On the eve of King Gyanendra’s visit to India, the Maoists launched a campaign to cripple the country by blocking off all main highways in Central Nepal with booby-trapped barricades. For Kathmandu Valley, this is effectively another blockade since all four highways linking the capital to the rest of the country have been blocked for two days now. Shops are hoarding vegetables and food, and queues have formed at petrol stations.

Early Wednesday morning, 18 lorries on the East-West Highway were burnt to cinders by the Maoists for defying their blockade. The army has been hard-pressed to clear the barriers and carried out heli-patrols along the main highways on Thursday.

A day after six policemen were killed in the first ever attack on a post inside Kathmandu Valley, the chief of the Maoist eastern command, Conrad Badal, said on Sunday, the beginning of the rebel’s ‘strategic offensive phase.

On a trip this week from Pokhara to Biratnagar, we saw thousands of passengers forced to spend cold nights huddled inside buses, many had run out of money to pay for food. There are bombs hidden inside trees and boulders piled on the highways and are too risky to remove. “Driving was already risky because of accidents and robberies, but the landmines have made it even riskier,” says Dhiraj Rai, a bus driver. The Maoists are replicating tactics they used in western Nepal last month by blocking highways and ambushing the army as it tried to clear them. Seven soldiers were killed in an ambush on the Jiri Highway on Saturday.

All over eastern Nepal, along the East-West and Mechi highways, tree trunks and boulders have blocked roads. The barricades are festooned with Maoist banners and from the nearby forest the Maoists warn bus passengers through loudspeakers not to remove the trees. “Don’t move them, we won’t be responsible if you are killed,” they say.

Major Kosh Raj Ghimire from the Ilam barracks said it is difficult to clear the barricades because of the bombs and the danger of Maoist ambushes. “There are so many of these obstacles, it takes time,” he told worried bus passengers on their way to Mirik on Wednesday.

King Gyanendra’s visit to India has been ‘rescheduled’ because of the death of former Indian prime minister PV Narasimha Rao on Thursday. Rao was the architect of India’s economic reforms and was prime minister 1991-96 after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He had been admitted to hospital after a heart attack two weeks ago and news of his death came at 2:30 pm just ahead of the scheduled departure time for the royal visit. King Gyanendra’s visit had been getting muted coverage in the Indian press and his interview in The Times of India last week was relegated to the entertainment section. Indian officials had leaked New Delhi’s message to the king would be that he mustn’t be tempted to go it alone. They have also hinted that the army should be more aggressive in going after the Maoists, and even give up UN peacekeeping to do so.
FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS
- Life through the Lens Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery. Till 15 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np
- Mass Timings at the Assumption Church, 24 December 9.30 PM carol singing followed by Holy Mass. 25 December 9AM Christmas Day mass in Nepal and 4PM in English and Christmas mass at Hotel Armanagu in RAM in English.

EVENTS
- Pablo Neruda poetry reading in Spanish, English and Nepali, also the screening of If Postino at the film club Baghi Khana 4PM Sunday, 26 December
- Christmas Eve Carol Service by the International Church on 24 December at 6:30 PM and Christmas Day Service on 25 December at 9.30 AM, British School, Jhamsikhel.
- Citizen’s Call For Peace at Ratnapark in Kathmandu on 27 December at 10.30 AM. Come express solidarity towards the peace movement.
- Haute Couture celebrates New year with a fashion theme this year at the Yak and Yeti for more information and tickets contact 4424899

The Chimney Exclusive dining with soft music and a seven course meal at the Yak and Yeti includes entrance to Sinner’s in Heaven from Heaven.6PM to 10PM Rs 3,999/person and Rs 5,999/couple. 4424899
- Sinner’s in Heaven 7AK and Yeti hosts their annual New year’s Party from 8PM to 2AM for all the party animals. Rs 1,599 includes food and unlimited imported spirits. 4248999
- New Year’s Eve at Oawira’s Performances by Abhay and the Steam Injuries. Rs 3500/couples and Rs 2000/person including dinner and drinks. 4479489

MUSIC
- Swingin this Christmas with the Mc. Twisters and the Divazzzz!!! D.j session with J.J. and friends on 24 December 7PM onwards at Moksh restaurant and bar. Tickets Rs 300, 450
- Christmas Jam at the Yak and Yeti. Rs 1175/person. 4248999
- Christmas Eve at Oawira’s with ‘Benaam’, 25 December 8PM at Himalatte Cafe Mitra and Lounge Bar at Hotel Summit, 6.30 PM onwards on 24 and 25 December.
- Christmas and New Year’s Eve at Dwarika’s Super Star Christmas Day lunch with live music at the Shambala Gardens. 12PM onwards, Rs 720 per person at Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat, 4412999
- Christmas at Kilroy’s Christmas Dinner and Lunch with Rune and the Injuns.’ Rs 3500/couples and Rs 2000/person including dinner and drinks. 4479489
- Christmas at K-too’s Christmas Jam Christmas desserts and welcome drink for Rs 1200 per person Lajimpat. 4412999
- Christmas Day at the Yak and Yeti. Rs 1175/person.4248999
- Christmas by the jungle at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. Special New Year’s Eve deal with live music at the Shambala Gardens. 12PM onwards, Rs 720 per person at Hotel Shangri-la, Lajipat, 4412999
- The Spirit of Christmas Suntosoo Christmas goodies at Hyatt Regency. 4491234

NEPALI WEATHER

The good news is that the concentration of particles below 10 microns in Kathmandu’s air is not getting worse. The bad news is that it is already very bad. In fact, PM10 concentrations in Kathmandu’s streets were still in the ‘haumful’ range. But the two-day break did leave a positive impact. The worst areas are still Putali Sadak, Thamel and Patan Hospital.

GREAT WAYS TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S DAY
- Christmas and New Year’s Eve at Oawira’s is with breakfast and dinner at the venue of your choice. Rs 49/person on win-sharing and B75 for single. 30 December to 5 January. 4479488
- Merry Christmas Package One night, two days with welcome drink, breakfast and dinner. Single room Rs 4,000 and double room Rs 5.100 at La-Meren 4490553
- Dream Holiday package tour to Malaysia for Christmas and New Year. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, marcopolo@wlink.com.np
- Tiger Mountain Lodge Attractive Christmas and New Year offers for Rs 12,000. 4490553
- Christmas by the jungle at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. Special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Cabin Himalaya invites you to celebrate the sunrise of 2005 rather than the sunset of 2004 at their windy hills on 1Jan 2005, Nagarkot,
Jesus Christ, the revolutionary

The single most important fact about the birth of Jesus, as recounted in the Gospels, is one that receives almost no emphasis in the American festival of Christmas. The child who was born in Bethlehem represented a drastic political challenge to the imperial power of Rome.

The nativity story is told to make the point that Rome is the enemy of God and in Jesus, Rome’s day is over. The Gospel of Matthew builds its nativity narrative around Herod’s determination to kill the baby, whom he recognizes as a threat to his own political sway. The Romans were an occupation force in Palestine and Herod was their puppet king. To the people of Israel, the Roman occupation which preceded the birth of Jesus by at least 50 years, was a defilement, and Jewish resistance was steady. (The historian Josephus says that after an uprising in Jerusalem around the time of the birth of Jesus, the Romans crucified 2,000 Jewish rebels.)

Herod was right to feel insecure on his throne. In order to preempt any challenges from the rumored newborn ‘king of the Jews’, Herod murdered ‘all the male children who were two years or younger’. Joseph, warned in a dream, slipped out of Herod’s reach with Mary and Jesus. Thus, right from his birth, the child was marked as a political fugitive.

The Gospel of Luke puts an even more political cast on the story. The narrative begins with the decree of Caesar Augustus calling for a world census—a creation of tax rolls that will tighten the empire’s grip on its subjects. It was Caesar Augustus who turned the Roman republic into a dictatorship, a power grab he reinforced by proclaiming himself divine.

Herod was also determined to ensure the blaspheous claim by Caesar Augustus to be the “Saviour of the world” was being repudiated.

When Jesus was murdered by Rome as a political criminal—crucifixion was the way such rebels were executed—the story’s beginning was fulfilled in its end. But for contingent historical reasons (the savage Roman war against the Jews in the late first century, the gradual domination of the Jesus movement by Gentiles, the conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century) the Christian memory depersonalised the anti-Roman character of the Jesus story. Eventually, Roman imperialism would be sanctified by the church, with Jews replacing Romans as the main antagonists of Jesus, as if he were not Jewish himself. Thus, Herod is remembered more for being part-Jewish than for being a Roman puppet.

In modern times, religion and politics began to be understood as occupying separate spheres, and the nativity story became spiritualised and sentimentalised, losing its political edge altogether. ‘Peace’ replaced ‘resistance’ as the main motif. The baby Jesus was universalised, removed from his decidedly Jewish context and the narrative’s explicit critiques of imperial dominance and of wealth were blunted.

This is how it came to be that Christmas in America has turned the nativity of Jesus on its head. No surprise there, for if the story were told today with Roman imperialism at its centre, questions might arise about America’s new self-understanding as an imperial power. A story of Jesus born into a land oppressed by a hated military occupation might prompt an examination of the American occupation of Iraq. The story of Jesus come decisively to the poor might cast a pall over the festival of consumption. A story of the Jewishness of Jesus might undercut the Christian theology of replacement.

Today the Roman empire is recalled mainly as a force for good—those roads, language, laws, civic magnificence and ‘order’ everywhere. The United States of America also understands itself as acting in the world with good intentions, aiming at order. A “new world order” of George W. Bush. That we have this in common with Rome is caught by the Latin motto that appears just below the engraved pyramid on each American dollar bill. ‘Novus Ordo Seclorum’. But, as Iraq reminds us, such ‘order’ comes at a cost, far more than a dollar. The price is always paid in blood and suffering by unseen ‘nobody’s’ at the bottom of the imperial pyramid. It is their story, for once, that is being told this week.

(James Carroll is a columnist for the Boston Globe)
Bluebird
Starting off as one of the first supermarket chains in 1985, Bluebird set the trend for many others to follow. The competition has proved beneficial and as a result, prices have gone down. A full-fledged departmental store offering a variety of popular food products, local and imported, also has a video section offering appliances and has recently introduced branded items, sticking to the big brands like Nike, Adidas, etc. “We do not sell many Chinese items as we would rather stick to investing in better quality,” says Binod Tuladhar. Giving customers a treat to look forward to, Bluebird is giving every shopper who makes a purchase of up to Rs 15,000 a free one night stay (valid for couples) at the Bluebird Hotel in Pokhara.

Gemini
Gemini was established in 1991 and they started out as the biggest grocery store in Kathmandu. Now they have expanded into a full-fledged departmental store offering a variety of popular food products, local and imported, it also has an audio-video section offering appliances and has recently introduced branded items, sticking to the big brands like Nike, Adidas, etc. “We do not sell many Chinese items as we would rather stick to investing in better quality,” says Binod Tuladhar. Giving customers a treat to look forward to, Gemini is giving every shopper who makes a purchase of up to Rs 15,000 a free one night stay (valid for couples) at the Bluebird Hotel in Pokhara.

