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ASIAN TSUNAMI

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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 169

Q. Do blockades hurt or benefit the Maoist cause?



Total votes: 700

Weekly Internet Poll # 170. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think the Outer Ring Road in Kathmandu is a good idea?

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We need to talk

Talk or vote: Deuba's ultimatum to the Maoists expires next week

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA



KIRAN PANDAY

There is one week to go for the 13 January ultimatum the government set for the Maoists to come for talks.

Otherwise, it is ready to push through with elections by April.

But the government will not have to wait till next Thursday for the Maoist response. Maoist chief Prachanda has already ruled out negotiations, warning: "Talks about elections will only mean more bloodshed."

In this showdown, the royal-appointed government of Sher Bahadur Deuba is under pressure not just from the Maoists. Once bitten twice shy, Deuba doesn't want to give King Gyanendra another justification to sack him. He needs polls, any polls.

For now, Deuba's ministers are talking tough. "Elections are our mandate and moral obligation," Information Minister Mohammad Mohsin told a radio interview on Wednesday, "It can be held, just look at Afghanistan. But if we can't hold elections we will step down."

In July, while reluctantly reappointing a prime minister he had fired, the king's terms of reference were: restore peace and go for elections by the end of 2061 BS. He didn't say hold talks. "Going by the king's conditions, this government simply does not have the mandate to hold talks with the rebels and the Maoists understand that," points out political scientist Krishna Khanal. Which may be why the rebels have rebuffed Deuba saying they will talk directly with his boss.

So, why did the government give the 13 January deadline to the rebels? It could have been a face-saving gesture on behalf of the main coalition partner, the UML, which has joined the government by staking all on its

ability to restore peace.

Political analysts say the UML doesn't really have any other option but to stay on in government, and it would be more than happy to be at least partly in command of the state machinery in future polls. For Deuba, even a low turnout is good enough for legitimacy in the eyes of the international community and to prove to the king that he has fulfilled his mandate.

Deuba has reportedly got the assurance from the security apparatus that a multi-phase election is possible, and a nationwide average of up to 40 percent turnout can be assured.

Five-time prime minister Surya Bahadur Thapa conducted the 1980 referendum in which he delivered a victory for the 'Panchayat with reforms' camp. He thinks elections can be held. "Practically it may be difficult, but technically it is possible to hold elections," Thapa told us, "but it is risky for Deubaji."

There are plenty of skeptics who doubt elections can ever be held in the current security situation. There are grave doubts that campaigning is possible and voting itself will be free and fair.

The Girija Congress likens Deuba conducting elections to a fox guarding the chicken coop, and it is playing up security uncertainties as a cover to oppose elections. But if Deuba announces poll dates next week, Girija will be in a dilemma about a boycott.

The real question is: will voters take the risk? Minister Mohsin has no doubt they will: "Just look at Dailekh, the people are waiting to exercise their democratic rights. Whoever obstructs the process will be seen as anti-democratic." ●

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A PEOPLE'S TSUNAMI

With a week to go for the government's bullet-or-ballot ultimatum to the Maoists, there is a sense of suspended animation. No one wants to do anything because no one wants to make a mistake. Given how we have blundered in the past 14 years, that may be just as well. Our political forces have shown a chronic inability to act even in enlightened self-interest, let alone in the national interest.

One puzzling failure is political myopia that prevents politicians from figuring out who the real enemy is. Going by the people they have butchered over the past eight years, the villagers they have hounded, the school children they have abducted, the ordinary farmers and small businesses they have punished by blocking highways, the underground comrades are behaving as if their real enemies are the people of Nepal. Isn't this supposed to be a 'people's war'? Aren't they supposed to be for the people and by the people? Then why are they punishing the people?

