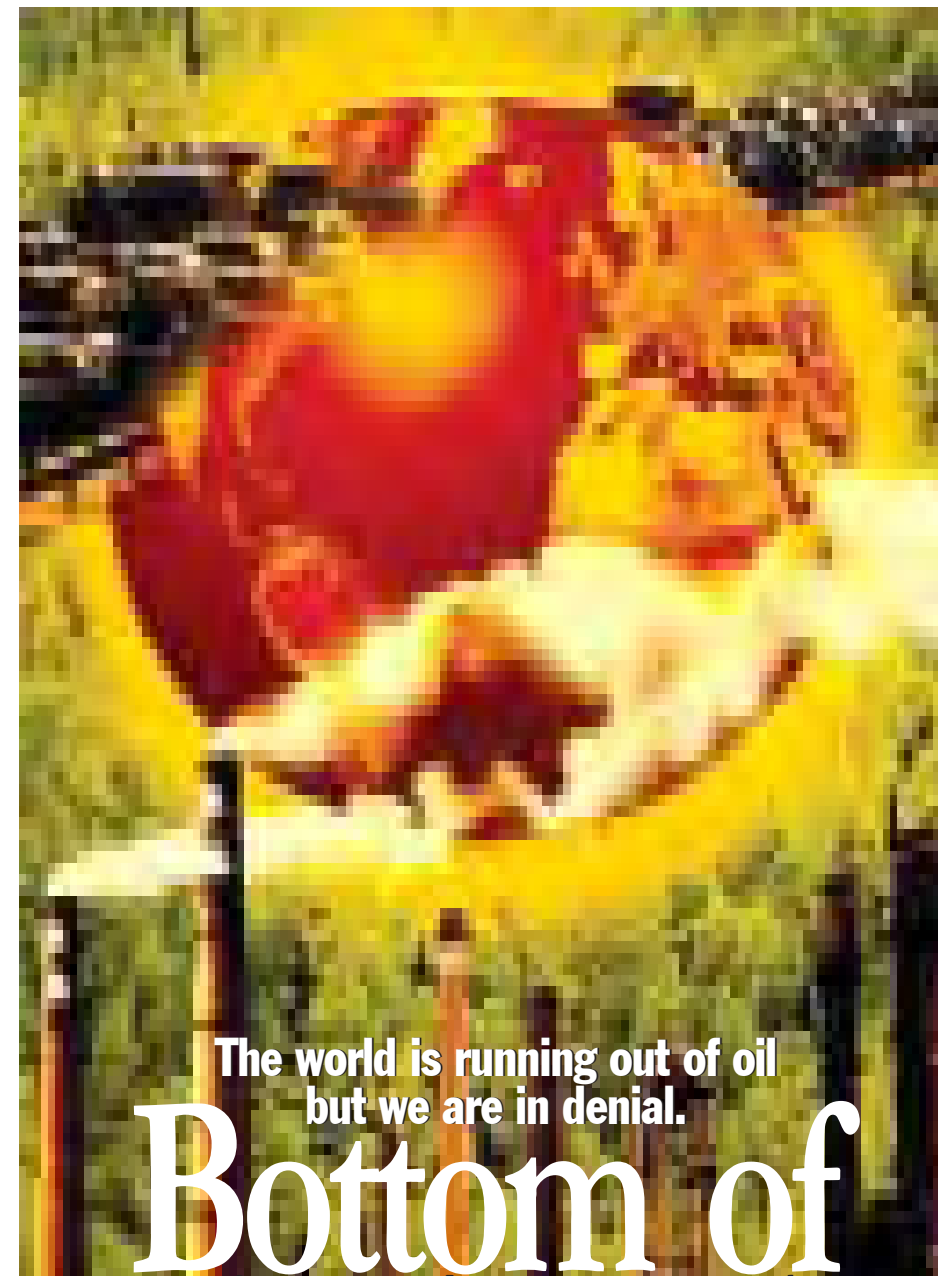
the BIMSTEC's first ever summit in Thailand's resort town of Phuket in early February. This is in keeping with India's new 'Look East' policy that is opposed to the peninsula's traditional focus of economic and other activity along its western seaboard.

Bhutan and Nepal have already applied to join BIMSTEC and their entry can only serve to hasten the demise of SAARC, already held hostage by India-Pakistan rivalry. "India will strongly support the entry of Bhutan and Nepal into BIMSTEC at the summit," said an official as if to emphasise the new policy.

Another security analyst, Brahma Chellaney of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), says that SAARC lacked vibrancy and dynamism. It is time that India looked beyond the immediate region and invested political capital in "processes and initiatives that have a future", Chellaney explained. ● (IPS)

**KALNIA** Picture Frames  
 THE GRANDEST OF ALL...  
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The world is running out of oil but we are in denial.

# Bottom of the barrel

COMMENT  
George Monbiot



The oil industry is buzzing. In December, the US government approved the development of the biggest deposit discovered in British territory for at least 10 years. Everywhere we are told that this is a "huge" find, which dispels the idea that North Sea oil is in terminal decline. You begin to recognise how serious the human predicament has become when you discover that this "huge" new field will supply the world with oil for five and a quarter days.

Every generation has its taboo, and ours is this: that the resource upon which our lives have been built is running out. We don't talk

about it because we cannot imagine it. This is a civilisation in denial.

Oil itself won't disappear, but extracting what remains is becoming ever more difficult and expensive. The discovery of new reserves peaked in the 1960s. Every year we use four times as much oil as we find. All the big strikes appear to have been made long ago: the 400 million barrels in the new North Sea field would have been considered puffing in the 1970s. Our future supplies depend on the discovery of small new deposits and the better exploitation of big old ones. No one with expertise in the field is in any doubt that the global production of oil will peak before long.

The only question is how long. The most optimistic projections are the ones produced by the United States department of energy, which claims that this will not take place until

2037. But the US energy information agency has admitted that the government's figures have been fudged—it has based its projections for oil supply on the projections for oil demand, perhaps in order not to sow panic in the financial markets.

Other analysts are less sanguine. The petroleum geologist Colin Campbell calculates that global extraction will peak before 2010. In August, the geo-physicist Kenneth Deffeyes told *New Scientist* that he was "99 percent confident" that the date of maximum global production will be 2004. Even if the optimists are correct, we will be scraping the oil barrel within the lifetimes of most of those who are middle-aged today.

The supply of oil will decline, out global demand will not. Today we will burn 76 million barrels; by 2020 we will be using 112 million barrels a day, after which projected demand accelerates. If supply declines and demand grows, we soon encounter something with which the people of the advanced industrial economies are unfamiliar: shortage. The price of oil will go through the roof. As the price rises, the sectors that are now almost wholly dependent on crude oil—principally transport and farming—will be forced to contract. Given that climate change caused by burning oil is cooking the planet, this might appear to be a good thing. The problem is that our lives have become hardwired to the oil economy. Our sprawling suburbs are impossible to service without cars. High oil prices mean high food prices—much of the world's growing population will go hungry. These problems will be exacerbated by the direct connection between the price of oil and the rate of unemployment. The last five recessions in the US were all preceded by a rise in the oil price.

Oil, of course, is not the only fuel on which vehicles can run. There are plenty of possible substitutes, but none of them is likely to be anywhere near as cheap as crude is today. Petroleum can be extracted from tar sands and oil shale, but in most cases the process uses almost as much energy as it liberates, while creating great mountains and lakes of toxic waste. Natural gas is a better option, but switching from oil to gas propulsion would require a vast and staggeringly expensive new fuel infrastructure. Gas, of course, is subject to the same constraints as oil: at current rates of use, the world has about 50 years' supply, but if gas were to take the place of oil its life could be much shorter.