Saleways
Saleways plans to become the Walmart of Nepal and it seems to already be on its way with two stores already open in Pokhara and doing booming business. Saleways plans to expand to Kathmandu and beyond. Says Sudhir Pradhanang, “Organised retail is at a very nascent stage in Nepal right now, the potential is huge and we plan to cash in on it.” Sudhir Pradhanang, Sudhir’s brother, adds “We are different and are planning to provide superior customer service with memberships and paying them back according to their expenses through various free packages and plans.”

Metro Mall
Metro Mall is now two years old, as possibly the first 24-hour department store not just in Nepal but the region. Located inside the Soaltee Complex, security was not a problem and the store catered to the all-night crowd at casinos and was a shopping paradise for the jet-lagged and nightbirds. Though it has a reputation for being more expensive, proprietor Bijen Jhochen insists his products are actually up to seven percent cheaper.

Namaste
Namaste was one of the first supermarkets in Patan when it opened 12 years ago, now it is one of many. When Jeevan Shakya first opened his store, people used to think that supermarkets were only for the rich. “We have changed that attitude, and now people are becoming more aware of the fact that all sorts of goods from all price ranges are available with us,” he says. Namaste did so well that it has expanded and moved to the former Hotel Narayani in Pulchok. (Its former premises in Jawalakhel have been taken over by Saleways). Shakya would like to keep his store open till midnight, but cites present security concerns. Namaste also plans to have a wine and cookie tasting with caroling for Christmas Eve. Shakya says “this is the first time that we are organizing such an event within a supermarket.”

Dexo
Dexo has seen quite an expansion since 1986, when it specialised only in woollen garments. Now, it has music consumer items and a supermarket offering all grocery items. Located in Thamel, Dexo is always busy with late-night shoppers and the most popular spot being the liquor section which draws a lot of wine-lovers. Piracy has hurt the selling of original soundtracks and albums on cds and audiocassettes, but Dexo’s emphasis on quality has gotten loyal customers.
CLASS STRUGGLE

Going on nine years, this conflict is degenerating into a competition between the two warring sides to be nastier than the other in tormenting non-combatants. This year they beat their own national record on disappearances, extra judicial killings and torture. They now seem hell bent on breaking world records.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the blatant use of children in Nepal’s armed conflict. The party that has been most insistent on calling for United Nations mediation is the one that is recruiting children directly from their classrooms, forcing them to join militia training, closing schools down with threats, and menacing teachers. As a result, the country’s education system is now in shambles, the remarkable progress made in the past decade in raising the country’s literacy rate is seriously jeopardised.

Even in conflicts menacing as ours, we have seen an unspoken agreement between belligerents not to target children and schools. But in Nepal there has been a cynical and deliberate attempt to wreck the school system. Day care centres are bombarded, children are used as cannon fodder and education turned into a theatre of war.

As we have seen in Africa, conflicts reach a virulent, irreparable phase when children are taught to kill. As our report from Rolpa in this issue (p 4-5) makes it clear: parts of Nepal are now in this phase. Forcing children into war is one form of exploitation. The Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child make the recruitment of anyone under 15 a war crime. The Option Protocol, to which Nepal is a signatory, has raised that age threshold to 18.

The Maoists may say they are not the government, but non-state parties are also bound by the conventions and the leaders of armed groups can be brought to justice if they recruit children in a war situation. A few leaders sometime later. But it can also work the other way around. Bin Laden was friend of US leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should also work the other way around.

Leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should work the other way around.

Leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should work the other way around.

Leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should work the other way around.

Leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should work the other way around.

Leaders when he was fighting against the Soviet Union, but at the end of Cold War they suddenly turned him into a terrorist. We should work the other way around.
Embrace Nepal’s diversity

Let’s replace exclusionary Nepali with an inclusive Nepaliya of religious, linguistic and cultural plurality

In the space of a month, King Gyanendra has inaugurated the Second World Buddhist Summit in Lumbini, participated in the re-enactment of the marriage of Ram and Sita in Janakpur and performed a puja at the Gadimai temple in Bara, the biggest animal-sacrifice ritual in the world.

STATE OF THE STATE

In all three sites, India’s Sangh Parivar has a political agenda to pursue. By accepting the significance of Lumbini, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) wants to prove that it is opposed to ‘foreign’ religions like Christianity and Islam, but is tolerant of ‘Indian’ faiths like Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism.

The purpose of Bihari Puncham festival in Janakpur last week was to create a Hindu solidarity for politics to face the electoral challenge across the border in Bihar where a general election is due soon. The VHP is also flexing its muscles for the UP by-elections. The Sangh Parivar hopes to cash its Nepali connections for better electoral prospects in our neighbouring states.

It’s unlikely that the palace bureaucrats don’t understand the political significance of the presence of Sangh Parivar fire-breathers like Ashok Singhal and Vinay Katiyar in Janakpur. King Gyanendra’s association with them, albeit indirect, is sure to have sent the wrong signals to Congress I-led ruling coalition in New Delhi smack before his ten-day visit to India that begins on Thursday. Mulayam Singh Yadav in Lucknow and Ramesh Debi in Patna, whose King Gyanendra is also scheduled to meet, will not be amused.

The VHP-affiliated Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh bestowed upon the king the title of ‘World Hindu Emperor’ and together with the RSS and BJP are collectively referred to in India as the Sangh Parivar, which is opposed to secular politics and wants to establish a fundamentalist polity in the world’s largest democracy. The palace bureaucracy has to be careful about hob-nobbing with this lot, and understand its implications for Nepal’s own multi-religious and multi-ethnic status.

Over-dining the monarchy’s Hindu antecedents is already rattling Nepalis who do not believe in the superiority of one religion over another. Relying on religion for political legitimacy is extremely risky business. A king who sees himself as an icon of culture, rather than just the ruler of territory, was seen in France in 1830. Louis-Philippe, son of Philippe of Égalité who supported the revolution of 1789, took the Bourbon throne. But instead of assuming the traditional title of ‘King of France’, he chose to describe himself as the ‘King of the French’. This charivarianic patriotism later led to two great wars in Europe.

Jang Bahadur Kunwar saw this at work when he became the first oriental potentate to visit Europe in 1650. The idea he took home lay dormant in his dynasty’s century-long rule only to emerge later when symbols of a new Nepali nationalism were forged.

The notion of émigré Nepalis who descended into Kathmandu after the Shah Restoration of 1950 impressed upon Birendra Prince Mahendra that the King of Nepal deserved to be the king of Nepalis everywhere. The notion of Nepaliya’s national identity and Nepaliya’ses very soon replaced with the idea of Nepali nationalism built around the ethnicity of Nepaliya.

Nepaliya was a de-territorialised identity: anyone who swore by the crown, wore dharo-surumu-topi (or sari), spoke Nepali, and professed Hinduism remained a Nepali irrespective of citizenship.

Nepal was the fatherland of everyone true to Nepaliya. Compared to the adherents of prescribed Nepaliya, people living inside Nepal for generations were deemed to be lesser Nepalis if they happened to believe, dress, speak, or worship differently. Since the primacy of the crown was the functional principal of Panchayat patriots built around Nepaliya, everyone struggling for the restoration of democracy was also hounded by the establishment as an ‘anti-national’.

The biggest failure of the post-1980 order has been its inability to replace exclusionary Nepaliya with an inclusive Nepaliya of religious, linguistic, and cultural plurality. However, after October Fourth, the royal predilection for a monolithic Hindu orthodoxy has re-assembled itself.

The French don’t have a king anymore, but a monarchy continues to reign over the United Kingdom. If the illusion of cultural emperors isn’t discarded, Nepaliya will have to learn to live without the most prominent legacy of Nepal.
Year Zero is already here for Rolpa’s child militia

Giving children a

THERE were seven of them on the trail to Thuang, boys and girls carrying heavy homemade shoulder bags. The biggest was barely four feet tall, must have been 14. He was carrying a Chinese radio with the antenna pulled out. There was a comb in his shirt pocket and his hair was slickly groomed. In a voice of authority, he asked: “Who are you?”

We said we were journalists on our way to Thuang. “Do you have a pass?” We replied that the head of the people’s government in Milking had told us to get a pass further on. “OK,” he replied.

He was Comrade Sahas, the leader of the group of Maoist child militia. One of the girls, Comrade Bhabana who looked 13, asked: “Here are things over here, are there any enemies about?” They were on security duty, checking the papers of everyone who came up the valley or working as messengers and porters.

Once they found out we were harmless, the children opened up. Sahas said he was studying in Grade Five and has been taking part in Maoist activities since 2000. Bhabana was in Grade Three when the Maoists said if she didn’t join the militia her parents would have to join the People’s Army. They said they would take her for a month but Bhabana hasn’t been home for a year now. “They had said I’d only have to cook but I am carrying grenades and guns,” she says.

LORD OF THE FLIES

(Above) With a .303 slug over his shoulder, Comrade Waithaba leads a group of Maoists in Rolpa. He claims to be 15 but his friends say he is younger.

(Below, left) Kami Pun and Ramtel Gharti were recruited from their school and managed to escape from the Maoists on their second try.

(Below, right) On sentry duty on the road to Thuang, we ran across this bunch: Comrade Sahas (second from left), Comrade Akrosh (in red shirt) and Comrade Bhabana (extreme right).

The curse of geography

Let’s stop using it as an excuse for underdevelopment

There are few mines and oil exploration remains a distant dream. In short, there’s no gold in the hills that we know of. And for that, we should be pleased. Because it’s not resources themselves that curse a developing country.

It’s the penchant of greedy local elites to steal everything that isn’t nailed down, then to come back for the nails. And boy does Nepal have that elite problem in spades. The top people here—not all of them but many, and going right to the very top—have plundered and stolen and pillaged—and—yes—stolen as much as ever they could. In earlier days, they did take timber. But mostly they stole the labour of the people, and managed Nepal’s geography to their advantage.

Being landlocked means that those who control and manage access to outside markets and ideas own immense power. That’s what the elite did here for centuries. Why else would Jung Bahadur Rana and the British collaborate in keeping this kingdom sealed off from the world while so many others in the region were wide open? It’s because access became a resource, a natural resource. And a curse.

These days aid and development types play that role. Using as local contacts members of that old elite, they control access to Nepal and they do it with a similar if unintentional rapaciousness to the old feudal. India may be the land that locks this country, but it can be more easily than the plethora of multinational agencies that preside over Nepal’s decline.

In short, if Nepal is ever to change, it needs to be far more open to the wider world than it ever was. It needs to build bridges and forge relationships through diplomacy, development, and trade. These must be based on equality, not aid partnerships that owe more to feudalism than anything else.

A good start would be to stop using the curse of geography as an excuse for underdevelopment. •
Bhagyaman ahead with a campaign under the slogan: ‘One School, One Strong
people’s education, actually
development for those two.
years. He later emerged from
time, which was very little.

The work is hard, sometimes
their parents sent them away at night. The only ones who
result is that villages and schools are empty.