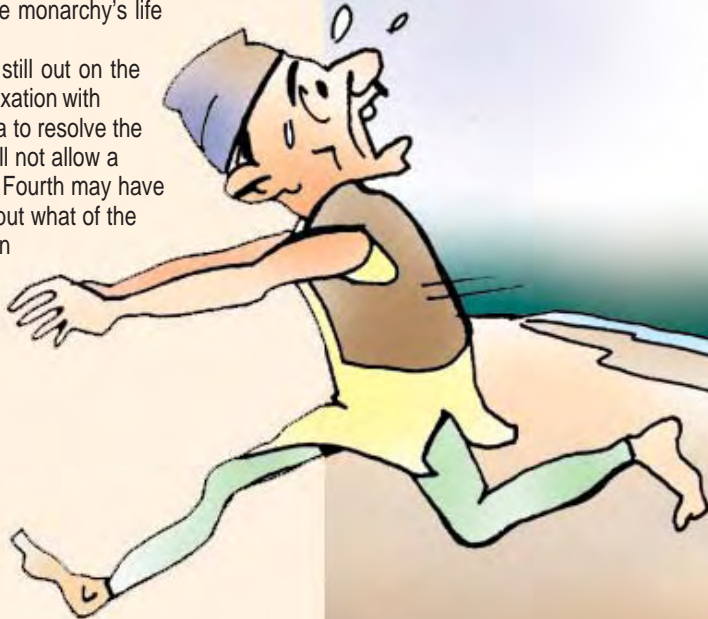
For its part, the monarchy is behaving as if its real enemy are the political parties, and not the revolutionary republicans at the gates. One of the most puzzling aspects of the post-October Fourth order is this baffling royal allergy towards politicians. True, some of them are reprehensible, many were members of successive parliaments where they repeatedly displayed an absence of accountability that was breathtaking in scope. But they represent the people and democracy has this fabulous self-correcting mechanism to weed out crooks over time.

Even for the longevity of his own dynasty, the king needs a buffer between himself and those who want to dethrone him. Panchayat-style divide-and-rule, political musical chairs and machination may buy him time, but it will not lengthen the monarchy's life span.

Then there are the political parties still out on the streets whose leaders have a stubborn fixation with procedures. They will oppose every idea to resolve the crisis if they are not a part of it. They will not allow a solution unless they get credit. October Fourth may have been a mistake that needs to be fixed, but what of the mistakes they made over and over again after 1990? Who is going to fix those? The party leadership seems incapable of distinguishing who its real enemy is: the monarchy or the Maoists. Who has been killing, torturing, threatening and driving out their own party cadre from the grassroots?

Unless this political stalemate is broken, it will be a checkmate. And we can already hear the approaching wave.

Monocracy may be tempting but it is an absolute dead-end. Democracy may be messy, but it is a mess we know how to fix.



LETTERS

OUTER RING ROAD

I have come across only one concrete reason for constructing the Outer Ring Road: since the distribution pipeline for the Melamchi project is being placed along the periphery of the valley, a 50-metre ROW Ring Road might as well be built along the same alignment. This project however reminds me of the time when my father, architect Robert Weise, was called by the *Anchaladish* to plan out the new city of Bharatpur in December 1960. When he got there, he was told that the bulldozers were arriving the very next day and that he should direct them on the alignment of the roads. During the past 44 years, the planning process doesn't seem to have evolved greatly. Instead of jumping from one mega-project to the next, wouldn't it be more credible for the authorities to first show that they are in a position to successfully implement smaller, more intricate projects? Why pump in expensive water into a leaking system? Why build a road out in the green when the inner-city linkages don't function? A road is a catalyst for urbanisation. We first need to comprehend the

possible impact this road will have and prepare all necessary controls even before starting the project. In Madhyapur Thimi Municipality, we have been fighting a losing battle trying to preserve agricultural land. My concern is whether the legislative basis will be laid down to make possible the implementation of a 60:40 ratio of green to built-up areas ('A road to the future', #228). Instead of containment of urbanisation, we seem to be heading for more chaotic sprawl.