Vehicles could be run from fuel cells powered by hydrogen, which is produced by the electrolysis of water. But the electricity that produces the hydrogen has to come from somewhere. To fill all the cars in the US would require four times the current capacity of the national grid. Coal burning is filthy,

nuclear energy is expensive and lethal. Running the world's cars from wind or solar power would require a greater investment than any civilisation has ever made before. New studies suggest that leaking hydrogen could damage the ozone layer and exacerbate global warming.

Turning crops into diesel or methanol is just about viable in terms of recoverable energy, but it means using the land on which food is now grown for fuel. My rough calculations suggest that running the United Kingdom's cars on rapeseed oil would require an area of arable fields the size of England.

There is one possible solution which no one writing about the impending oil crisis seems to have noticed—a technique with which the British and Australian governments are currently experimenting, called underground coal gasification. This is a fancy term for setting light to coal seams that are too deep or too expensive to mine, and catching the gas that emerges. It's a hideous prospect, as it means that several trillion tons of carbon which was otherwise impossible to exploit becomes available, with the likely result that global warming will eliminate life on Earth.

We seem, in other words, to be in trouble. Either we lay hands on every available source of fossil fuel, in which case we fry the planet and civilisation collapses, or we run out, and civilisation collapses.

The only rational response to both the impending end of the oil age and the menace of global warming is to redesign our cities, our farming and our lives. But this cannot happen without massive political pressure, and our problem is that no one ever rioted for austerity. People tend to take to the streets because they want to consume more, not less. Given a choice between a new set of matching tableware and the survival of humanity, I suspect that most people would choose the tableware.

In view of all this, the notion that the war with Iraq had nothing to do with oil is simply preposterous. The US attacked Iraq (which appears to have had no weapons of mass destruction and was not threatening other nations), rather than North Korea (which is actively developing a nuclear weapons program and boasting of its intentions to blow everyone else to kingdom come) because Iraq had something it wanted. In one respect alone, Bush and Blair have been making plans for the day when oil production peaks, by seeking to secure the reserves of other nations.

I refuse to believe that there is not a better means of averting disaster than this. I refuse to believe that human beings are collectively incapable of making rational decisions. But I am beginning to wonder what the basis of my belief might be. ● (© *The Nation*)

George Monbiot's recent articles can be found at [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com)

ANALYSIS  
Paul R Epstein



Today few scientists doubt that Earth's atmosphere is warming, but less familiar effects of global warming—namely, serious human medical disorders—are no less worrisome. Many are already upon us.

Most directly, global warming is projected to double the number of deaths related to heat waves by 2020. Prolonged heat can increase smog and the dispersal of allergens, causing respiratory symptoms. Global warming also boosts the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts. Such disasters not only cause death by drowning or starvation, but also damage crops and make them vulnerable to infection and infestations by pests and choking weeds, thereby contributing to food shortages and malnutrition. They displace entire populations, leading to overcrowding and associated diseases, such as tuberculosis.

Developing countries are most vulnerable to other infectious diseases associated with climate

change as well. But advanced nations, too, can fall victim to surprise attack—as happened last year when the first outbreak of West Nile virus in North America killed seven New Yorkers.

International commerce and travel enable infectious diseases to strike continents away from their sources.

Diseases relayed by mosquitoes—malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever and several kinds of encephalitis—are eliciting particularly grave concern as the world warms. These disorders are projected to become increasingly prevalent because cold weather limits mosquitoes to seasons and regions with certain minimum temperatures. Extreme heat also limits mosquito survival. But within their survivable range of temperatures, mosquitoes proliferate faster and bite more as the air becomes warmer. Greater heat also speeds the rate at which pathogens inside them reproduce and mature.

As whole areas heat up, mosquitoes enter formerly forbidden territories, bringing illness with them, while causing more disease for longer periods in



Global warming means terrible times ahead for the human race.



the areas they already inhabit. Malaria has returned to the Korean peninsula, and parts of the US, southern Europe and the former Soviet Union have experienced small outbreaks. Some models project that by the end of this century, the zone of potential malaria transmission will contain about 60 percent of the world's population, up from 45 percent now.

Similarly, Dengue (or "breakbone") fever—a severe flu-like viral illness that can cause fatal internal bleeding—has broadened its range in the Americas over the past 10 years, reaching down to Buenos Aires by the end of the 1990s. (It has also found its way to northern Australia.) Today it afflicts an estimated 50-100 million people in the tropics and subtropics. These outbreaks, of course, cannot be traced conclusively to global warming. Other factors—declines in mosquito-control and other public health programs, or rising drug and pesticide resistance—could be

involved. But the case for a climatic cause becomes stronger when outbreaks coincide with other projected consequences of global warming.

As anticipated, warmth is climbing up many mountains. Since 1970, the elevation at which temperatures are always below freezing has ascended almost 500 feet in the tropics. Insect-borne infections are being reported at high elevations in South and Central America, Asia and east and central Africa.

More droughts and floods due to global warming will also probably fuel outbreaks of waterborne diseases. Paradoxically, droughts can favour waterborne diseases by wiping out supplies of safe drinking water, concentrating contaminants and preventing good hygiene. Floods, meanwhile, wash sewage and fertiliser into water supplies, triggering expansive blooms of harmful algae that are either directly toxic to humans, or contaminate the fish and shellfish that humans consume.

The human health toll taken by global warming will depend to a large extent on us. Effective surveillance of climate conditions and of the emergence or resurgence of infectious diseases (or their carriers) should be a global priority, as should providing preventive measures and treatments to at-risk populations.

But we must also limit human activities that contribute to atmospheric heating or exacerbate its effects. Cleaner energy sources must be adopted, while forests and wetlands must be preserved and restored to absorb carbon dioxide, and to absorb floodwaters and filter contaminants before they reach water supplies.

None of this will come cheap. But humanity will pay a far dearer price for inaction. ●

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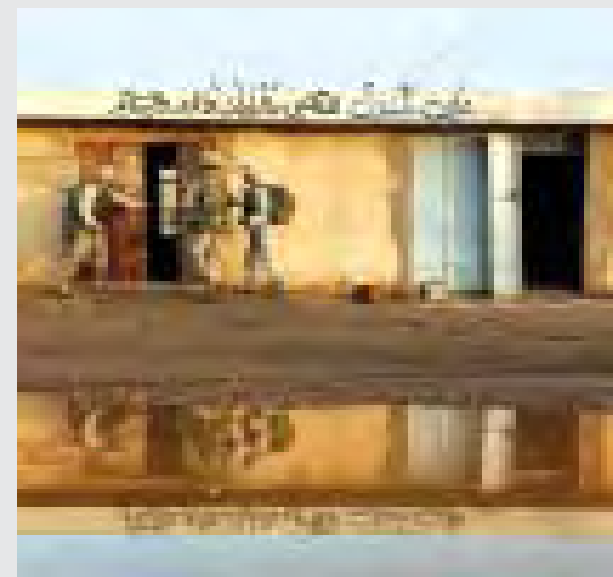
Paul R Epstein is Associate Director of the Centre for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School.

ANALYSIS  
Joseph E Stiglitz



# Globalisation and its discontents in 2004

It is dangerous to put excessive power in the hands of a few.



The year 2003 was in many ways a disaster for globalisation. America and its "coalition" of the willing went to war in Iraq without the support of the UN, and the World Trade Organisation meeting at Cancun—which was supposed to provide the impetus for a successful conclusion of the Development Round of trade negotiations—ended in failure. 2004 will almost surely be better, for political globalisation as well as for the global economy. But don't look for a banner year.

The events in Iraq demonstrate the failure of democratic processes at the international level—and the need to strengthen them. The Bush administration's approach to the war in Iraq and its aftermath has been marked by the same unilateralism shown by its rejection of the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court.