Desertions are common, and attribution in battle has decided
as to how much people are willing to fight. One 14-year-old
to them. The children are surprisedingly

commander of Powrung, Pem
be dictating a successful

Bhagyaman remembers, “I fainted many times, then they
sponder said they had

Bhagyaman’s friend from Grade

No stitch in time

Garment industrialists will not boast cheery 2005 as a happy new year. Reason: from January 1, 2006, Nepal’s garment quota for export of ready-made garments to countries like the US will be scrapped because of the WTO. That will mean almost all the remaining 30 garment industries in the country will have to close shop. The death of the annual Rs 6 billion industry will also mean a big loss for the national coffers that had been getting 35 percent of its earnings from garment exports.

There was sufficient warning. The industry and the government have both known this was coming. “That is the reason we had been alerting the government to do something since years ago,” says Kiran Sahak, President of Garment Association of Nepal (GAN). “But unfortunately, nothing was done and here we are helpless when our industry is dying.”

The end of the quota system means the Nepali garment industry has almost lost its livelihood because it cannot compete with giant regional exporters like India and China on pricing. Situated far from the sea as it is, Nepal garments already have a hefty transportation margin and now, as GAN had suggested that the government rush to build a dry port near the border and an Export Processing Zone (EPZ),

Middle Marsyangdi suspended

Concurrent work on the Middle Marsyangdi, one of the biggest current projects in the country, has been suspended indefinitely due to Maoist threats. The German-funded 70 megawatt project in Lamjung has gone to a halt since September when rebel fighters bombed a vehicle. The civil contractor, DDC-JV stopped work just a little

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant

Many like us died in Beni

LIBANG—In June, a ragged-dressed emaciated young boy appeared in the Rolpa headquarter. He looked tired, hungry and was crying. Rolpaks who had fled Thawang and had been living as refugees in Libang could barely recognize 14-year-old Bahagyan Roka who they remembered from their village. “He is looking like a dead body. Two years ago, Bahagyan, studying in Grade Six, was taken away by the army from Jilmbau School,” one of the villagers. “The army accused the students of stealing, stripped and beat them for three days. I fainted many times, then they made us cook for the guerrillas in Thawang.”

Bahagyan’s friend says, “They told us to go to Jilmbau Heights. Later, the boys had to drill and were taught how to use guns and throw grenades. Together with many other school children, they were used as porters to transport rice, ammunition and grenades in the attack on Beni in February. There were bombs exploding everywhere that night.”

“Many like us died in Beni”

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant

No stitch in time

Garment industrialists will not boast cheery 2005 as a happy new year. Reason: from January 1, 2006, Nepal’s garment quota for export of ready-made garments to countries like the US will be scrapped because of the WTO. That will mean almost all the remaining 30 garment industries in the country will have to close shop. The death of the annual Rs 6 billion industry will also mean a big loss for the national coffers that had been getting 35 percent of its earnings from garment exports.

There was sufficient warning. The industry and the government have both known this was coming. “That is the reason we had been alerting the government to do something since years ago,” says Kiran Sahak, President of Garment Association of Nepal (GAN). “But unfortunately, nothing was done and here we are helpless when our industry is dying.”

The end of the quota system means the Nepali garment industry has almost lost its livelihood because it cannot compete with giant regional exporters like India and China on pricing. Situated far from the sea as it is, Nepal garments already have a hefty transportation margin and now, as GAN had suggested that the government rush to build a dry port near the border and an Export Processing Zone (EPZ),

Middle Marsyangdi suspended

Concurrent work on the Middle Marsyangdi, one of the biggest current projects in the country, has been suspended indefinitely due to Maoist threats. The German-funded 70 megawatt project in Lamjung has gone to a halt since September when rebel fighters bombed a vehicle. The civil contractor, DDC-JV stopped work just a little

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant

Many like us died in Beni

LIBANG—In June, a ragged-dressed emaciated young boy appeared in the Rolpa headquarter. He looked tired, hungry and was crying. Rolpaks who had fled Thawang and had been living as refugees in Libang could barely recognize 14-year-old Bahagyan Roka who they remembered from their village. “He is looking like a dead body. Two years ago, Bahagyan, studying in Grade Six, was taken away by the army from Jilmbau School,” one of the villagers. “The army accused the students of stealing, stripped and beat them for three days. I fainted many times, then they made us cook for the guerrillas in Thawang.”

Bahagyan’s friend says, “They told us to go to Jilmbau Heights. Later, the boys had to drill and were taught how to use guns and throw grenades. Together with many other school children, they were used as porters to transport rice, ammunition and grenades in the attack on Beni in February. There were bombs exploding everywhere that night.”

“Many like us died in Beni”

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant

Many like us died in Beni

LIBANG—In June, a ragged-dressed emaciated young boy appeared in the Rolpa headquarter. He looked tired, hungry and was crying. Rolpaks who had fled Thawang and had been living as refugees in Libang could barely recognize 14-year-old Bahagyan Roka who they remembered from their village. “He is looking like a dead body. Two years ago, Bahagyan, studying in Grade Six, was taken away by the army from Jilmbau School,” one of the villagers. “The army accused the students of stealing, stripped and beat them for three days. I fainted many times, then they made us cook for the guerrillas in Thawang.”

Bahagyan’s friend says, “They told us to go to Jilmbau Heights. Later, the boys had to drill and were taught how to use guns and throw grenades. Together with many other school children, they were used as porters to transport rice, ammunition and grenades in the attack on Beni in February. There were bombs exploding everywhere that night.”

“Many like us died in Beni”

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant

Many like us died in Beni

LIBANG—In June, a ragged-dressed emaciated young boy appeared in the Rolpa headquarter. He looked tired, hungry and was crying. Rolpaks who had fled Thawang and had been living as refugees in Libang could barely recognize 14-year-old Bahagyan Roka who they remembered from their village. “He is looking like a dead body. Two years ago, Bahagyan, studying in Grade Six, was taken away by the army from Jilmbau School,” one of the villagers. “The army accused the students of stealing, stripped and beat them for three days. I fainted many times, then they made us cook for the guerrillas in Thawang.”

Bahagyan’s friend says, “They told us to go to Jilmbau Heights. Later, the boys had to drill and were taught how to use guns and throw grenades. Together with many other school children, they were used as porters to transport rice, ammunition and grenades in the attack on Beni in February. There were bombs exploding everywhere that night.”

“Many like us died in Beni”

The run-of-the-river project, which was designed to meet Nepal’s power needs by 2005 is now indefinitely suspended with delays. The project was to be completed by 2007. The Nepali government has almost lost its lifeline because it cannot compete with giant
Willing to go after defaulters

It's getting ugly as the battle between Nepal Bank and its powerful defaulters enters a new phase

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Nepal Bank Limited has tried just about everything to recover loans. It took the defaulters to court and even tried naming and shaming them.

That didn't work, and now its aggressive ex-CEO has written to foreign embassies in Kathmandu not to grant visas to defaulters and is asking the government to impound their passports.

The bank even wants Nepal Rastra Bank and the Ministry of Finance to request the royal palace not to invite the defaulters to official functions. Already, there has been an agreement among Nepal's donors to avoid social contacts with willful defaulters.

Nepal Bank's high-profile defaulters are crying foul, calling the moves unconstitutional and are preparing to fight back. The row has split the business community and put the embassies in a fix.

At the heart of the storm is Nepal Bank's CEO, Craig McAllister, whose letter to the ministry reads: “There is no single action that would be more effective in demonstrating support to the banking system and the efforts to chemically overdue loans from willful defaulters than action by the palace.”

The fight has gotten personal and degenerated into name-calling between McAllister and Nepal's biggest defaulter, Piyush Bahadur Amatya of Pokhara's Fullbari Resort, who owes the bank Rs 2.18 billion. The other 36 defaulters in Nepal Bank's list owe the bank Rs 10 million or more.

An irate Amatya told us in an interview: “The foreigners are trampling on the law of the land.” (see interview, below)

Defaulter see their businesses have suffered because of the bank’s defaulters and say that their are legal ways to address the problem. “Nepal Bank should have adopted procedural methods instead of blackmailing businessmen and recommending such harsh measures,” says Chamal Raj Dhalik of FDC.2C

Other defaulters who declared themselves to be a procedural problem with the request to embassies to stop visas. “The bank should have asked the Nepal Rastra Bank to request the foreign embassies not to grant us the visa,” said one defaulter. Some lawyers also have problems with the visa.

“This move has been legal standing,” former attorney general, Sushil Pant told us. “Legally, the bank can't send a letter like this, nor can foreign embassies entertain them.”

Nepal Bank officials say they made the request to put stop visas only after exhausting all other means. “We sent them request letters, notices and asked them to sit for negotiations repeatedly,” says Ajay Nepal, Nepal Bank’s public relations officer. “They just ignored it, which is why we have been forced to adopt these tough measures.”

Nepal Bank officials believe they are running out of time because they have only seven months before the matured contracts of the expat management ends. “If we wait for the Rastra Bank and the ministries, nothing is going to happen,” said one banker.

Defaulters, like Amatya blame the World Bank for backing Nepal Bank to arm-twist the defaulters. Indeed, the World Bank is behind the foreign sector reform program which aims to bolster the banking industry by, among other things, addressing the problem of non-performing assets of public-sector banks like Nepal Bank Limited and Rastrighat Bank.

In its interview with us, Amatya didn’t hide his contempt for the World Bank, and even accused it of corruption.

World Bank’s country director, Ravi Ohashi, expressed surprise over Amatya’s comments. “If there is any evidence of corruption, we would be happy if he came forward with it,” he told us. Ohashi argued that the financial sector reform was the government’s plan and that it was the government’s decision to introduce the foreign management.

“There are competent Nepali bankers for such reforms also,” he said. “But since they have social and family relations with the business community and political leaders, it would have been difficult for them to deal with the situation.”

But even with the foreign management team, Nepal Bank has only recovered Rs 5 billion of its Rs 20.74 billion in bad loans in the past two years. “We could have done much better if only we had support from the judiciary and administration,” says a senior bank official.

“There has been no hearing on cases we have filed against defaulters.”

Indeed, government officials and even businessmen say prominent defaulters are so powerful that they have succeeded in knotting the recovery process in legal tangles. The stay orders that the courts have issued at the petition of the defaulters have prolonged the process.

Bank officials say they have been forced to take strict action because the CAA was also dragging its feet. “The CAA has taken action against one official, who had lent the money violating the banking norms, it would have sent the right message at the right time,” said one official.

At the CAA, commissioner Basu Deb Lamichhane told us his office had interrogated more than a dozen ex-officials and board members of Nepal Bank.

“It is true that it took some time, but we were just trying to do a thorough job,” Lamichhane told us. The CAA had found there was banky panicky and collusion between the defaulter and bank officials.

The business community is divided over the way the government is putting on defaulters. Most are against Nepal Bank’s moves to stop visas, saying it is high-handed. Others support it: “It is the public’s money, it is their savings that will go down the drain,” says industrialist Rajendra Khetan. He says defaulters include some “big boys” who are leaning on the chambers of commerce to save their skins.

“The business community is 40,000 strong and it is certainly not going to defend the 200 or so defaulters,” Khetan told us. Other businessmen say the defaulters’ argument that they are hurt by the conflict doesn’t hold water because others are exposed to the same conditions and have managed to pay their loans.