Kai Weise, Kathmandu

● Kishore Thapa's article on the proposed Outer Ring Road ('A road to the future', #228) creates more confusion than provides answers. The first half of the article talks about the merits of the Kathmandu Valley Long Term Development Plan, which was prepared and endorsed by the government two years ago by publishing it in the Gazette. Page 47 of this plan, however, clearly mentions that the Outer Ring Road should not be constructed and gives four reasons for this. One of the reasons is that the road will promote urban sprawl. I don't

understand how Thapa, who is a very respected urban planner and one of the chief architects of the plan, can now claim that the road is Kathmandu's future. No doubt, integrating infrastructure development and landpooling, as proposed by Thapa, are good ideas but it is not clear how he plans to do it.

Currently there are two schools of thought on the Outer Ring Road and the demand for transport in Kathmandu. People in urban Kathmandu want a solution to traffic congestion and people and politicians in rural Kathmandu want access and development in their villages. Both are valid demands, but the Outer Ring Road will serve neither, at least not right now. To address congestion, we need to revamp our transport system with facilities such as Inner Ring Road, improved intersections, better traffic management and segregation of traffic. And to provide better access to rural Kathmandu, we should be thinking about radial roads that will connect these villages to market centres. Trying to solve today's transport problems with an Outer Ring Road will be like trying to put out a fire by

adding petrol. Kathmandu may need an Outer Ring Road in the future but that future is at least a decade away.

**Bhushan Tuladhar,
Clean Energy Nepal**

● It is interesting to see how excited local planners and foreign donors get over projects in the Kathmandu Valley ('A road to the future', #228). If they showed the same enthusiasm for development work in other parts of the country, there would be some balanced development that everyone is talking about.

**Bhaju Man,
Kathmandu**

DEFAULTERS

I have full support for J Craig McAllister and his administration for going after the defaulters ('Willing to go after defaulters', #227). When the law and policies don't work, public defamation is the least these banks can offer. Defaulters like Piyush Amatya have damaged the economic sector while working for their selfish goals. I only hope that the legislative bodies in Nepal

provide full support to McAllister for the cases filed against them by these shameless defaulters.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

Shame on you Piyush Amatya for trying to say that a visa ban on defaulters is against the 'law of the land' ("Why only pick on me?",



The wrangling over the Rastra Bank governor is a symptom of depoliticised polity

A division of the spoils



ROBIN SAYAMI

Head honchos of the reigning coalition have been squabbling over the nomination of a new governor for the Nepal Rastra Bank for well over a week. Such unnecessary politicking over a routine appointment is trivial and pointless.

After all, the governor’s job description entails implementing the wishes of the

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



World Bank and the IMF without asking questions. Any Bijay, Bimal or Binod can take over from Tilak Rawal and it won’t make any difference at all.

The unseemly tussle between the premier and his deputy is also inconsequential. Once the phone rings from Narayanhiti, they will have to appoint that nominee. In fact, this is equally applicable to all other appointments likely to be made by the Constitutional Appointments Council as well. The executive authority granted by the king to his council of ministers doesn’t include the power to choose high officials.

The public bickering proves the old adage about political contest being nastiest when the stakes are lowest. Other than some pork barrel benefits, neither Deuba’s letter-head party nor Bharat Mohan Adhikari’s reformed communists will gain anything by pushing their choice as a successor to an exemplary non-performer at the Rastra Bank.

In places where a new appointee can make some difference—justices of the Supreme Court including its chief or the chairperson of the Public Service Commission—they will have to go along with the

wishes of the palace bureaucracy.

The five different forces present in the de jure government at Singha Darbar differ on almost every political, administrative or economic issue of any significance. Consequently, they end up kowtowing to the diktat of the de facto rulers behind the curtain. To a certain extent, the present government is a textbook example of ‘consociational arrangements’ prescribed by donor community for developing countries. Theoretically, consociational institutions are supposed to cement highly divided societies to help the growth of democratic polity. In actual practice, such arrangements tend to induce meddling of the Invisible Hand of the lending community to the detriment of democracy.

Politics, by its very definition, is the management of differences over issues of common concern. In any functioning democracy, institutions are designed to handle these differences. Most are amicably settled at the executive level, some end up in courts, while the most vital issues are decided by the legislature. Very few political questions necessitate the use of coercive arm of a democratic state.