In each instance, when the world's collective decision differed from what America wanted, President Bush insisted that America get its way. Whether the US government deliberately lied to the world about the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction or got carried away by its own rhetoric is less important than the lesson to be learned: it is

dangerous to put excessive power in the hands of a few.

But the US is finally realising that even a superpower cannot ensure security in a country occupied by force. It might have been able to win over the Iraqi people in the early months of the occupation, but by now its cumulative mistakes may have doomed the campaign for hearts and minds to failure. America has also come to recognise the need to forgive Iraq's debts, which will require rapprochement and cooperation with traditional US allies that opposed the war.

These developments hold out the hope that the US will adopt a more multilateral approach to foreign policy in 2004. But the Bush administration's exclusion of creditor countries like France, Germany and Russia from Iraq reconstruction contracts undermines this hope.

At the same time, if America's "shock therapy" approach to reconstruction—quick economic liberalisation and privatisation—is carried out, higher unemployment and greater resentment are likely to follow. "Shock therapy" is a strategy that has repeatedly failed. In 2004 the world could well learn

again the risks of relying excessively on the ideology or leadership of a single country. Iraq will suffer the most, but the consequences will almost certainly be felt widely.

The WTO talks in Cancun represented the other major failure of globalisation in 2003. The US and Europe reneged on their promise that this would be a round of trade negotiations designed to improve the plight of developing countries. Indeed, they failed to redress the imbalances of earlier rounds of trade talks that had made the poorest regions of the world worse off.

The US and Europe not only tried to impose their trade agenda on developing countries, they also continued to insist on their right to subsidise agriculture and raised new demands that would have made lives in developing countries even worse. For the first time, developing countries united, and the talks broke down.

After blaming each other for the breakdown, America and Europe will continue to insist in 2004 that they want to restart the development round. But unless meaningful concessions are made in agriculture, non-tariff barriers and intellectual property rights, what do developing countries

have to gain? Tariffs on industrial goods in the advanced countries are already low enough that developing countries are unlikely to receive many benefits—and they have much to lose from another unfair trade agreement.

Developing countries are, however, learning some of the West's tricks. In Miami last November, they agreed to a Free Trade Area of the Americas that did not, in fact, provide for free trade, and barely went beyond what had already been agreed within the WTO. In short, it is beginning to look as though any success in the current round of trade talks will be based on agreements without substance.

The pick-up in economic activity in Japan and the US bodes well for the global economy in 2004, as does China's continued strength. Every economic downturn comes to an end, and it is high time for America's economy, which began slumping almost four years ago, to recover. This could have happened sooner if the Bush administration had supported tax cuts for the poor and middle class, rather than for the rich. The size of the tax cuts that it did promote was so large, however, that it provided some stimulus anyway. But the cost is enormous: a colossal fiscal deficit that jeopardises

future growth.

The counterpart of America's immense fiscal deficit is its yawning trade gap. This twin deficit has taken a severe toll on foreigners' confidence in the fundamental health of the US economy—and hence on the external value of the dollar. As the Euro remains strong relative to the dollar in 2004, America's trade deficit will moderate, but at the cost of making a robust European recovery all the more difficult.

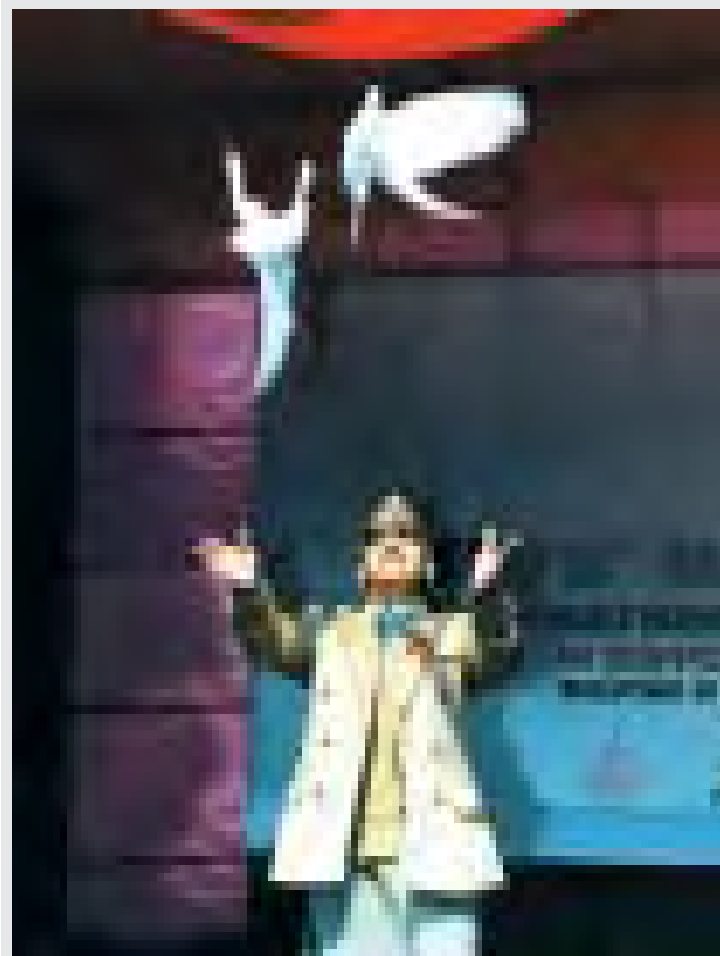
Meanwhile, once recovery has set in, the huge borrowing demands of the US and Europe will almost certainly drive up real interest rates globally, posing new problems for the world's emerging markets. For them it will be just another instance of having to bear the costs of policy mistakes made in the advanced industrial countries, another instance of globalisation gone awry. ●

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Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University. His most recent book is *The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World's Most Prosperous Decade*.



# What would King Birendra have done?



Upper House Member Radheshyam Adhikary in *Kantipur*, 29 December

Two years have passed since the demise of King Birendra. But, the recent turns of events in the country frequently remind us of the late monarch. Many have wondered how he would have handled the country's present dangerous and chaotic situation, were he still alive.

King Birendra had an uncanny knack of finding compromises and wresting a peaceful resolution in times of trouble. During his coronation when he addressed the people using words like "me and my wife", it won him praise from liberal Nepalis. He showed an uncanny ability to break down walls and stand by the people. In 1979, he allowed a referendum on absolute monarchy, reflecting his commitment to defuse a crisis through consensus and not by suppression.

Of course, the referendum was by no means fair. That is why the late BP Koirala suggested that the minority in the results of the referendum should be respected and that there should be an earnest effort to make reforms accordingly. But, ultimately, the third amendment of the Panchayat constitution cheated the people and took them for a ride.

The popular 1990 Movement is yet another reason to remember King Birendra. Hardly a month-and-a-half after the movement began, the king handed his power to the leader of the People's Movement and agreed to be a constitutional monarch. Once again, he tore down walls between the people and himself.

Critics have charged that the late King Birendra broke the rules of a constitutional monarch. When the framework of the present constitution was still being made, top brass of the army had reached Singha Darbar to propose that the sovereignty should not be vested in the people. Even after the new constitution was promulgated, the king, against the spirit of the constitution, kept the tradition of appointing ambassadors. He also nominated members of the Upper House without the recommendation of the cabinet.

But despite these example cited by critics, King Birendra was always known as a constitutional monarch. That is because most of his work in the last 12 years were very much within the constitutional framework. During his tenure, the constitution was protected and the monarch even pardoned some mistakes made by the people's representatives.