The Public Accounts Committee of the newly elected parliament had in 2000 raised the issue of willful defaulters at a time when the blacklist had only 30 names. But since the investigation did not go anywhere, the list has now more than ten times that number.

Nepali Times: What do you say about Nepal Bank Limited’s recent move to request foreign missions not to grant visas to loan defaulters? Piyush Bahadur Amatya: It’s an unconstitutional move. This shows how foreigners are trampling on the law of the land. In other words, they don’t give a damn about our rules and regulations. If it were not so, they would have never dared to ask the royal palace not to invite them.

But defaulters like you have ruined the bank. What else could it have done? This move is a part of corruption. International agencies like the World Bank are funding such moves. It’s a well-organised corruption of the World Bank to get our economy in its clutch. But don’t forget that wherever the World Bank enters, there is corruption.

This is getting vicious. Do you have something personal against the expat consultants managing Nepal Bank? No, it’s not personal. It is the outcome of immoral people who have ganged up against us.

So, tell us, are you going to back the money you borrowed? What can I do when the situation is out of my control? When there is war going on, or if there is an earthquake, I can do nothing. Such circumstances can arise anywhere in the world.

Nobody is talking about how bad it is for business. Even the World Bank, that claims to be running the country, is ignoring the impact of the crisis on the business.

Some say despite your troubles, you are still living lavishly. Buying new cars and building houses. Who do you think is spending on new houses and cars? It is the banks which have been lending in non-productive areas like housing and vehicle loans. They have stopped spending in industries that generate employment and benefit the economy.

Does that mean you will never repay the loan? I have always said that I will repay the loan. But why did they cancel the 12 year rescheduling that the bank had earlier done? Other banks got Rs 20 million in loans. Soatel got 17 years to repay its loan. Yaku & Yeti got eight years and now Hyatt has 20 years. So, why pick only on me?

What is your next move? I have challenged the bank’s moves against me in the court. I have filed many cases including defamation. I have been remaining quiet because my cases are still in the court. But, now this is not just against me. The whole business community has been offended. We are going for class litigation now. For that purpose, a cell has been formed at the FACC.
Misrule of law

The government arbitrarily destroys firms it has problems with

I f you are Raghu Pant, the Minister of Labour and Transport, what would you do to ultimately save face? You would put on a Minister’s best cap to cancel the registration of a private-sector firm. In doing so, you would make that firm’s investors’ money worthless, throw its employees out on the streets, damage its relations with suppliers and clients and show all others who is boss.

But winning the battle would also mean losing the war, which, as a Marxist, Raghuji would know. Through his action, his silent signal would be that the government of Nepal could arbitrarily destroy private firms that it has problems with, even if that firm’s in a cut-throat competitive market. Instead of sorting out these problems by fighting its case to the finish in a court of law to establish impeccable precedents to deal with similar cases in future, the government could interpret the law itself, decide what’s legal and illegal as though it were a court and then take actions in the name of some vague public good.

For somebody who once ran his own paper, Pant should have known better. Only 15 years ago, owners of fledgling private-sector media houses in Nepal lived in constant fear of having registrations cancelled by the Panchayat government with the flourish of excuses. That fear so paralysed the publishers’ business plans that they were finally able to hand together to get rid of it by getting a clause of their own in the 1990 constitution that says under no circumstances can the government cancel the registration of any media house.

And no matter how Nepal continues to rank in various indices of global press freedom, that clause continues to assure all non-profit and for-profit media houses that whatever problems they may have with the government, cancellation of registrations through diktat by the Ministry of Information is never going to be one of the outcomes. It is rather odd that while the private sector media is thus shielded from government arbitrariness that threatens their existence, private sector firms—who too are in the same business of using private money as investment, providing employment, supplying goods and services to those who pay for them, paying taxes and keeping the economy going—continue to have no choice but to ultimately kneel down even before a short-term Minister lest he, in a fit of righteous anger, made them legally non-existent.

To be sure, few would mistake Lumbini Overseas, the firm whose registration Pant cancelled, as a model corporate citizen. The allegations against it are damning: it extorted lakhs of money from job applicants, it sent more than 1,500 undocumented workers to South Korea and it evaded taxes. Although these malpractices may also exist among 400-plus “manpower” firms, the fact is that Pant’s ministry hasn’t proven any of those allegations against Lumbini in a court of law, much less shown what “special circumstances” (as stated in Section 21 of Foreign Employment Act of 1968) warranted the cancellation of its registration. This provides a window for Lumbini and other business bodies to mount a legal challenge against Pant’s action, if they still have energy left to do so.

But for Pant, a larger question remains: if the ends justified the means, as in this case, then, how different really is his action from that of the Maoists or the Panchayatis who too think that arbitrarily trampling upon the rights of those who they do not like is justified in the name of righting perceived wrongs? •
A Buddha path to peace

A Nepali monk in Thailand speaks of lessons from there in resolving the insurgers

BHIKKU SUGANDHA

A Nepali monk in Thailand speaks of lessons from there in resolving the insurgers.

Left Nepal to study Buddhism in Thailand as a 15-year-old novice monk in 1975. At that time Thailand was at a similar state of development as Nepal—eventual Temple Theory predicted that Thailand would be next. I was residing at a royal monastery and had been given the patronage of the present Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. He was quite influential and The King and Queen were top Thai generals and senior members of the national government were very much interested in him for advice and inspiration. I had become fluent in Thai and so gained an insider’s understanding of the seriousness of the situation.

The military and the government were not as concerned with the communists in neighbouring countries as they were with the communists and sympathisers within Thailand.

Many brilliant Thai university students had fled to the jungles in northeastern Thailand to support the communists. Thai Maoist guerrilla force. Their weaponry was supplied from outside and transportation. But the villages in the ‘pink’ parts of the northeast gladly supplied food and other requirements to the rebels. They were an olmous threat precisely because they had local support.

They declared many parts of Thailand ‘red’ where it would be very difficult to govern them. The Thai military often engaged the communists in bloody firefights. I was often a teacher to the red zone trying to help villagers who were secretly sympathetic to the communists. We threatened to fire on them, a bomb was detonated on the route where my teacher passed after visiting a monastery.

My senior colleague, a British Buddhist monk, Ajahn Brahm, who was in Thailand during the 1970s, had written in his book, Opening the Door of Your Heart and other Buddhist Tales of Happiness, how the Thai government helped to resolve the Maoist problem. Brahm says the Thai military and government took a three-pronged strategy:

1. Restraint: The military did not attack the communist bases, though ex-ideological warriors knew where they were.
2. Forgiveness: Throughout this dangerous period, there was an unconditional surrender of the enemy.
3. Solving the root problem: New roads were built and old roads were being paved in the region. The King of Thailand personally supervised and paid for the construction of many hundreds of small reservoirs with connected irrigation systems, allowing the poor farmers of the northeast to grow a second crop of rice each year. Electricity reached the remotest of hamlets and it came with a school and a clinic.

A Thai government soldier on patrol in the jungle told me once: “We don’t need to shoot the communists. They are following Thais. When I meet them coming down from the mountains or going to the village for supplies and for important positions in the Thai civil services. Why waste the resource of such courageous and committed young men? They are not following any enemy. They are following Thais in all this. Following the Buddha’s teachings, the path to resolving the present conflict lies in addressing the following six points:

1. The economy: Poverty is a root cause of rebellion. If a person follows the Buddha he himself pointed out: “If a ruler allows poverty to develop, it will lead to social strife, and to its height so that his ability to avoid this by looking after the poor.”

2. Education: The Buddhist way of solving conflict by peaceful means is carried in the Buddha’s own life when he gave practical lessons in the tolerance.

3. Nonviolence: The Buddha always instructed his disciples to be true pacifists by telling them: “Conquer anger with love, conquer evil with good, conquer greed with giving, conquer lies with the truth.”

4. Patience: The Buddha instructs his followers to avoid blaming themselves in such circumstances, practicing loving kindness, compassion, appreciative conduct and patience.

5. Forbearance and forgiveness: The Buddha says: “The words of a fool are best stopped by responding to his anger and verbal onslaught by oneself remaining calm, not by harsh measures. This will not lead to one’s opponent thinking he can take advantage of one’s ‘weakness’, forbearance is a sign of real strength, unlike the deceptive ‘strength’ of a fool.”

6. Tolerance and amiity: The Buddha teaches his followers to have religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence with followers of other religions.

As for the role of the government or Maoists practice these values sincerely, it would guarantee peace in Nepal. The ruler’s actions are of importance in reaching consequence since they affect his own kingship as well as the fortune, fate and destiny of his subjects who are almost immediately dependent upon him. By his exemplary action the king, the leader, influences, for good or bad, for weal or woe, the material as well as the spiritual realm of those who live under his rule, and he thus influences and determines their happiness or misery. Perhaps the teacher of the Buddha who was nurtured on Nepali soil can solve the current problems.
A season to be jolly

NARESH NEWAR

From the remote corners of Banke, Kailali, Dangadi to the streets of Thamel, Nepali Christians are busy preparing to celebrate Christmas, their Diwali. Some Hindus and Buddhists as well will join in festivities on the big day.

Christmas is done in Nepali style. In the nativity scene, Baby Jesus is dressed up in a bhoto inside a doko; the Three Magi are decked up in dauna suruwal. During the weekend prayer sessions, everyone takes off their shoes, aguatis on the floor and prays in Nepali. Even “praise the Messiah” is recited as “jai mahatvi”.

The New Testament was first translated into Nepali in 1821 by William Carey and is now being translated further into 12 indigenous languages. “Nothing is foreign about Christianity anymore,” says church-goer Susita Rai from Jawalakhel, “We are all one big family of Christians.”

Christians have earned a positive reputation for involvement in social, health and education sectors, reaching out to the backward, poverty-striken and illiterate Nepalis in remote areas.

Among the best-known are the Jesuits who were one of the first to arrive after 1895 and they established themselves in the country by starting the boarding school, St Xaviers in Jawalakhel and Godavari. They were followed by the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), a collaborative body of several global missionaries. It made its own mark by establishing some of the best public and community hospitals, launching literacy programs, agriculture development activities and so on. It also became one of the first international NGOs to pioneer development work in Nepal. Today, it is the second-largest employer in Nepal after the government with the largest number of expatriate and Nepali staff working in UMN’s projects around the country.

Other Christian charities like Caritas, International Fellowship (INF) and Nepal Leprosy Trust (NLT) have also been doing exemplary work in health and education—especially to reach marginalised communities who fall between the cracks. NLT is the only organisation that operates the leprosy services centre in southeast Nepal, that has the highest prevalence of leprosy. Over 20 percent of hospitals and clinics in Nepal are run by Christian charities.

The numbers of Christians in the country is growing. With less than 30 Christians in late 1950s, the number of believers increased to 200,000 in 1980 and now is estimated at one million, making up nearly four percent of the population and one of the fastest growing in the world. There are churches now in almost all the 75 districts of Nepal.

Among Christians, the Catholics have been working towards Nepalis’ Christianity. “Our religious differences do not affect our culture,” explains Binod Gurung, president of Nepali Catholic Sangh. “We were brought up as Nepalis and have a close affinity with Hindu and Buddhist friends and we often celebrate each other’s festivals.”