Hence, any attempt to eliminate those who don’t agree is either authoritarian or totalitarian. Repression, or the fear of repression, is a way to create uniformity of views. Unanimity on vital issues of political economy has been the most conspicuous aspect of Nepali politics. To please the donors, almost every political party, barring the Maoists, have

sworn by neo-liberal economics in the post-1990 status quo. Such a policy of creating uniformity drove the marginalised towards the violent politics of Maoists.

After October Fourth splintered the badly fractured polity even further, each political player tried to outdo the other in pleasing donors. Diplomats have further intensified their campaign of creating unity between ‘constitutional forces’. These ended up justifying the Maoist claim that the international community is intent on prolonging the status quo. Donors have therefore ended up giving back-handed legitimacy to the armed insurgents. Political parties, whether in the government or in the streets, do not even figure in the power-games being played by the militia and military.

Once excluded from the agenda-setting role that the parties are meant to play, they have no other option but to engage themselves in the game of pulling each other’s plates. In the ensuing confusion, outsiders often end up appropriating the lion’s share in the name of resolving the conflict.

The recent wrangling over appointments to public posts is merely a symptom of the deeper disease of a depoliticised government. If the affliction spreads, it is sure to result in total anarchy or totalitarianism. In the history of politics, wrangles over the spoils of office have seldom been settled amicably. The right way to handle such challenges is still the way of democracy with rule of law and a system of checks and balances to moderate claims and neutralise the possibility of excesses. ●

#227). It is the same law of the land that you disregarded when you didn’t pay back the money you borrowed from the Nepali public. It is people like you who have enriched yourselves with complete disregard for the welfare of the country that will someday have to pay for your misdeeds. You have actually admitted you are guilty when you say in the interview “the others did it too, so why single me out”.

Gyan Subba, email

● The World Bank’s Ken Ohashi is right when he says that foreign managers had to be brought in to clean up the state-owned banks and their problem of non-performing assets because of social and family connections. However, it looks like even when foreign managers try to crack the whip there are howls of protests from the immoral people who haven’t paid back the loans.

Name withheld, email

PROUD TO BE NEPALI

Been a long time since I felt proud to be Nepali. Till two days ago when I heard Jan Egeland the man the UN has put in charge of the tsunami relief effort, state that aid

was pouring in from some of “the most unconventional quarters...Nepal....East Timor...some of the poorest nations on earth.” It wasn’t the reference to being one of the poorest nations in the world that gave me the jolt of pride once again of being Nepali but the fact that he’d said “Nepal”...N-E-P-A-L and about us as a nation, as a people united giving to those in their hour of dire need. If only we are able to be this united, this assertive, this decisive, this munificent to our own plight.

S B Shrestha, Kopundole

TRAFFIC DARWINISM

To acknowledge that Darwinism is at work in the anarchy of Kathmandu’s traffic and the anthropological questions it raises as Rajendra Pradhan does (‘First to come, first to go’, #228) is an interesting perspective. However, we must also be pragmatic enough to contemplate that vehicular chaos is a fusion of the lack of civic sense and the lack or mismanagement of traffic rules. Kathmandu’s traffic sense will not attain overnight enlightenment by providing drivers with a crash

course in human relationship management. Educationists and intellectuals function on the premise that their own personal research and study can somehow extrude itself into the psyche of a layman.

Being self-centred, individualistic, competitive and ambitious are traits of contemporary humans and are generally regarded as urban traits. These innate human drives also drive the drivers entrenched in traffic regardless of which society we look at. In countries that have ample and excellent traffic rules, an outlet has been provided for these psychological traits to be unleashed. For example, the use of four or more lanes is an innovative means to maintain traffic as well as provide an option for more aggressive drivers to vent whatever psychological mayhem is going on in their minds. Slower drivers have access to the left lane whereas those willing to overtake or simply drive faster within the designated limit can use the right lane. Buses use a separate lane that allows them easy access to passengers and of course pedestrians have a sidewalk for

their benefit. The point I’m trying to drive home is that these traffic rules have been invented for the dual purpose of having lesser congestion as well as to accommodate the different kinds of people that exist in our societies. Even if those that invented the rules were not as far sighted as we’re making them out to be, the fundamental fact that they made the traffic rules in coordination with social demands is a great achievement in itself.