When he bowed to people power in 1990, the king did not become less popular. In fact, that was the turning point after which his popularity soared. Why was the king always criticised before 1990 and not after the popular movement? After all, it was the same king who vacillated during the peoples' movement. But once the nation was unshackled and the people could elect their representatives to find a prime minister, the target of public criticism and even that of the Maoists were the parliament, the political parties and their leaders. When the king was active, and his role absolute, he was the target of criticism. From the day he chose to be a constitutional monarch, the king had a buffer. Our country is once again under the direct rule of the king. The state once more arrests students for chanting seditious slogans, and it releases them to keep the situation under control. Alarm bells are clanging. The constitution that was designed to narrow the gap between the king and people, is being battered. The distance between the present monarch and his subjects is widening. King Birendra granted the royal seal to this constitution. Perhaps we should respect this document in his memory on his birth anniversary.

# "We aren't worried about a big US presence in Nepal."

Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 31 December - 14 January

**Himal Khabarpatrika: What does India think about Maoist problem in Nepal?**

**Ambassador Shyam Saran:** Nepal's Maoist problem is also that of India. If there is devastation here, India will have to deal with the exodus of Nepalis into its territory. Nepal's Maoists have established their relations with Bihar's MCC and the People's War Group of Andhra Pradesh which could create critical situations in India. Such a problem should be solved together.

**Do India's intelligence agencies have connections with the rebels?**

Those who say so are deliberately talking nonsense. The Indian secret agencies have other problems to deal with from Kashmir to the northeast. As far as the Maoists using India as their refuge, we have the PWG, MCC and separatist groups who also hold meetings and get interviewed by journalists. If Nepal's Maoist rebels cross the border and reach India, how can you draw the conclusion that they came with Indian approval? I have nothing to say if people have preconceived notions that India is Nepal's enemy.

**Do you think the Maoists have softened their stance on India in recent times?**

I have no idea. Perhaps they too understood the grounds of the special relation between India and Nepal.

**What kind of understanding does India have with the US regarding the conflict in Nepal?**

Our foreign ministries have regularly exchanged opinions and these days our conclusions are similar. You may say that India, the UK and the US are on the

same wavelength. The fact is India is Nepal's neighbour, so activities here directly affect us. It natural to have some differences on priorities. For the first time, the US is directly helping Nepal's security and there have been consultations between us. India does not have to be worried about the help the Nepali government is receiving from the US and the UK. We have an understanding that whatever Nepal needs will be supplied by India to the extent that it is possible. If that cannot be done, such requirements can be fulfilled from other sources. India is not worried about a big American presence in Nepal.



**Have you tried to mediate between the palace and the parties?**

As an ambassador, I naturally meet with the political leaders of this country. You can check with them, I have never expressed an opinion on their movement. That is not the job of an ambassador. India has held a uniform opinion since the beginning: the constitutional forces should be one to tackle their common danger.

Since I am repeating it, it might sound like a mantra, but the constitutional monarch and the political parties must walk together.

**India's cooperation and other activities have gone up suddenly as Nepal weakens.**

If we are not involved in development and if we do not expand trade and economic relations, we are accused of doing nothing. Now that so many activities are taking place, why should it be seen as conspiracy and not as a positive development? All these projects will profit Nepal. India may also gain something but if India stands to gain a little bit from such projects, some people believe we are against Nepali interests. How can such an approach strengthen the relationship between our countries?

## Justice delayed is denied

*Rajdhani*, 30 December

With the support of a walking stick, 94-year-old Sumitra Devi makes her daily pilgrimage to the Supreme Court from her temporary residence at Dilli Bazar. This has been her routine for the past few months in an attempt to get a date fixed for her case at the apex court. Sumitra has already spent more than a decade fighting this property case in her home district of Bara. Last year, after losing in lower courts, she was left

with no recourse but to go to the Supreme Court, and so began her commute for justice.

The Civil Code has provisioned that people above 75 years must be given priority in the courts. After a good 10-month period, the court has fixed 3 February 2004 as the date for her hearing. Having cleared that bit, no one knows how long the hearings will continue and if Sumitra Devi will see justice carried out in her lifetime. Sumitra's travails began when a distant relative claimed land registered in her name. Although she

won that first battle in court, an appellate court in Hetauda later reversed the district court's decision. The incident left Sumitra no choice but to take her legal battle to the top.

"Safalta Devi, an 82-year-old woman from Kabhre, fought a really long battle for her property. Even though she won the case, she could not get it due to the legal hassles," says a legal practitioner for seniors. "God knows how much longer Sumitra Devi will have to fight."



On the car: 'Panchayat mentality' People's rights

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 31 December - 14 January

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The king made the prince to work like a secretary by making him inspect various ministries."



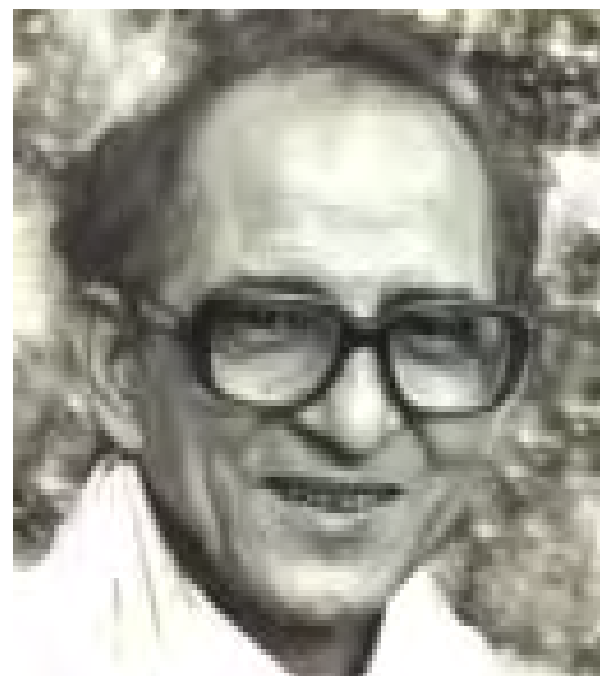
- Girija P Koirala in *Kantipur* on 27 December





Back at Sundarikal >51

# "The king is not going to take the initiative."



Back in prison again, BP Koirala is reading a biography of Indira Gandhi and concludes that the treachery towards him by his former colleagues pales in comparison to the "vulgarity, chicanery, deceit and arrogance" in India. In a debate that appears to be straight out of present day politics, BP is also told that a multiparty polity is not suitable for Nepal and he should think about compromising with the king.

9.11.77  
10.11.77  
Early in the morning GM entered my room to convey the sad news of Subarnaj's death yesterday. The Camp Commander had come with the news last night but I had already gone to bed. I am sad, extremely sad. I was with him two weeks ago, and although he was very ill, I hadn't expected the call would come so soon. People told me that he had picked up some hopefulness after my visit—otherwise he used to sink deeper into despondency, which had deprived him of the will to live. I had told him that I would contact my doctor in New York about his case—if it was possible to do an operation on him. He said—but you are returning to Nepal who will do this work for us? I said—I will send your reports to him and also to another doctor of mine who would be visiting Delhi towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> week of Nov. Even if I am back in prison, Sushila will look after this urgent matter. Since some 3 yrs, he and myself were drifting apart in politics. I told—forget about the differences. We are old friends, we have to work together again. Get well. Don't lose heart. He said if he recovered he would like to work with me + under my guidance, as in the past. Why did he die yesterday? He must have heard of my return to Nepal and to prison the day before. Then he must have lost all hope, perhaps. Will to live extinguished?  
Kosu, Rosa, Niru, Kalpana, Sriharsha, Ruchira, Kalpana's little daughter came to see me in the morning by

special permission. Since Kosu wanted to leave Kathmandu tomorrow he had sought special permission from the commandant to interview me. I asked him to take care of Sushila, and if possible to sell some land in Biratnagar to provide for her in Varanasi. Kosu says that the land couldn't be disposed of easily since there are many legal difficulties. I remain worried for Sushila. I couldn't make financial arrangements for her before. I came away to Kathmandu to be arrested, Rosa told—that Ganeshrajji + Kusum were contemplating moving to high court for the illegality of my arrest at the airport—which according to the police was... a provision for my safety against hostile demonstrations at the airport. From the airport Shailaja + Rishikesh Shaha were taken to the latter's home where they were released. Baggage were inspected by the customs authorities at Shaha's place. My baggage was brought to us but my radio was not permitted to me. The officer who presides over our interview—he is perhaps an intelligence officer—takes me on my inquiry that Shailaja will not be permitted to see me, because although she is my relative and hence should be in usual course be permitted to interview me as relatives are, she is a political person on which ground she cannot see me. This will be my greatest deprivation in prison.