Christianity in Nepal

The Christian missionaries came to Nepal over the Himalaya from Tibet more than 250 years ago. They were Tyrolean Capuchin monks and wrote in their chronicles how Kathmandu Valley was the dirtiest place they had ever visited.

They called on the Malla kings of the Valley and presented the King of Patan with a telescope. For decades after that as the Gorkha conquest began, Nepal was closed to outsiders especially beef-eating Europeans.

But by the early 18th century, more missionaries came in from British India and their first group of local converts were from the Newar community. However, Christianity did not spread much after King Prithvi Narayan Shah came to power who saw the religion as a threat to national security and suspected Christians of being British spies. European missionaries and newly-converted Newar Christians were asked to leave the country. King Prithvi Narayan also strictly banned the conversion of Hindus into Christianity.

There is still a lingering distrust of Christians as proselytisers among Kathmandu’s officialdom. Even after Nepal opened its doors to the outside world in 1950 and Christian missionaries poured in they were under strict surveillance which still did not allow conversion. The law carried a sentence of three years for the preacher, one year for the convert and six months for the baptized. Many were persecuted during the 1980s.

During the Panchayat regime, a large number of Christians were persecuted and 300 pastors were jailed for proselytising. Many were subject to police brutality and there are records of at least one missionary having been killed. Church-goers had to keep their religious identity a secret and missionaries were effectively underground.

After the People’s Movement of 1990, the new constitution granted religious freedom. When the Nepal Congress (NC) came to power it instituted democratic reforms, including freedom to practice any religion. The government introduced a law that allowed freedom of religious practice. Today, voluntary conversion from one religion to another is legal. Only forced conversion is considered illegal. With more tolerant laws and policies in place, Nepali Christians today feel very much at home. “Nepalis are a tolerant community and we no longer have any fears unlike during the Panchayat days,” says Silas Bogati, parish priest from Assumption Church.

Devotees arranging Christmas decorations at Assumption Church in Dhosight this week (left) and a Nepali Mary in a sarli and pashmina.

New Year’s Eve at

Godavari Village Resort

Celebrate this New Year’s Eve at Godavari Village Resort and get a delightful package which includes a Night Stay with an opulent Gala Dinner and Breakfast, complimentary glass of wine, soft drink/beer and a grand Dance Party with ‘The Mind Turn’, LIVE on STAGE. And attractive door prizes to be won.

Also offering special XMAS Lunch and Special BBQ Lunch on New Year Day.

Date : 31 Dec, 2004
Venue : Godavari Village Resort
Rate : NRs 5550.00 (Double Room)

Rates are inclusive of taxes.

P.O.Box: 12446 Anamachhi, Butwal, Tel: 5560775 Fax: 5560777
Email: gvsales@mail.com Website: www.godavariresort.com.np

PICS: KIRAN PANDAY
Little Nepal flourishes in Hong Kong
Nepalis in the Special Autonomous Region are going places

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
HONG KONG

There used to be a time when this was still a British colony when the only Nepalis here were British Gurkhas, their families and the occasional Beirut trader. But the wave that allowed anyone born in Hong Kong before 1963 eligible for permanent residency, many children of Gurkhas have decided to live here. As conditions in Nepal deteriorate, more and more Nepalis have decided to stay on and, the number has now exceeded 50,000.

Vibrant, laissez-faire Hong Kong has made many Nepalis prosperous. From newly-arrived pavement trinket sellers to established millionaire real estate developers, the Nepalis of Hong Kong now have a strong presence. There are Nepali FM stations Nepali newspapers and magazines, Nepal is taught in 16 government schools and there are six special Nepali schools. Nepalis have stood for local elections and Chinese candidates print flyers in Nepali to woo voters.

“Nepalis here are now treated like Hong Kong citizens, and we have also shown that we are a hard-working and law-abiding lot,” says Ganesh Ijam of the umbrella organisation of Nepali associations here, the Hong Kong Nepali Federation. Among the Nepalis who have done very well for themselves is ex-British Gurkha Tej Bahadur Rai who is into construction and runs a company providing security services. He is also the chairman of the Hong Kong Nepali Chamber of Commerce and has invested in a hydroelectric project back home. Prakash Pun is also ex-Gurkha and has a similar portfolio of companies in construction and security services. Between them, Rai and Pun employ a thousand or so people, are involved in building some of Hong Kong’s landmark high rises and have annual turnovers of hundreds of millions of dollars. Dipak Khadka and his brother run Pacific Crown Engineering and employ 350 Filipino, Chinese and Australian staff.

Many of these entrepreneurs started from scratch in Hong Kong, and still have a soft spot for Nepalis giving them preference in jobs if they are qualified. Y Bh Rai came to Hong Kong 10 years ago and worked in a Chinese restaurant. Today Rai owns six franchises for Uncle Russ Coffee in prime locations in Hong Kong’s business district. “It was just hard work, pure and simple,” Rai tells us when asked the secret of his success.

Harinaya Gurung runs the well-known Nachgarg Restaurant in the Jordan neighbourhood, which brings in Nepali singers and dancers for performances. Mohan Limbu and his friends studied information technology and run the successful HSM Computer Institute. Rajendra Shrestha runs a string of labour middlemen, but no one has been able to produce any official data about them.

Sukra Raj and Biraj Gurung who were abandoned by a Nepali labour recruiter in Hong Kong. Both have applied for refugee status

Ram Li Rai, a Nepali businessman who owns a store in Yun Long

Nima Gurung does brisk business on the footpaths of Kowloon

Seeking asylum

There have been several waves of Nepali migration to Hong Kong. Not all have been legitimate. But the latest is the trend for Nepalis seeking political asylum in Hong Kong claiming that they are being persecuted at home.

The Hong Kong authorities do not recognize the Nepalis as refugees, but they can apply to the UNHCR office here which, if approved, allows them to stay while their papers are being processed. If they are deemed not to be refugees, Hong Kong police deport them.

In the year, there has been a steady rise of Nepalis claiming refugee status and the number is now estimated to be more than 600. Most are Nepalis who have paid middlemen up to Rs 550,000 for jobs in Korea or Japan but are dumped here without money, tickets or passports.

The cheated Nepalis name a certain Sarita Gurung of Kathmandu in Kathmandu as being involved in the racket. Says Sukra Raj Gurung of Lamjung, “We gave her Rs 300,000, now it’s gone and we have no way of going back. So we are applying at UNHCR for refugee status.” In the application, most claim they fled their villages in Nepal because of Maoist extortions or threats.

A group of illegal Nepalis in Hong Kong live in a tiny room and do odd jobs in Nepali restaurants as cooks and guards. They have to be vigilant about police raids at their workplaces. One Nepali working illegally in a restaurant in Yurong admits he is not a refugee, “I just want to regularise my stay here, and claiming to be a Maoist victim seems to be the easiest way of doing it.”

But there are some genuine Maoist victims among the illegal Nepalis here. Ike Raju Shrestha of Tharok. He had two houses and some property but says he left it all because the Maoists accused him of being a spy and feared for his life. “If I was sure I wouldn’t be killed I went back home. I’d go back tomorrow,” Rai says.

The UNHCR office here says it can’t reveal the numbers who have applied for asylum in Hong Kong. But nearly all the applicants have reportedly cited fear of Maoists, and none have said they were forced to flee because of state security.

Royal Nepali consul general in Hong Kong, Hemlal Bhattarai, says he has no official information about asylum seekers. “We know of people who have been abandoned by labour middlemen, but no one has notified us about those seeking refugee status,” he adds. Says Ganesh Ijam of the Hong Kong Nepali Federation, “We know this is emerging as a big problem, the only way to stop it is to crack down on unscrupulous middlemen who abandon their clients here.”
Hong Kong

A Nepali school in Hong Kong teaches Nepali and even has non-Nepali students, like Filipina, Michelle (second from left).

There are more than 50,000 Nepalis in Hong Kong, out of a total population of 7.5 million.

Raju Shrestha from Thankot works illegally in Hong Kong while his application for asylum is being processed by the UNHCR.

Hello Annapurna and Asia Telecom provide radio feeds from FM stations in Nepal which can be accessed through internet and telephone. Tanka Sambahamphe and Paush Tamu have started www.lk nepal.com a portal providing all necessary contacts and information about Hong Kong Nepalis.

Self-made restauranteur, Y B Rai, runs a string of six franchises in Hong Kong for an American coffee shop chain.
Shopping in paradise

A consumer boom has gripped Kathmandu as shoppers discover affordable and convenient malls

For all those who want to be able to shop in their pyjamas with a hot mug of coffee, there is always shopping on the net. Muncha.com began as a shopping website in May 2002, currently selling about 7000 products including various electronic and home appliances and food products. Muncha House also offers money transfer services from the US to Nepal and a photo web site that converts digital images of products into a printable format which is attached to every delivery. Initially targeting people outside Nepal, it has recently taken into account locals as well. “We have made the web site more user-friendly for the locals,” says Amit Tuladhar, founder of Muncha.com. The food and rations section is a recent addition to the web site, where rice, dal and common spices are sold at standard market rates. Muncha also provides free delivery for members and is one of many other online shopping experiences that are emerging for the net savvy Nepali who is too busy to go to the store.

Aarti Basnyat and Shreya Mukherjee

The shopping and retail boom in the capital is hard to miss, even without the holiday season. Department stores and malls offering high-quality consumer products have managed to rope in quite a few locals. This means they are less dependent on Indian shoppers and tourists as they used to be. All in all, the Kathmandu consumer has become more quality-conscious and has gotten used to the convenience of shopping under one roof. And the supermarket chains and malls are responding to this booming demand.

The latest to hit the markets are branded products. Labels, specialising in international brands has opened up sister outlets like Pepe on New Road and Adidas on Dharbar Marg. By bringing in their own imports from Europe and India, stocking trips to wholesale markets in Bangkok and Singapore have gone down. Most trade in cheaper clothing and knock-off designer goods has been replaced by the Tibet trade. Bluebird and Namaste, for instance, now have exclusive sections for branded goods owned by Labels.

“Businesses in Nepal have lacked creativity and originality,” says Bijen Shrestha, owner of Metro Mall, ScanGate Mode. Shop owners are now spending a lot more money on improving the ambience of their stores and providing customers with a hassle-free, convenient shopping experience.

“Nepalis are becoming very brand conscious and prefer buying quality products,” says Dikla Lama, co-owner of United Brands, specialising in mountaineering gear and casual wear. United Brands gives the choice of buying top-notch, authentic brands like Jansport, Lowe Alpine, Eagle Creek, Grundau, etc. “It is necessary for the locals to be exposed to original, genuine products,” says Lama. Opened only two months ago in Thamel, the store has found upscale customers not only in tourists but in the local crowd as well.

The market in Nepal is reaching a stage where it could possibly become a free port like Dubai and Singapore. If more store-owners invest in creating a shopper-friendly atmosphere and selling genuine products, the tourism industry should be welcoming this advancement with open arms.