Regardless of which culture and country we talk about, the replacement of these traffic rules and road sizes with what we have in Nepal will bring about the same self-centred reaction from people there.

The problems of traffic chaos and the added mean spirited, self-centered nature of the drivers has more to do with our onerous traffic infrastructure than with anthropology. Civic sense plays an important role in any functioning society but so do rules and regulations. Selfishness is not a purely Nepali trait, given the circumstances even the most conscientious and righteous people fall into the same category.

Shivendra Thapa, Kathmandu

CORRECTION

The last two paragraphs in Rajendra’s Pradhan’s Guest Column contribution ‘First to come, first to go’ (#228) were inadvertently dropped during page layout. The concluding paragraphs were:

‘Except when physically confronted by agents of the state (traffic police), people usually follow their own rules. The people’s traffic rules are an uneasy combination of hierarchy based not on caste, but type of vehicle, colour of the number plate and rugged, selfish individualism.

Traffic practices produce and reproduce as well as reflect social relations, social structure and culture of the urban, post-modern

Nepal in public spaces, whereas in private and in domestic spaces we are still rural, pre-modern at heart. Until these attitudes, perceptions and rules concerning use of road space and the hierarchy and status of vehicles change, there is little hope for improvement in the capital’s traffic situation.’

Bodies of babies on the beach

Amidst the mass death in southern India, some living miracles

ARUNA UPRETI
in NAGGAPATTINAM

It was like any other beautiful day on the stretch of beach near Chennai. The breeze from the Bay of Bengal was bracing, the sun glistened off the azure ocean. The palm fronds swayed.

The only thing missing was the presence of human beings. The nearby village of Tarang Badi was almost completely destroyed on the morning of 26 December. A week after the disaster, the few survivors of the village have moved to camps inland and they all have tales of horror and miracles.

Prabhakaran was hit by the wave when he was out in the sea and saw his daughter, Mubbi, on the shore. He tried to get to her but the water engulfed him and he lost consciousness. "Some villagers saved me and they told me later that my dog Ramu saved my daughter," says Prabhakaran. Ramu had waded out as the waves receded to drag the floating Mubbi by the hair and out of the water. "Many people say God saved them but in my daughter's case it was my dog" says Prabhakaran. Today, Ramu is treated like a family member.

What is surprising is how normal everything looks here. The beach-side resort is surprisingly intact, the temple is still standing, the deep blue ocean and the golden sand look idyllic. Then you see the fishing village, just a jumble of timber, thatch and debris. And the overpowering stench of rotting flesh as you approach the village.

As we walked along the beach, we came across a group of people in masks throwing what looked like sacks on the back of a tractor. Closer, we realised they were piling the

bodies of babies from the beach. I saw the bloated body of a child who must have been three. A little hand was sticking out of the side of the trailer from under a pile of corpses.

I have seen many horrors of natural and manmade disasters while working in Nepal, Afghanistan and in the aftermath of the earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam exactly a year ago (see: 'A future foretold', #183). But nothing prepared me for this sight. I broke down on the side of the road and wept. My colleagues consoled and patted me, they let me get it out of my system. Just when you think that as a professional you are inured to the sight of human suffering, it hits you when you least expect it.

The scale of the disaster is much worse than we expected. When the news first broke of an earthquake in Indonesia on Sunday morning, we didn't take much notice. Then the tv images started coming in, but even the next day the true extent of the tragedy had not sunk in. By Monday, I was told to cancel my holidays and fly

out to Chennai that night. On Wednesday morning we headed straight out along the beach road that brought us to Naggapattinam.

This is one of the worst affected regions of southern India and 45 women were killed on just a few hundred metres of shoreline here. "We were working on the beach taking the fish out of the nets when the waves arrived," one survivor told us. Their bodies were recovered only the next day.