11.11.77  
Definitely, prison life does not suit me. It is only my sense of pride and commitment to my ideal + care for the protection of

my dignity that sustains me in prison. The moment I am behind the bars I become homesick, start missing everybody and small things that are available outside. I start loving those whom I love with greater intensity and am overwhelmed with remorse that I have not done my duty by those who need my care. I have neglected the upbringing of my children and their education. They have got whatever education they have got or are getting without care and plans on my part. They have a fond mother, who smotheres them with her love, but she is only a mother, not a guardian.

12.11.77  
I am gradually settling down to the melancholy routine of jail life. I started reading, although very light books—to get into the proper mental training to be able to tackle serious ones later. In the Patna airport Shailaja had bought some books from the stall for me. She has inscribed her name on them with fragments of sentiments of love for me. *All prime minister's men*—a sordid story of Indira Gandhi's vulgar politics conducted for her by her petty vulgar tyrants. I finished it yesterday, and the alarming thought recurs to me that the book is a true document—how could it happen? What happened in Nepal, I used to think, was incomprehensible—the incredible roll call of Giri, Vishwabandhu Thapa, Bista, Dil Bahadur, Khadga B., etc etc etc. But India left Nepal miles behind in vulgarity and chicanery and deceit and arrogance. I am reading 'Clive', by Nirad Chaudhari—a very superficial study. That Clive could be two specks of the writer himself—who has style but no substance, poise but no depth. I haven't finished the book yet—so I can make up my mind about the book only partially—but it is definitely a belaboured attempt on the part of the writer, his other book on Max Muller is slightly better but that book too is not a definite study of the life of Max Muller. I wonder why Nirad C. wrote their biographies.

IG (Police) has been visiting me almost everyday. Today he came to tell me that my doctor Mrigendrarajji is in USA and hence won't be available for consultation for some time and that he was contemplating bringing in some Dixit. He, by the way, suggested that I should think out a process by which I could be able to remain out of prison—the king was not going to take the initiative, etc, that my presence among the people itself could start a process of polarisation etc, etc. I shouldn't insist on the whole bread—that I should be satisfied with a small portion of it to start with, that I am wasting my time, that at least I mustn't insist on the party system of politics.  
Today is *Bhai Tika*. Indira could have come to apply tika to me but she is in Biratnagar + I sent word to her not to come just for this purpose. GM's sisters + others came. It rained in the evening, I have a cough.

# Numa's world

Numafung offers us a microcosm of the lives of Nepali women.

director himself is a bachelor.  
All through Numa's life, her younger sister Lojina observes and sometimes quietly rebels. Only at the very end do we see a hint to her future: in a symbolic gesture she picks a wild flower, as if to tell us the audience, that she has taken on Numa's mantle of responsibility. It's a powerful way of demonstrating that traditional roles of women have still not changed in Nepal.

In *Numafung*, the mothers are mere spectators. They seem to understand Numa's needs and fears and but are unable to impact change like the men. But don't we, modern liberated women, face the same dilemma? Even today, despite attempts at decision-making few women sit at the head of policy issue dialogues, political meetings, institutions and especially government. Where are the women with power?

The women of Nepal seem to have moved, but have we really? We are like Numa—full of dreams and aspirations, seeking our path to fulfillment. We have come full circle into a space that was ours, but is it really ours? Like Nabin Subba, through the medium of *Numafung*, this when we ask ourselves what we want and act upon it. ●

Renchin Yonjan is a Kathmandu-based social architect and movie buff.



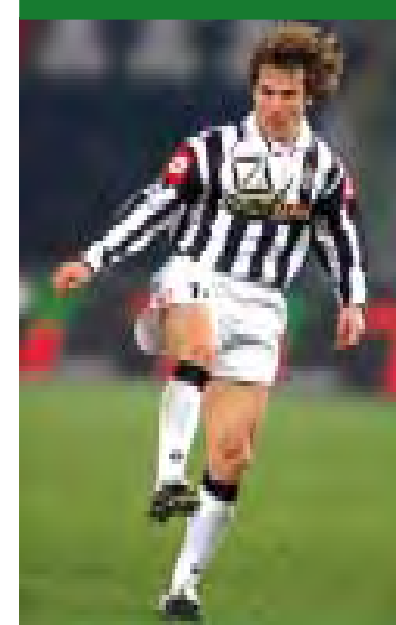
family name and honour.  
Since that first time in March 2002, I've watched *Numafung* 11 times and even had the good fortune to travel with the film to Sikkim, Lepcha land. Numa herself ultimately takes the path less travelled, even though it may be tougher than putting up with the idiosyncrasies of a husband who is insensitive to her needs as a woman—both emotionally and physically. But isn't this what many Nepali women put up with today? Very often, efficient, independent career woman go home to insensitive husbands like Girihang who are all noise and bluster to disguise their inadequacies.

Nabin Subba has presented Numa's relationship with her two husbands with sensitivity and understanding. The innocent fun and friendship that could have matured into a deep abiding marriage filled with love and caring is cut short. As Numa throws a handful of earth on her husband's grave, many in the audiences I have watched it with have wept. Girihang, her second husband, treats Numa like a commodity, there only to fulfill his physical needs while she cries herself to sleep. The sensitive handling of emotional scenes of marital disharmony are all the more remarkable because the

# EURO 2004

International football's second biggest sporting event kicks off next year in Portugal. As the Euro 2004 games draw ever closer, it's time to look at how each European team may fare in this tournament, and who to look out for.

## PLAYERS TO WATCH



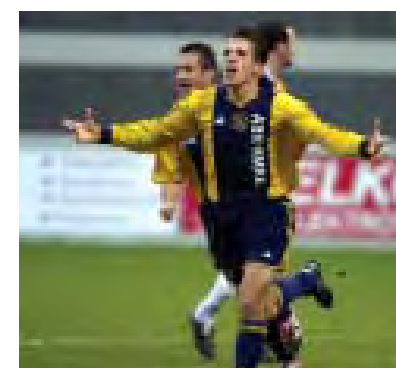
Pavel Nedved, Czech Republic Voted Player of the Year, Pavel Nedved rightfully received the Ballon d'Or this year after guiding his club Juventus to the final of the Champions League in May. Thanks to Nedved, the Czech Republic hasn't lost a single game this whole year.