As Kathmandu shoppers become more sophisticated, supermarkets have had to find innovative means of attracting customers. All in all, a good thing for the consumers as not only will they have a one-stop shopping experience but also quality products at quality prices.
2004’s little-known winners

No one knows why but in today’s world many find football the only area of identity in which they recognise themselves and in which they really believe.

separation that is dominant in today’s Australia, New Zealand and the rest of the world.

It is not a chemical miracle. Enthusiasm and delight are the drugs for this cure. The 11 players of each team are many more than 11. In each player, a whole crowd plays. These are rituals of affirmation of the humiliated, both men and women, boys and girls.

Little by little, women’s football has been carving a larger space for itself in the sports media, where for the most part men cover men and don’t know what to make of this invasion of women and girls.

On a professional level, the development of women’s football today has found a certain resonance. But there is no echo, or only enemy echoes, from the game that is played for the pure pleasure of playing.

In Nigeria, a women’s team is a national treasure and source of intense pride. It is ranked among the top in the world. But in the Muslim north of the country, men are against it because the sport draws maidens into depravity. In the end they accept it, though, because football is a sin that can bring them fame and save their families from poverty.

In Zarzatr and Sudan, the brothers of these female players, guardians of the family honour, administer beatings to punish this mania of their sisters who think they are men enough to withstand women and commit the sacrilege of revealing their bodies. Football, a game for men, denies women fields to play and practice. The men refuse to play against the women. Out of respect for religion, they say. Maybe so. Or maybe when they play, they lose.

Across the ocean, in Belivia, there is no problem. Women play soccer in the towns of the high plains without taking off their coverings or their trousers or the sleeves from their jerseys and are still able to make goals. Every game is a party. Football is a free space open to these women, prolific in children, overwhelmed by slavery in the fields and mills and subjected to frequent beatings by their drunk husbands. They play barefoot. The winning team is given a sheep. So is the losing team. These silent women laugh and laugh more throughout the game and continue laughing uncontrollably throughout the banquet. They celebrate together, the winners and losers. No man would dare set foot inside.

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer and novelist, is the author of The Open Veins of Latin America and Memories of Fire.
Long and straight
What I did to get back on line

The last couple of weeks we concentrated on the biggest golf event in Nepal. Now we get back to some tips and rules of the game.

When this year’s Surya Nepal Masters, I felt I was hitting my driver better than ever before. I was averaging 295 yard drives with almost 85 percent of fairway hits. That is quite something for any player and an even more remarkable achievement for me. I have always hit the ball long but have been quite wild. Well, the sudden change was an adjustment I made recently and I will share how with you.

In recent months while I have been working hard to straighten out my drives, these are a few things I consciously worked on.

Making an effort to keep the spine at the same angle until impact. This promotes a lot of balance in the swing and avoids those big slice and hooks.

Ensuring shoulders and hips are fully turned. I concentrated on this when taking my club back. This is what brings the bigger muscles into play.

Using the bigger muscles. On the downswing, I worked on ensuring I cleared my left shoulder and on turning my hips. This helped avoid unnecessary hand action and instead allowed the bigger muscles to power the ball through.

This distance and accuracy has proven very useful for me and a lot of people who’ve played with me recently are quite amazed with my length.

Another decision on the rules of golf:

There are many occasions during a round of golf where you end up in interesting situations that leave you puzzled as to how to proceed. Here is one example.

Two balls end up close to each other in a bunker. A ball is just an inch away from B’s ball but is a further away from the hole. What is the proper procedure according to the rules of golf?

In this situation, B, who is nearer to the hole should mark his ball and lift it, and should be aware that he may not clean his ball. Since both balls were so close, A, while playing the shot can alter the lie where B will replace the ball. If the lie is altered, B, in equity, is allowed to have the lie given to him before A’s shot, and should recreate the original lie as near as possible and place the ball under rule 20 – 3b (iii).

This rule sounds quite complex, and most golfers are surprised that B was allowed to touch the sand prior to making the shot.

Next time you are faced with this situation during a competitive four ball match, be confident that you can apply this ruling. This and all other rulings are available under ‘Playing the Game’, followed by the ‘Rules’ link at www.usga.org

Do have a browse through when you have some free time.

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

One of the Chinese dhabas in Pune run by Nepals. Sunraj Sonar who runs two Chinese eateries in Pune and employs eight Nepalis. Each stall makes a minimum of Rs 2,000 every evening. Even though he graduated from Pune University, Sunraj doesn’t mind starting small. “I am earning here and it’s honest earning. I don’t have to worry about security,” he says.

There are countless Hem Bahadurs and Tankas in Pune and the numbers are increasing. “There are around 5,000 here from Pokhara alone,” says Dilip Pandey from Palpa, who worked his way up from dishwasher to now own two food stalls that employ 12 fellow Nepalis. Dilip’s family has joined him and his sons go to English schools here and speak Marathi.

From bahadur to chef
Nepalis have found a niche running India’s Chinese restaurants

Alok Tumbhangphwe in Pune

ALOK TUMBHANGPHWE in PUNE

One of the Chinese dhabas in Pune run by Nepals. Sunraj Sonar who runs two Chinese eateries in Pune and employs eight Nepalis. Each stall makes a minimum of Rs 2,000 every evening. Even though he graduated from Pune University, Sunraj doesn’t mind starting small. “I am earning here and it’s honest earning. I don’t have to worry about security,” he says.

There are countless Hem Bahadurs and Tankas in Pune and the numbers are increasing. “There are around 5,000 here from Pokhara alone,” says Dilip Pandey from Palpa, who worked his way up from dishwasher to now own two food stalls that employ 12 fellow Nepalis. Dilip’s family has joined him and his sons go to English schools here and speak Marathi.

From bahadur to chef
Nepalis have found a niche running India’s Chinese restaurants

Alok Tumbhangphwe in Pune

ALOK TUMBHANGPHWE in PUNE

One of the Chinese dhabas in Pune run by Nepals. Sunraj Sonar who runs two Chinese eateries in Pune and employs eight Nepalis. Each stall makes a minimum of Rs 2,000 every evening. Even though he graduated from Pune University, Sunraj doesn’t mind starting small. “I am earning here and it’s honest earning. I don’t have to worry about security,” he says.

There are countless Hem Bahadurs and Tankas in Pune and the numbers are increasing. “There are around 5,000 here from Pokhara alone,” says Dilip Pandey from Palpa, who worked his way up from dishwasher to now own two food stalls that employ 12 fellow Nepalis. Dilip’s family has joined him and his sons go to English schools here and speak Marathi.

From bahadur to chef
Nepalis have found a niche running India’s Chinese restaurants

Alok Tumbhangphwe in Pune

ALOK TUMBHANGPHWE in PUNE

One of the Chinese dhabas in Pune run by Nepals. Sunraj Sonar who runs two Chinese eateries in Pune and employs eight Nepalis. Each stall makes a minimum of Rs 2,000 every evening. Even though he graduated from Pune University, Sunraj doesn’t mind starting small. “I am earning here and it’s honest earning. I don’t have to worry about security,” he says.

There are countless Hem Bahadurs and Tankas in Pune and the numbers are increasing. “There are around 5,000 here from Pokhara alone,” says Dilip Pandey from Palpa, who worked his way up from dishwasher to now own two food stalls that employ 12 fellow Nepalis. Dilip’s family has joined him and his sons go to English schools here and speak Marathi.
‘Comrade

Maoist ideologue from Baburam Bhattarai writing under his alias in Janadhana, 16 December

On peace talks
Our party has never been against a progressive political outlook and the peaceful solution of the ongoing civil war. But, there is no meaning and relevance of the proposal of talks by the Dahal-UML government that is just a rubber stamp of the royal army. Extending detention of people from 90 days to one year through the Terrorist and Destruction (Control and Punishment) Ordinance, the increase in the expenditure of the royal palace and the army are proof about where the real authority and the intention of the government is. Even the common people have understood this fact. That was the reason our party’s recently held central committee meetings decided to sit for talks only if the people’s sovereignty is guaranteed and if there is reliable international mediation.

Talks with king
Our party cannot even imagine relinquishing such a historic, revolutionary and sacrificial movement to those who have been against the country and the people. This is the first movement of its type in more than 200 years of history ever since Nepal has had a central state power. So, under no circumstance will there be any agreement on the continuity of the monarchy and the monarchical royal army. If someone tries to make any compromises, he/she will be trashed in the history books by the Nepali people. That is why our proposal to hold talks with the king in an open manner and with the help of international mediation must be understood as our efforts to bring the monarchy out from behind the curtain. If anyone thinks...

Quotations of the Week

It is important for the king to have public backing whenever he visits a foreign country. If the parliament had been restored, the Royal visit would have been more honourable and made more of an impact.

Girija P. Koirala in Kantipur, December 22
Laidhoj’ and Prachanda

otherwise, it would be a fallacy.

On party’s goals

Like we said last year, our party’s ultimate goal is a people’s republic. In basic ingredients, it is to transform it into a capitalistic system, which is above the present political system and constitution and below the people’s system and the communist party of Nepal. The final goal is a people’s republic and a people’s elected constituent assembly is the means to achieve it. For this minimum and immediate program, we can join hands with parliamentary democratic parties who agree to our demands.

That toward that end, political parties need to be serious. We as a general people and civil society to exert pressure in this regard.

Prachandapati

Our party’s central committee meeting last year had brought forth the proposal ‘Development of people’s republic in the capitalistic system’. The proposal is about a people’s republic, a new party, army and regimen which is of long-term importance. The essence of that proposal is formation of a party, army and a regimen of the proletariat. After that, the ongoing war will stop, but the revolution will move on into new phases until we attain communism where there is no state and class. This concept comprises such crucial points that were discussed even at the times of Marxism and Lenin. To all true revolutionaries, including those with RIM, must analyse the concept seriously and come to conclusion. That is the reason why the RIM-affiliated revolutionary communist party in the United States of America and others have launched public discussions on the concept of people’s republic and their authority. Our party has also begun intensive discussions on principles of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism and Prachandapati to enrich and develop the scientific and intellectual revolutionist revolution. For that, our party has stressed the protection, use and development of the proletarian revolution science’s three organs - philosophy, political economics and scientific socialism. In short the development and prosperity of Maoism (Marxism, Leninism and Maoism) and Prachandapati is possible only if the layers and drawbacks during the people’s republic of Comrade Stalin are corrected. Stating on the central committee’s proposal of the development of people’s republic in the 21st century, we need to develop the concept of Maoism and Prachandapati. Or else, both of these concepts will become extinct.

Maoist plans

Dr. Nepal, 21 December

Intelligence services claimed that they have come across the activities and plans of Maoist rebels in Kathmandu. After receiving such information, the police headquarters have already alerted different units under it. According to a fax letter (symbol number 573) sent to police stations by the headquarters, there are around 300 Maoist guerrillas working in Kirtipur and valley. They have been divided into several groups. Each has around a dozen guerrillas and they are given the responsibility of covering 25 areas in the valley.

The same letter has the information that the rebels have plans to attack in the Lalitpur and Chabahil area. The visit of Santosh in New Delhi also, because he handed over two Maoist rebels to the army. It also talks about the rebel’s black list that includes the name of the former president of the Raj Sabha standing committee Keshab Jang Raymajhi because he had recently voiced against the active role of the then government. Another letter from police headquarters (number 3991) has it that the Maoists are planning for a big centralised attack. For that purpose, the letter says, the rebels have been transporting tans from the tara to the hills. Special commands and routes have also been fixed for the work.