We heard many stories of miraculous escapes but a lot more stories of children being washed away. Almost everywhere, it was the children who either couldn't outrun the waves or were wrested away from the arms of their parents.

A mother and three of her children were sitting down for breakfast in Nagapatanam when the wave hit. They clung to each other, but the force of the water separated her son, who was never found. The trauma and guilt of the ordeal has left the mother muttering

that her son has just gone down the road to buy some sweets. Although there is now almost no hope her son is alive, she has convinced herself he'll return.

Along the coast is the village of MGR where I saw a soggy unopened envelope, it was a letter from a certain Karunasaran in Riyadh to a Mr Kabitarma in the same village. I asked around but no one seemed to know of the man. I wrote a letter to Karunasaran explaining where I found his letter and of the conditions I saw in MGR and posted it to the return address in Saudi Arabia.

In camp after camp, the survivors sit listlessly staring vacantly at the sea. Some find it comforting just to talk and tell of how their lives turned upside down in the space of a few minutes. Many are too traumatised even to pray. The real problem for the survivors is to surviving the aftermath. The water is contaminated and the wells and reservoirs need to be cleaned up. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost not just their relatives but all their possessions too. No

clothes, no beds, no utensils, no food, no livestock, no nets and no boats. Aside from the psychological trauma of bereavement and shock, many are wounded and the wounds are getting infected.

But there are rays of hope, heart-warming scenes of generosity and altruism. Thousands of volunteers from all over India have come to work in food distribution, doctors are running clinics in the camps and villages. Along the beaches, some fishermen are already trying to rebuild their houses salvaging what they can from the debris. Most fishing catamarans have been destroyed but some fishermen are trying to find new boats to go out to sea again. "What else can we do, the sea brought death but it is also our life," says one fisherman with a feeble smile.

Even after a disaster like this, life limps on. ●



Aruna Upreti is Nepali doctor who works for Oxfam GB and will be based in Chennai for the next few months.

One of the little girls (below) who survived the tsunami, while the rest of her village of Naggapittanam is in ruins.



Picking up the pieces

The biggest job for relief officials is coordinating all the generosity and putting it where it's needed most

NAGGAPATTINAM—The fishing boats lie in a grotesque pile at a corner of the harbour, stacked like twisted toys. Their captains and crew, if they survived, clamber in the mess to pull out what possessions they can find. Nets are particularly prized. Nylon mesh is expensive and if it can be salvaged, so

much the better. As for the fish

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



market, it didn't happen last Sunday.

The market was what drew people to their deaths on 26 December. Women were buying and selling fish with their children running around nearby when the waters brought death and devastation.

Wrecked fishing boats and houses reduced to rubble. Crows grown fat on

unspeakable meals beneath the debris. Men wandering the shattered streets of their villages, wondering about their families, their fates. Government ministers clambering over wreckage to get in front of television cameras, distributing cash as they go.

This is the face of the tsumani in South India. I write from the heart of the devastation here. The town of Naggapattinam in Tamil Nadu used to be a chaotic, dusty but rather well off fishing port. Hundreds of wooden trawlers crowded its harbour and the Sunday fish market on the beach drew people from surrounding districts to get the freshest dolphin and tuna.

Now Naggapattinam is the centre of a vast relief effort aimed at helping the hundreds of thousands of displaced and bereaved people of the area. About 10,000 people died here, a third of them children. The young couldn't flee the raging seas and were easily swept away.

India has pointedly said it doesn't want vast amounts of international help with this crisis. Specifically, the country doesn't want bilateral humanitarian assistance, saying others need it more and there's no real need for outside help. At first, this was put down to perverse national pride but it's proven to be true. India is managing this rather well on its own.

The sheer volume of aid that has come from informal sources in India is remarkable. Doctors from Bangalore donating their services, Keralaite students who've collected toys, plastic tents and shoes and brought them all the way across the country. Volunteers from Lions and Rotary clubs cleaning up schools and picking up the pieces, along with the affected people themselves. It's a truly remarkable sight.