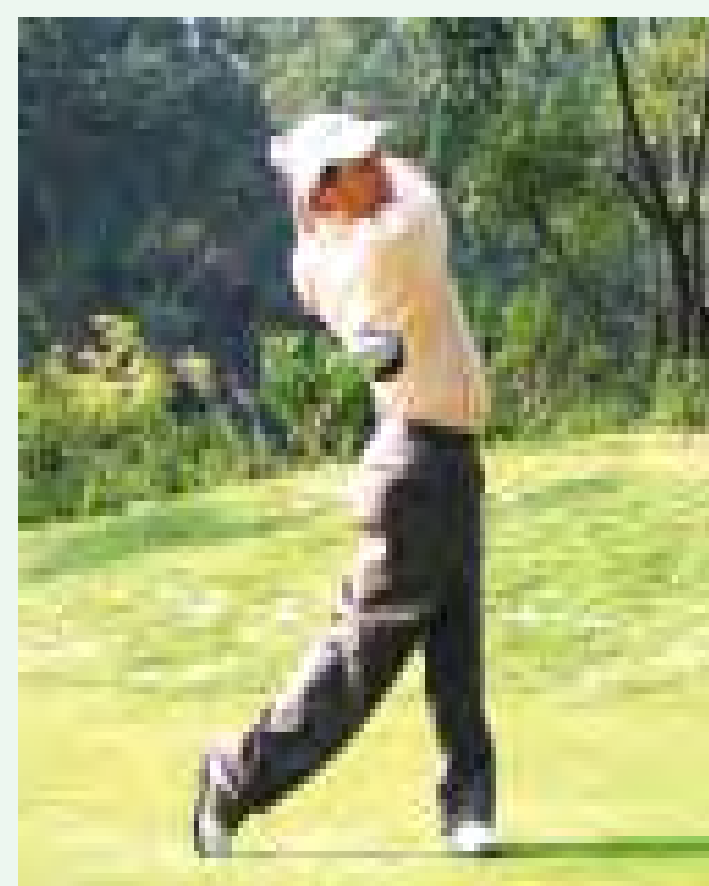
Ludovic Giuly, France Widely dubbed as the next Zinedine Zidane, this French midfielder dynamo combines impeccable technique to an incredibly high work rate. King Ludo has scored nine goals for AS Monaco this season.



Francesco Totti, Italy AS Roma's captain Francesco Totti is at the heart of Italy's attacking potential. Totti has made his intentions clear after superb displays this season both at the international and domestic level.



Rafael Van der Vaart, Holland The Ajax captain helped secure Holland's place in the finals after a rout over Scotland, and also scored one of the goals of the season this November. Rafael Van der Vaart combines pace with technique to good effect.



## Golf gets going

Nepali Times begins this weekly column on golf tips and trivia from Nepal's foremost professional.

TEE BREAK  
Deepak Acharya



I was introduced to this crazy game of golf by my father at six, and have been playing regularly ever since then. Over the years I have been privileged to watch the popularity of this sport grow at a slow but steady rate in Nepal.

Back in 1981 when I started playing, there were but two golf courses in the country, one near the present airport in Kathmandu, and the other in Dharan in the south east of Nepal, which was built by the British Gurkhas. At that time hardly any Nepali played at the Royal Nepal Golf Club (RNGC), with the majority of golfers being expatriates and diplomats. In the past decade the number of courses in Nepal has grown to seven, with three in Kathmandu, two in Pokhara and one each in Dharan and Nawalparasi. Golf as a sport doesn't grow without practice facilities and we are fortunate to have two practice driving ranges, one in Bafal near Soaltee Crowne Plaza and the other in Pokhara near the airport. These two ranges along with practice facilities at the golf clubs themselves are the breeding grounds for the growing number of players in Nepal.

The revolutionary year for golf in Nepal could be 1993, when the first professional golf tournament sponsored by Surya Tobacco was held at RNGC. Aspiring amateurs in the country were given their first chance to play with the big boys, and the exposure of playing for prestige in a high pressure environment was invaluable.

The Surya Nepal Open was played at RNGC until 1998, and then with the arrival of a full-length international standard golf course, the event moved to the newly opened Gokarna Golf Club. Today, the tournament is called Surya Nepal Masters and is the biggest professional sporting event in the country.

The opening of Gokarna Golf Course and the arrival of top professionals in the region meant that the media began to take more interest, and today it promotes golf more than ever before. This makes the tournament sponsors happy, and a cycle of growth can be seen from the many new golfers in Nepal who have started playing in the past three years.

Golf programs on cable TV and sports channels, and growing local news coverage creates curiosity and awareness. The increasing numbers of local players and competitions points to a healthy future for golf in Nepal.

A great advantage of taking up this game is that it is a lifelong sport, playable at any age. The phenomenal arrival of Tiger Woods a few years back boosted golf's appeal worldwide and had an impact on the youth of our country as well. Before young Woods took the golf world by storm, the game was generally considered elitist, an old man's sport, but he dispelled this myth once and for all. The number of teenagers and those in their early 20s playing golf in Nepal today is proof enough.

Though you may have to start young to make golf your profession, it is a sport that can be taken up and enjoyed later in life, and played well into the twilight years, something I have every intention of doing. ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

## Group A

Portugal, Spain, Greece and Russia present a fascinating prospect. The hosts, Portugal, will be the focal point of this group and their match up with rivals Spain should decide who wins the group.

With Greece and Russia both experiencing a resurgence, this could be one of the most fiercely fought groups.

Portugal, under the guidance of Brazil's World Cup winning coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, will be expected to deliver with the inspiration of Luis Figo to call on. But massive expectations may weigh heavily on a host nation that has suffered under pressure before.

Spain are long overdue a performance of significance at a major tournament, and in Raul they have a true world star.

Greece, however, lie in wait and they beat Spain on their own ground on the way to winning qualifying Group 6. Russia, unbeaten under coach Georgi Yartsev, possibly lacks the individual brilliance to make a real impact.

VERDICT: Portugal and Spain to progress.

## GROUP B

The game between holders France and England on 13 June will prove to have a major impact on this group. However, Croatia have looked infinitely more impressive than England over the last year. Both teams needed play-off games to qualify, but neither have fulfilled their potential.

France are still an outstanding side, despite their no-show at the 2002 World Cup. They are also rejuvenated with the presence of midfield dynamo Ludovic Giuly and Zinedine Zidane.

England grows in confidence under Sven-Goran Eriksson after unexpectedly holding Turkey in Istanbul. If both sides can steer clear of injuries to key players, they can be regarded as potential champions. Still, England have lots lacking in attack with only one world class striker in Michael Owen.

Switzerland has the brilliance of Basle's Hakan Yakin to call on, but coach Kobi Kuhn's side are unlikely to last beyond the first phase. Croatia needed a play-off win against Slovenia to reach Euro 2004 and the golden era of the nation's football has passed.

VERDICT: France and Croatia to lead the way.

## GROUP C

The vast plethora of talent in Italy's large squad is unsurpassed throughout Europe. The problem is that Giovanni Trapattoni may have

a hard time picking the best players. Trapattoni remains one of the world's shrewdest coaches, and despite struggling in their qualifying group, Italy can never be discounted with a likely 4-2-3-1 attacking formation that could possibly feature the likes of Alessandro Del Piero and Francesco Totti on the same team. This said, Italy have a lot to worry about since they face an organised and efficient opposition.

Bulgaria may look like the weakest of the four teams, but they have a very solid young midfield that guided the team through the qualification round with ease.

Denmark showed their promise when they beat England at Old Trafford and AC Milan's Jon Dahl Tomasson is a goalscorer of the highest calibre. Morten Olsen is a clever operator at the international level, and the Danes know their way around this tournament.

Sweden, once again with the experienced managerial duo of Tommy Soderberg and Lars Lagerback at the helm, will be as stubborn and efficient as ever. And with Ajax's gifted Zlatan Ibrahimovic leading the attack, they are not without flair.

The other qualifying place is likely to go to Bulgaria who are more adaptable to the humid conditions in Portugal, unlike the Nordics.

VERDICT: Italy and Bulgaria to narrowly clinch the top two places.