In the letter it is also mentioned that the rebels had planned to create obstructions in the East-West highway and attack the security forces who come to remove them and capture their weapons. The letter also talks about the rebel place of arms to destroy industries and factories that have Indian and American investment.

Bus terror

Naxala, 24 December

For the last two years since the Royal Nepal Army was mobilised along the highway for security checks, bus travelers have been going through a very unpleasant experience. The night bus travel to Kakribitta, which is a 12 hour journey, now takes about 18 hours, because from any other city to Kathmandu is a nightmare. Tight security checks on each bus have been to a never-ending struggle. The buses to and from Kakribitta and Pharping highway lasts for hours. It gets much worse at Nagdhunga when the bus is in Kathmandu. Even the ambulances carrying patients are stuck in road jams. The army was first stationed on the main highways after the start of emergency and now has been there for two years back. Since then, the army has been adding check points one after another and it’s the ordinary civilians who have to pay the price for national security. The bus to Kakribitta has to pass through at least 20 security check points. Buses from Mahendranagar to Chitwan have to stop at 19 places. For passengers, the security checks have been the ultimate harassment, they are enraged but don’t dare complain. The check points haven’t improved security, in fact it is spreading anger against the security forces. “What have they really achieved until now? Have they found anything they are looking for?” asks one irate passenger who had to get out of the bus at every check point. Even on a short journey from Naryanghat to Kathmandu, buses have to stop in at least four places. The worst is for the buses going west from Jashap. Passengers have to walk for about half an hour in Pathalaya, where the army believes the Maoists smuggle arms from India.

The security checks have adversely affected tourists who have seen a sharp decline in passengers, especially on night buses. In normal times two to three, over 400 buses passed with passengers used to ply on the highways out of Kathmandu every night. Now more than half of those buses travel only in the mornings and afternoons and they are half-empty. Most buses worry about reaching the destination before curfew time. Many buses that start in the evening from Kathmandu have to halt near the forest areas while traveling to the other side of Kathmandu, as they don’t risk to disperse into the woods. The army’s spokesman Deepak Garung says: “The security force has to do its job. We have to make the passengers walk along the checking points as we can’t recognise Maoists from their faces.”
Daughters in law

NEW DELHI—India, where extreme patriarchal attitudes prevail, is about to make a giant step towards gender equality by introducing a bill that will give women an equal share in family property. To be introduced in the ongoing winter session of parliament, the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Bill 2014, will remove discriminatory provisions in an existing law enacted in 1956 that ensured that only males inherited ancestral property.

“Studied clearly show that when women have access to resources it improves their power to make decisions,” said Saroj Pachauri, South and South-East Asia director of the international non-governmental organisation, The Population Council. Commenting on the bill, Pachauri said that some of the worst manifestations of gender discrimination in India such as female foeticide and dowry, particularly in northern India, can be traced to biased inheritance laws, which adds to the vulnerability of women.” (IPS)

Invisible expatriates

SINHAGAD—Every little island republic of four million people, thousands of well-educated and highly qualified Asian expatriates quietly go about their work, often unseen as locals. The number of Asian professionals working here, the bulk of them Indians and Chinese, has increased tremendously in recent years. Yet the public image of the expatriate here is largely that of a Caucasian on a well-paid job package that includes free housing, car, domestic help and schooling for the children.

In a country whose citizens are about 70 percent ethnic Chinese, 25 percent Malay and seven percent Indian, thus making a rich Asian ethnic mix, it is often difficult to distinguish the Asian expatriate from the locals. For Ravi, a Indian business analyst, this local tag gives more breathing space and helps a person feel more at home. But Filipino engineer Raoul is not happy about being asked often, because of his Filipino accent, “Are you not local?”

The typical expatriate in Singapore is no longer from Western countries but from Asia. Arun Malarvihan, deputy director of the Institute of Policy Studies, says: “The image of the expatriate worker has definitively changed, colour is no longer white, because of the resulting influx of Indian (South Asian), Chinese and other Asian professionals.” (IPS)

Study abroad

AMERICAN universities, which for half a century have attracted the world’s best and brightest students with little effort, are suddenly facing intense competition as higher education undergoes rapid globalization.

The European Union, moving methodically to compete with American universities, is streamlining the continent’s higher education system and offering American-style degree programs taught in English. Britain, Australia and New Zealand are aggressively recruiting foreign students, as are Asian centers like Taiwan and Hong Kong. China has declared that transforming 300 universities into world-class research institutions is a national priority and is persuading top Chinese scholars to return home from American universities.

“What we’re starting to see in terms of international students now having options outside the US for their education is just the tip of the iceberg,” said David G. Payne, an executive director of the Educational Testing Service, which administers several tests taken by foreign students to gain admission to American universities. “Other countries are just starting to expand their capacity for offering graduate education.”

In the future, foreign students will have far greater opportunities.” Foreign students contributed $12.4 billion to the American economy annually. But this year brought clear signs that the United States’ overwhelming dominance of international higher education may be ending. In July, Payne briefed the National Academy of Sciences on a sharp plunge in the number of students from India and China who had taken the most recent administration of the Graduate Record Exam, a requirement for applying to most graduate schools. It had dropped by half.

Foreign applications to American graduate schools declined 28 percent this year. Actual foreign graduate student enrolments dropped six percent. Enrollments of all foreign students, in undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral programs, fell for the first time in three decades in a annual census released this fall. Meanwhile, university enrollments have been surging in England, Germany and other countries.

Some of the American decline, experts agree, is due to post-9/11 delays in processing student visas, which have discouraged thousands of students, not only from the Middle East but also from dozens of other nations. American educators and even some foreign ones say the visa difficulties are helping foreign schools increase their share of the market.

“International education is big business for all of the Anglophone countries, and the US traditionally has dominated the market without having to try very hard,” said Tim O’Brien, international development director at Nottingham Trent University in England.

“International students say it’s not worth queueing up for two days outside the US consulate in whatever country they are in to get a visa when they can go to the UK, much more easily,” American educators have been concerned since the fall of 2001, when many numbers of foreign students experienced delays in visa processing. But few noticed the rapid emergence of higher education as a global industry until quite recently. “Many U.S. campuses have not yet adapted to this new competition,” said Peggy Blumenhal, a vice president at the Institute for International Education.

During 2002, the most recent year for which comparable figures are available, some 586,000 foreign students were enrolled in United States universities, compared to about 270,000 in Britain, the world’s second-largest higher education destination, and 227,000 in Germany, the third-largest. Foreign enrollments increased by 15 percent that year, while programs fell to 20 percent in Germany.

The countries exporting the most students were China, South Korea and India but the annual global migration to overseas universities involves two million students from many countries travelling in many directions. That number is exploding—by some estimates it will quadruple by 2025—as economic growth produces millions of new middle-class students across Asia.

Traditionally most countries, including the United States, had tried to attract foreign students as a way of disseminating their nation’s core values. But three other strategies emerged in the 1990’s, and countries with aging populations like Canada and Germany, pursuing a “skilled migration” approach, have sought to recruit talented students in strategic disciplines and to encourage them to settle after graduation. Germany subsidises foreign students so generously that their education is free.

Australia and New Zealand, pursuing a “revenue generating” approach, try to attract higher education as an industry, changing foreign students to compete effectively in the world market because they offer quality education and the costs of attaining some degrees in those countries are lower than in the United States. Emerging countries like India, China and Singapore, pursuing a “capacity building” approach, view study abroad by thousands of their nation’s students as a way of training future professors and researchers for their own university systems. —(NYT)
2004, the year

All of a sudden, Japan, China, Korea and Thailand have stolen Hollywood’s thunder

This year, a Chinese film Hero, topped the US box office charts for the first time, despite already being available on DVD. A lush kung fu film in the manner of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, it was directed by former cinematographer Zhang Yimou.

Review

Screen International called it ‘one of the most eagerly awaited films in Asian film history’. It also went to number one in France and cut a swathe through the box office in many Asian countries. This is unheard of, yet Zhang’s follow-up, the even more beautiful House of Flying Daggers, looks set to follow Hero’s extraordinary breakthrough. Shot partly in the rust-red forests of Ukraine, it has already broken box office records in China itself.

Something remarkable is happening in Asian cinema, and Hollywood has cottoned on. ‘Check out the latest US movie production slate and it is hard to escape the conclusion that Hollywood is turning Japanese,’ commented the Guardian in July. ‘And Korean. With a dash of Thai and Hong Kong thrown in. No fewer than seven new versions of box office hits from Asia are preparing to go before western cinema screens. Toni Cruise is developing a remake of the Hong Kong/Thai horror picture, The Eye. Martin Scorsese is in pre-production with a new version of Infernal Affairs, the Hong Kong Policier. A Japanese thriller, Dark Water, is being reworked for Koreans Connoly. British director Gurinder Chadha is remaking the Korean feminist crime comedy My Wife is a Gangster.

This is not the first time that Hollywood’s imitation of Asian cinema has seemed like battery. Star Wane borrowed from Kurosawa. The Matrix films used Hong Kong fight techniques. But western film industries have never banked on the east to this degree before. Virtually every Hollywood studio has optioned some Asian project. Dark Water, The Eye and The Ring films unserved Hollywood because they are low budget games. They found new, subtle and inventive ways of doing what producers in southern California have spent a century perfecting: jangling the audiences nervous systems. All of a sudden, Japan and Korea have stolen its thunder. Directors from these countries are using the power of suggestion and turning the screen of tension to scare audiences profoundly. They build up tension more slowly, hint at unsee horrors and use sound more evocatively. Asian cinema, however, doesn’t merit our attention merely because it has captured Hollywood’s despite the bronchiosa caused by Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 in Cannes this year. The lasting impression of the festival was the overwhelming beauty of a quartet of films from China, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand. I have been going to Cannes for well over a decade but have never seen audiences applaud the visual magnificence of an individual scene as they did with House of Flying Daggers. Himalaya Kote-ed’s Nadyo’s Knows was one of the greatest works of observation that cinema has produced. And although I had to stand throughout Wong Kar Wai’s two-hour 2046, the world it created was so ravishing I didn’t even notice my feet. Finally, Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s Tropical Malady delivered one of the festival’s greatest coups. While Hollywood can easily ransom Asian horror cinema to revise its own techniques, it is unlikely ever to match the beauty of these four.

In movies from Beijing to Hong Kong, actresses like Zhang Ziyi and actors like Tony Leung Chiu-wai fill the screen with heart-skipping beauty and charm. In May at the Cannes film festival, audiences swooned for Wong Kar-wai’s romantic drama 2046 and Zhang Yimou’s latest swordsman epic, House of Flying Daggers.

Although they could not be more different in story, sensibility and visual pleasures, what the films share in addition to Zhang Ziyi is an extraordinary glamour born from the tension between release and repression.