The biggest job for Indian officials has been coordinating all that generosity and putting it where it's needed most. The government has risen to the task as best as it could. ●

The day the world exploded

If more attention was paid to history, we wouldn't be shocked by the scale of the disaster on 26 December



This Dutch paddle steamer was found 3 km inland in Sumatra in 1883

If someone had been reading history seriously, the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean would have had a tsunami early warning system in place by now.

The subduction of the Australian plate under the Sumatra coastline has caused frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which have triggered tidal waves. Although it was not the greatest, the legendary eruption on 27 August 1883 of Krakatoa on the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra was the most recent big one.

After the Indian Ocean disaster in December, there will be renewed interest in Simon Winchester's 2003 book, *The Day the World Exploded: Krakatoa*. Winchester is a travel journalist and a master story-teller. He goes beyond just chronicling the disaster to analyse the historical conjunctions that Krakatoa represented.

In the second half of the 19th century, the telegraph had just been invented and installed in the Dutch East Indies. It was this communication technology and the advent of news agencies that for the first time in human history allowed information to be transmitted across the world through undersea cables. Before that, information could only travel as fast as the fastest steamboat. So, Krakatoa was the first global disaster in a globalising world.

The eruption also came as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was being hotly debated, the Wallace Line that separated the Australian and Eurasian biodiversity domains and bisected the Indonesian archipelago had been discovered. There were unprecedented advances in scientific understanding and exploration of the natural world.

Krakatoa for the first time showed human beings that they were an interdependent species with shared vulnerabilities. Here was a disaster that for the first time was truly global in scale. Giant tsunamis raced across the oceans on 27 August 1883,

killing 40,000 people. Three cubic kilometres of dust was pumped into the stratosphere and it swirled around the world for years giving rise to fiery sunsets and bringing down global temperatures. The sound of the eruption was heard as far away as Perth, Colombo and Manila, barometres in Washington DC and Hawaii detected the pressure changes caused by the explosion.

Winchester traces the effect the Krakatoa explosion had on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Java which inevitably turned into an anti-colonial movement that ultimately drove the Dutch out. There could be echoes of this in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean earthquake, not just in Indonesia.

Indonesia is even more volatile at the beginning of the 21st century than it was in the late 1900s. The effect of the 26 December earthquake on the Aceh separatist war and on a post 9/11 resurgence of fundamentalism in Indonesia has yet to be seen. There is certainly geopolitical public relations at play in the unprecedented American and Australian military deployment in the rescue effort.

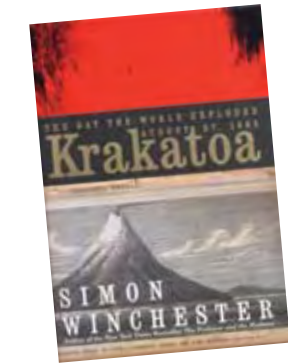
The tsunamis affected another war-torn region: Sri Lanka. A cartoon in the Sri Lankan papers last week shows a soldier and guerrilla on a boat looking for the submerged territorial boundary that they have been fighting over for 20 years. In Aceh, Sri Lanka and southern Thailand last month's disaster exposed the complete absurdity of civil strife. And if there is one good that could come out of this, it would be that realisation among the belligerents.

But don't count on it. Look at what happened in Java after Krakatoa. Although the Dutch were generous with relief and rehabilitation, the disaster triggered an inexplicable rise in a religio-political anti-colonial jihad that culminated in the

Banten Peasant's Revolt of 1888. Winchester concludes that the eruption of Krakatoa did indeed help ignite a political and religious movement that flared violently in Java. The post-Krakatoa assassinations of Dutch colonials by zealots clad in white robes can be seen as precursors to similar events like the bombing of the nightclubs in Bali in October 2002.