## GROUP D

The Czech Republic has been the most impressive side in Europe this season after the holders France. Pavel Nedved should guide them through this tough group along with the talented Dutch squad.

Holland showed their two faces in the play-off against Scotland, dispirited in defeat at Hampden Park but devastating in a 6-0 win in Amsterdam. Their fate will be decided in the derby clash against Germany.

But those looking for dark horses are turning in the direction of the seeded Czech Republic who flew through the qualifiers and sent Holland into the play-offs. Pavel Nedved takes his place in the elite of Europe, while Borussia Dortmund duo Tomas Rosicky and Jan Koller lend the cutting edge.

Germany, as always, are strong and organised with the ever impressive Michael Ballack as an anchor in midfield. However, they face brilliant opposition in the Czechs and the Dutch, and Latvia are not to be underestimated.

Latvia, may have beaten the great Turks in Istanbul, but really don't stand a chance in this group.

VERDICT: Holland and the Czechs go through, edging out the Germans.





ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

- Divine light of Tibet Photographs by Gabriela Mayorquin till 5 January at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- Reflections of Colour Paintings by Susan Gilleman Boggs till 9 January at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- The Land I Love Photographs Kim Hong Sung till 16 January at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. 4428694



EVENTS

- SAARC Atomic Documentary Special: One Million Hiroshimas by Michael Anderson. 16mm colour film (1982) 28 mins. 4PM on 4 January at Baggikhana, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. Open to all.
- The God's Dance of Kathmandu Valley 7PM on Tuesdays. Tea+Ticket: Rs 400 at Hotel Vajra.

DRINK

- Cosmic Cocktails 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

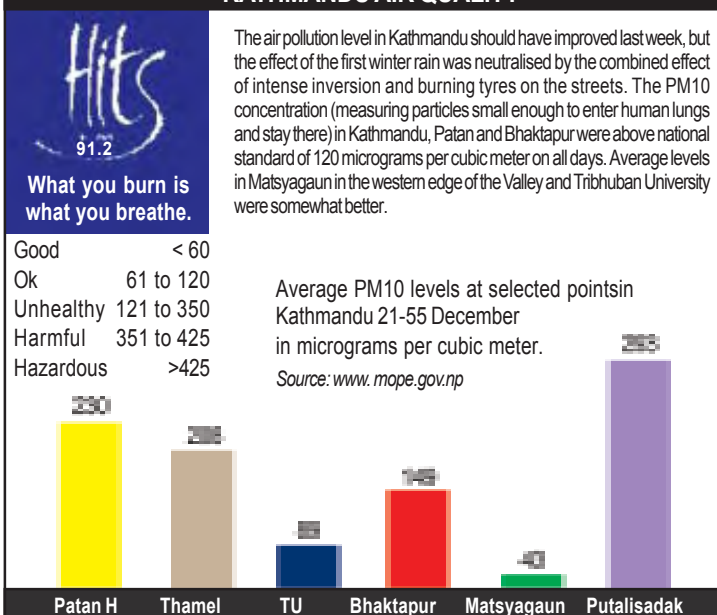
FOOD

- Lunch at Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka from 12-3PM, 5 January onwards. Non-vegetarian meals Rs 220, vegetarian Rs 190. 5522113
- Krishnarpan ceremonial Nepali cuisine fit for a king. Reservation recommended. 4479488
- Bring your wine along every Thursday and Sunday and buy our dinner. Himalatte Café, Thamel.
- Authentic Chinese food at Tian Rui Chinese Restaurant, Thapathali. 4243078
- Traditional Nepali Thali lunch at Patan Museum Café inside Patan Museum. 11AM-2.30 PM. Cocktails and snacks 2-7.30 PM. 5526271
- Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4431632

GETAWAYS

- Golf in the Valley's last pristine forest. Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa 4451212
- Escape to Godavari accommodation on half board with discount on other facilities. Godavari Village Resort, Taukhel, Lalitpur 5560675

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

The sudden appearance of a major westerly front over Nepal early this week was a surprise to us all, but a pleasant one. It ended a two-month drought and also proved just how much of an inexact science meteorology still is. The snow came down to below 2,000m for the first time in seven years. In Chitwan, where this Mausam Beed is at present, there was 20mm of rain and the thick fog is expected to last some more weeks. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows that the fog extends right from Pakistan to Bangladesh and along Nepal's tarai arc. For Kathmandu expect near zero minima with foggy mornings and sunny afternoons.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



BOOKWORM

**First Things First: Coping with ever-increasing demands of the workplace** Stephen R Covey, A Roger Merrill, Rebecca R Merrill  
Pocket Books, 2002  
Rs 472

The author attempt to show the connection between time management and money management, delegation without losing control, and rediscovering power and passion. *First Things First* seeks to empower the reader to redefine what is truly important: to accomplish worthwhile goals, and to lead rich, rewarding and balanced lives.



Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np



JP Dutta's *LoC Kargil* is based on the lives of those who fought in the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan. With lyrics by Javed Akhtar and stirring music from Anu Malik, who seems to have shed his copycat image, *LoC* will probably raise patriotic fervour in India to unprecedented heights by their Republic Day in January. Here in Nepal, most of us are probably going to admire the cinematography, weep when the soldiers fall and marvel at the unwieldy star cast—so many characters to keep track of—that is rivalled only by the numbers of the production team.

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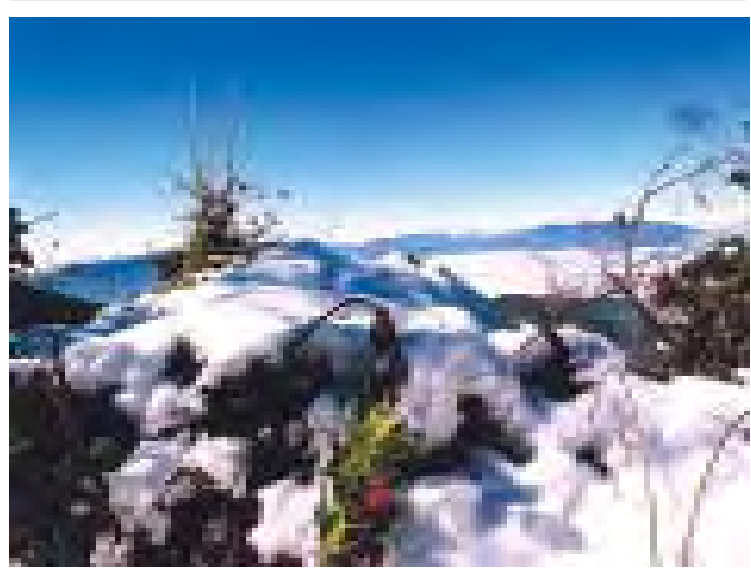
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HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDEY

WHITE CHRISTMAS: it came a few days late, but this was what Phulchoki hill looked like on Thursday morning with fog-blanketed Kathmandu below.



KIRAN PANDEY

WARMING UP: Dressed in waterproof jackets, members of the five-party alliance braved freezing rain to continue their street protests against 'regression' on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDEY

HAPPY NEW YEAR: Geographer, Dr Harka Gurung, with other revelers at a dance-in to mark the Gurung new year on Tuesday at the BICC.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

NIGHT LIFE: New Road, Kathmandu's main commercial thoroughfare, comes alive on the occasion of the New Year Street Festival this week.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Jagdish's eye

When it comes to Nepali landscape and mountain photography, Jagdish Tiwari is a name that is on the forefront. His famous panorama posters adorn offices, appear on brochures, postcards and are snapped up by tourists in Thamel and Pokhara.

Nepal is already so photogenic, you may say, it doesn't take much to be a landscape photographer here. But Jagdish's pictures capture the unearthly beauty, breathtaking vistas and the country's verticality like no other.