In the major cinemas of mainland China, Hong Kong and, to an extent, Taiwan, glamour is serious business. Much as it was in old Hollywood, glamour in contemporary Chinese film is a device and a disguise but it is also a luminous end in itself. By the time Marilyn Monroe laid down her parade head for good in 1962, glamour was a gorier. With sex banished from the screen, it was left to these photographers to manufacture desire, to turn mortals into deities. There are images of Zhang Ziyi in Flying Daggers that make her look like a MGM pinup. If she were still on watch, Madame Mao would have had a fit and then probably had someone executed. Film production in China was put on hold for several years during the Cultural Revolution and the Beijing Film Academy ceased normal operations. Two years after the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976, the academy began accepting undergraduates again. Among the students in that first class were Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige (Farwell My Concubine) and Kaige’s childhood friend, Tian Zhuangzhang (The Blue Kite). Among the first films made by this group, known as the Fifth Generation because it was the academy’s fifth graduating class, were social issue stories set in the countryside where all three filmmakers were sent as teenagers during the Cultural Revolution. Following the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and facing tough restrictions at home, the filmmakers ventured into more commercial terrain with stories that could travel around the world. Inspiring imitators from Sofia Coppola in Los Angeles, the Shanghai-born director of the visually lush Suzhou River and Purple Butterfly, Zhang is a case in point. Leather is a construction for these filmmakers, it is also sincere. There is nothing ironic about the mascara eyes and yawning mouths they immortalise. The slow swaying-up of mainland cinema in the past decade and a half has occurred with this headlong rush of new cinematic styles and project that has been called China’s sexual revolution.

China’s sexual revolution

Madame Mao would have had a fit and probably had someone executed around the world, inspiring imitators from Sofia Coppola in Los Angeles, the Shanghai-born director of the visually lush Suzhou River and Purple Butterfly. Of course leather is a construction for these filmmakers, it is also sincere. There is nothing ironic about the mascara eyes and yawning mouths they immortalise. The slow swaying-up of mainland cinema in the past decade and a half has occurred with this headlong rush of new cinematic styles and project that has been called China’s sexual revolution.
Chinese glamour queens are replacing Hollywood stars in cosmetics ads.

of the Asian film

How is it that, despite the occasional blink of recognition, the west has remained so blind to Asian cinema for so long? There has always been a sense in which America and Europe owned film. They invented it at the end of the 19th century and so readily were the first decades of cinema that America and Europe can be forgiven for assuming that they were the only game in town.

In the 1950s, for example, that Zhang Yimou’s House of Flying Daggers is so beautiful. His Raise the Red Lantern was visually striking and he started as a cinematographer on the breakthrough work of modern Chinese cinema, Yellow Earth. House of Flying Dagger, however, can be one of the most photographically distinguished films ever made. In it, the actress Zhang Ziyi, who starred in Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, plays Mei, a blind dancer in the year 859, who is sympathetic to a revolutionary group threatening the Tang dynasty.

An early sequence takes place in a large pavilion decorated entirely by peonies. A local captain suspects that Mei is a subversive and sets her a test. In the pavilion, he surrounds her with 100 vertically mounted drums. She stands in the middle, dressed in a coat of gold silk, embroidered with tangerine chrysanthemums. Presented with dishes of dry beans, the captain flicks one at a drum. The camera follows it through space. As it strikes the taut surface, Mei spins and flies, her sorrowful long sleeve of her coat in the direction of the sound. It travels as the bean did and strikes the drum in a ronco flourish. Then the captain flicks another bean, and Mei spins and flicks again.

Then another. Then a small handful which scatter around the circle of drums. Mei responds to the percussive effect, her eyes darting and soaring, her face still serene and expressionless, at the centre of the vortex. The bean shots are computer-generated, the most satisfying use of CGI yet. The combination of such cinematic modernity with martial arts choreography, photographic splendour and centrally Zhang’s enigmatic performance, makes this scene, at once, a classic.

Heng Kong director Wong Kar Wai’s 2004 goes even further. It, too, is a widescreen film seductively shallow focus, surface patterning and feminine beauty Zhang Ziyi stars again, this time joined by two other great Chinese actresses, Gong Li and Maggie Cheung, Like Wong’s previous film, In the Mood for Love, it is an evocative exercise in atmosphere and music, set in Hong Kong in the 1960s.

At first glance, the Japanese director Kore-Eda’s debut, Nobody Knows, is different from the aesthetic worlds of Zhang and Wong. Set in present-day Japan, it tells the story of a neglectful mother who rents an apartment with one of her children and who, when she moves in, opens her suitcases to reveal two more. The former documentary director is equally interested in stillness, in shallow focus and in production design.

Thai director Apichathong Weerasethaluk’s film Tropical Malady is more enigmatic. In its first half a soldier bedrums a young peasant man who lives in the country. They drift around, sit talking, grow fond of each other. In one scene the soldier puts his head in his friend’s lap, in another the soldier licks his hand. As their growing eroticism looks as if it might become explicit, the peasant walks into the jungle. Then the screen goes black: no sound, no picture, as if the film has broken. Then a second film begins. The actors are the same but their situation is more fable-like. Tropical Malady is likely to be seen as one of the most experimental films of its time, but what is again striking is its gentleness and stillness.

Though made in very different countries, the films of Weerasethaluk, Zhang, Wong and Kore-eda share certain ideas about art. Just as the work of Ozu can be fully understood only by balancing its psychological aspects with more abstract Buddhist questions of space and stillness, so the influence of Buddhism can be seen in these new films.

Despite the range of western cinema today, most of it assumes that movies are narrative chains of cause and effect, that their characters have fears and desires and that we follow the film by understanding these fears and desires. The new films of Zhang and the others make similar assumptions but are less driven by them and balance questions of self-hood with Zen ideas about negation and equilibrium. This makes their beauty hard to replicate in the west.

But Buddhism is not the whole picture. Unlike M Honduras, which pictured a clear moral opposition between the good workers and bad bosses, and unlike Confucian philosophy in which masculinity is noble and femininity is not, Taoism is less clear-cut. Morally it sees good within bad and vice versa. The feminine is a virtue in the same way emptiness may be for artists.

Every one of the great Asian films in the pipeline evinces Taoist ideas of sex and space. In none of them is gender polarised. In all of them, space is crucial. And the influence is acknowledged. Zhang, for example, has talked about the way Chinese painting has affected his work. His shots are often very wide. Space and landscape weigh as heavily within the frame as the human elements. Art historians have long discussed the Taoist component of such paintings. As the art form most swayed by money and market, cinema would appear to be too busy to bother with questions of philosophy. Other Asian nations are proving that this is not the case. In Venice in 1985 and Cannes in 2004, the audiences left cinemas with heads full of dazzling images. But the greatness of Rashomon, Upatsu, 2004.cn House of Flying Daggers, is, in the end, not to do with imagery at all. Yes, they are pictorially distinctive, but it is their different sense of what a person is, and what space and action are. •

(Mark Cousins is the author of The Story of Film)
The exorcist

Hari Lal Giri began conversing with spirits at the age of eight. By the time he was 16, he was a professional shaman driving the devil out of those possessed in the village of Katunj in Okhaldhunga. Exorcism is not as easy as it seems, says Hari Lal. It needs learning and patience and a lot of energy leaping around to the beat of the dhyungas. “You can’t just go and call on some deusia to help you because it is actually the deusia who are more powerful. The most powerful is Kali,” he says. Many villagers still trust the jankri more than a doctor. A jankri also needs to know about medicinal herbs because a lot of villagers come with simple ailments like stomach aches.

Hari Lal learnt to deal with the spirits by making them listen to him. “Most spirits are of children or people who’ve died young,” he says. “Spirits do exist. They are like shadows with no concrete form. They come only if invited.” Hari Lal gave up being a shaman 10 years ago and became a security guard. He converted to Christianity and still believes in spirits: the Holy Spirit. But a night security guard’s salary is not enough, so he paints furniture by day to make extra money.

Even in Kathmandu, people used to come from far and wide to seek his services. “The work just got too hard, the spirits sap your energy, they don’t let you sleep,” he says. “If they come to talk to you, you can’t ignore them as they become angry.”

For a while, the spirits wouldn’t let him alone although he wasn’t a jankri anymore. “They’d hit me and drag me across the floor, they stopped bothering me when they found out I wouldn’t relent,” he adds. These days, Hari Lal likes the solitude of his night work so he can contemplate on life and the mundane matters of daily survival.

(Mita H/Photos)
Back to the future

As we get ready to celebrate new year 2025, it is also a time for us as a nation to take stock of how far we have advanced since the early part of this century when we were lost in the political wilderness of the Old Regime.

In hindsight, it seems ridiculous, almost comic, how we stumbled around aimlessly burning trees in the streets in those naive days of the new millennium. But today, as we get ready to usher in 2025 and celebrate the 30th Anniversary of Regression and 40 Years of the Great People’s War, we pay tribute to the political myopia and official narrow-mindedness that has made Nepal what it is today.

Sometimes it feels like we are caught in a time warp as we remember how in 2005 we willingly and whole-heartedly agreed to sacrifice our individual freedoms that we had missed for so long in return for the peace and silence that we have today under the Dear Helmsman. The last 20 years have shown that however low a country sinks, however chaotic its past, as the Carpenters said, tomorrow will always be brighter than today and yesterday all our troubles seemed so far away. Or was it the Beatles?

Anyway, to mark the anniversary, we reprint with permission a selection of news items from the front page of the January 1, 2025 edition of The Still Rising Nepal daily:

Far-Out Ring Road To Be Built

The government is leaving no stone turning over to start construction of the Far-Out Ring Road under grant assistance from the government of the Faroe Islands.

Officials at the Department of Pathaks said the Far-Out Ring Road was not a luxury but a necessity because the Outer Ring Road completed in 2007 had now become too congested. The new ring road will connect the satellite housing colonies that have come up on the outskirts of the mountains peaks on the valley rim, including Phulchoki, Shivapuri, Nagarpal and Chandragiri.

said the official, “It is going to be a highway in the true sense of the term and a marvel of civil engineering.”

Helmsman Felicitates Kim Jong Il

On the occasion of the National Day of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Helmsman has sent a message of felicitation to Dear Old Leader, Kim Jong Il. In the message, the Helmsman has extended warm wishes for the personal happiness and continued prosperity of the people of the Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea. He further stated that Nepal and North Korea had a lot in common these days, and hoped that the bonds of amity and cooperation between the two great nations would be further strengthened in the years to come as they embarked on joint nuclear weapons tests while battling imperialism and hunger.

Girija To Stand Again

The Nepali Congress Central Committee meeting today decided unanimously to allow 10-year-old Girija Prasad Koirala to stand for Party President for the Tenth Term.

“He is going to stand but in consideration of his advanced years, we are going to allow him to sit,” said his cousin, Sushil Koirala, 99. He added that Mr Koirala had convinced them that the NC would splinter again for the 14th time in as many years if he didn’t once more take up leadership of the party that is synonymous with democracy. He added: “Considering the futility regression has lasted 25 years, we must carry on burning effigies in Ratna Park. If we don’t who will?”

CDO Regd No. 194/056/57 Lalitpur, Central Region Postal Regd. No. 04/058/59

www.nepalitimes.com