What is even more remarkable is that he never took a single formal class in photography.

Jagdish is self-taught, and the recognition he enjoys today comes after a long struggle. It may not be too fanciful to say photography was Jagdish's calling, he certainly had the eye, even as a rank beginner. In those days, unable to afford a camera of his own, Jagdish would take one on hire and walking across Nepal

snapping away. His fascination with mountains is apparent in carefully constructed, brilliantly sharp compositions.

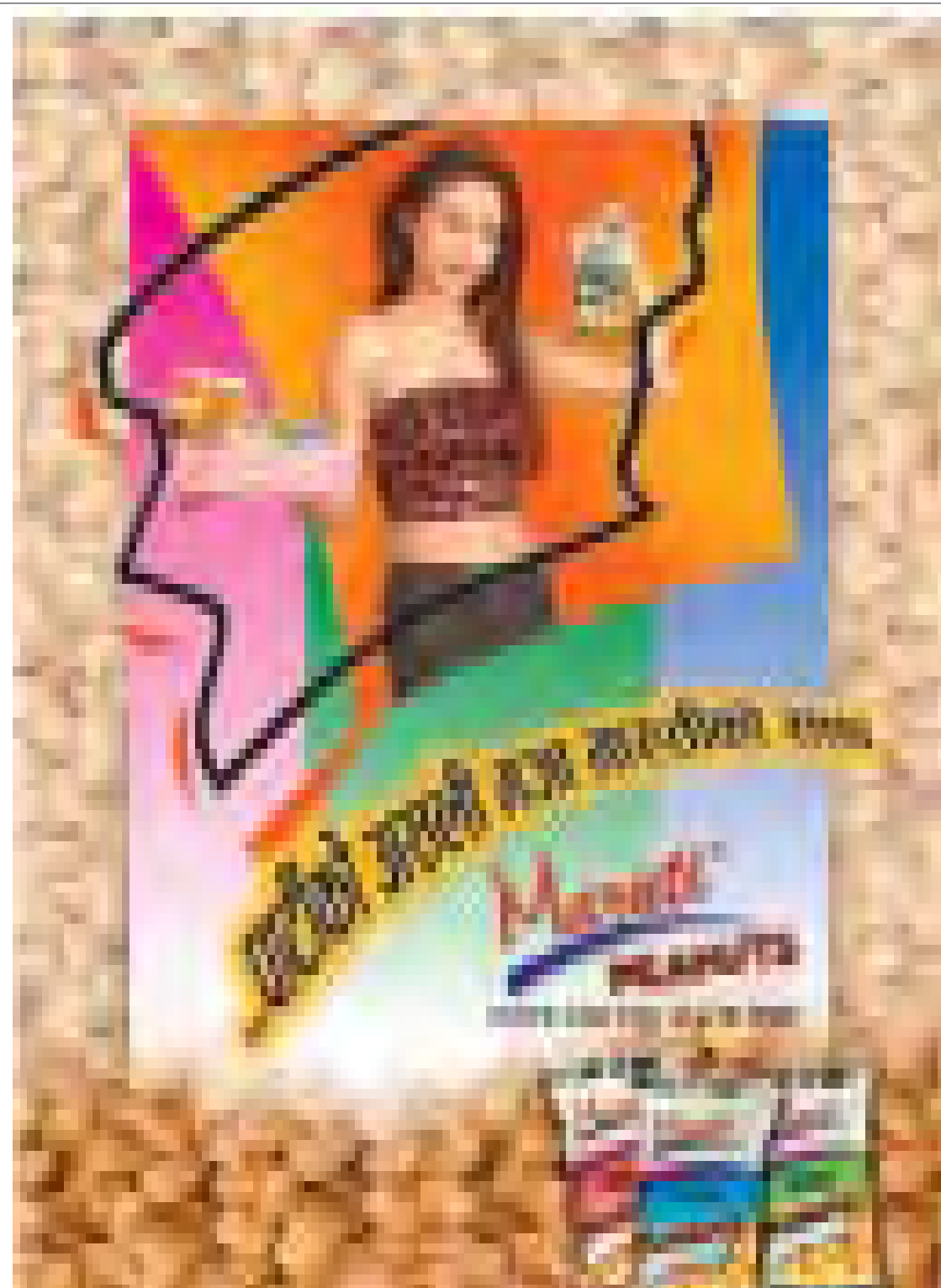
All this has paid off, quite literally. A decade ago, his portrait of Sagarmatha from Kala Pathar sold for Rs 700,000. Since then, Jagdish has been back on Kala Pathar 27 times and each time the mood of the mountain is different.

For an outdoor photographer like Jagdish, it is a source of great frustration that he can't travel as much as he would like because of the security situation. Confined to

Kathmandu, Jagdish is doing the next best thing: sifting through his vast archive of photographs to select favourites for three books to be published soon. He's also contemplating starting a four-month photography course. But life in the urban sprawl chafes his spirit: "Is there anybody who doesn't love mountains, landscapes, sunrises and sunsets? Nature has no substitute." Happily, Jagdish's photographs bring us close enough to the real thing. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA





**UNDER MY HAT**  
Kunda Dixit



It's that time of the year again when each of us, individually and in armed civilian groups, have to make a choice: is it really such a good idea to embark on a new year at this point in time? I mean, do we actually want to go through another 365 days of this?

If your answer is in the affirmative, and you have made up your mind to take the bull by the horns in the china shop, then let me compliment you on your courage, shake you by the hand and wish you god speed.

May your days in 2004 be filled with joy, prosperity, happiness, an absence of coliform bacteria in your bottled drinking water, an annual average of less than 50 microns per cubic metre of particulate concentration in the air you breathe, a mobile phone that can actually make contact on the first try and a flight to Delhi that takes off on the day that it is supposed to.

On a more personal note, let me say that I know from past experience that new year resolutions, once made, are difficult to

keep. However hard we try, by January the fifth, we are back to being grumpy couch potatoes with a poor sense of personal hygiene and smoking a pack of Yak a day. We need new year resolutions that are realistic and which we can actually take to the implementation phase. Otherwise what's the point, right?

In view of the above, therefore, I have drawn up my personal list of new year resolutions which are not copyright and may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, and transmitted in any form (electronic, mechanical, photocopying or by the Hubble telescope) provided these suggestions are not attributed to the author or publisher in a court of law:

1. I will try my best to be grouchy and cantankerous throughout the coming year. After all, what is there to be cheerful about?
2. I will take up smoking as a hobby in the new year as part of my personal effort to keep beleaguered American tobacco farmers in business. It's the thought that counts.
3. Since it causes ulcer, I will stop drinking



tea. And take up whiskey instead.

4. It's dangerous to keep your anger bottled up, so after being stuck for two hours in Teku because of a julus, I will give vent to road rage by knocking down every orange Hilltake portable road divider and stake my claim for the All-Nepal National Knockout Cup for Toppling Road Dividers in the Supporting Actor Category.

5. It is the duty of every citizen to contribute to the municipality's compost campaign, so I will begin the new year on a clean slate by dumping all my bio-degradable garbage on the sidewalk in front of my house.

6. I will try to read a book in 2004.

7. I will spend less time aimlessly surfing the net this year, and more time in the Casino watching underclad Uzbek artistes do the Nefertiti Bellydance.

8. I will join politics by opening a vulcanising shop and become sole supplier of X-tra Roadgrip Hi-flammable Tyres TM for the 25<sup>th</sup> Decisive Phase of the Street Agitation Against Regression.

9. I promise not to make utterances that may be construed to be seditious within earshot of the state law and order restoration council. This time, I really mean it.

10. I will endeavour to make a complete ass of myself every week throughout this new year.