Although Krakatoa 120 years ago was a much more spectacular trigger event than the 9.0 magnitude earthquake that hit the other end of Sumatra last month, the tsunamis this time were more devastating. One reason is that there are more people living along vulnerable shores today. The tidal surges that Krakatoa unleashed were detected even in Europe, but in Sri Lanka the waves were not as high and there were only two known deaths in Galle. A news item from the *Ceylon Observer* of the sea's behaviour at Galle in 1883 quoted in the book is eerily similar to accounts from December 2004.

What is most frightening about Krakatoa is not its apocalyptic explosion but that Mt Toba and Mt Tambora also in Sumatra were several times bigger. Such cataclysmic displays of nature's raw power prove one thing: they will happen again. The only thing we can do is to be prepared to minimise the death and destruction. And pray. ●
Reviewed by Kunda Dixit



The Day the Earth Exploded: Krakatoa by Simon Winchester HarperCollins, 2003 Hardback: \$29.95



The real seismic gap is between the rich and the poor

ANDREW C REVKIN in NEW YORK

In seven hours last week, great ocean waves scoured shores from Thailand to Somalia, exacting a terrible price in wealth and human lives. But unimaginable as it may seem, future catastrophes may be far grimmer. Many more such disasters from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, to floods, mudslides and droughts, are likely to devastate countries already hard hit by poverty and political turmoil.

The world has already seen a sharp increase in such 'natural' disasters: from about 100 per year in the early 1960s to as many as 500 per year by the early 2000s, says Daniel Sarewitz, professor of science and society at Arizona State University. But it is not that earthquakes, tsunamis and other such calamities have become stronger or more frequent. What has changed is where people live and how they live there.

As new technology allows, or as poverty demands, rich and poor alike have pushed into soggy floodplains or drought-ridden deserts built on impossibly steep slopes and created vast, fragile cities along fault lines that tremble with alarming frequency.

Catastrophes are as much the result of human choices as they are of geology or hydrology. Kerry Sieh, a veteran seismologist at the California Institute of Technology, has spent years studying some of the world's wealthiest and poorest earthquake-prone territories. The difference between the rich and poor countries, Sieh says, is that the rich ones had improved their building techniques and their political systems to deal with inevitable disasters.

In the Pacific Northwest, where offshore faults could generate a tsunami as large as last week's ocean-spanning waves, officials have created inundation maps to know more precisely what would happen in a flood and prepare accordingly. And in response to the threat of earthquakes, buildings on the West Coast now are designed to sway over shifting foundations and new highway overpasses are no longer stacked like the jaws of a huge horizontal vise.

Istanbul, Tehran, New Delhi and other increasingly dense and shabbily constructed cities on the other hand, are rubble in waiting. When an earthquake leveled the ancient Iranian city of Bam in 2003, for instance, more than 26,000 people were essentially crushed by their own homes. Elected officials and disaster agencies, both public and private, remain focused on responding to catastrophes instead of trying to make societies more resilient in the first place, says Brian E Tucker, a geophysicist and the head of GeoHazards International.

A recent study by Tearfund found that less than 10 percent of the money spent on disaster relief by government agencies and institutions like the World Bank goes to preventive measures. Mozambique, anticipating major flooding in 2002, asked for \$2.7 million to make basic emergency preparations. It received only half that amount. After the flood, those same organisations ended up committing \$550 million in emergency assistance.

People seem to have a blind spot for certain inevitable disasters, either because they play out over long time frames, like global warming, or because they are rare, like tsunamis. Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Earth Institute, was more optimistic, if only slightly so. He noted how Bangladesh had seen its mortality rates from flooding drop sharply since the 1970s, mainly by adopting simple means of getting people to higher ground. But he also noted another class of cataclysms that which receive no blanket news coverage: malaria, AIDS, crop failures and even global warming.

"We're at a period in earth's history where we're living on an edge where things can go terribly wrong if we're not attentive," says Sachs. "It's not even a question of money. It's much cheaper to anticipate rather than to respond." ●

Not non-profit

Commercialisation is not a bad word

Why has commercialisation suddenly become a bad word? We hear politicians bemoan “commercialised education”. NGOs are insulted if they are called commercial, “we are a non-profit social organisation”, they say. And international development agencies refuse contracts to for-profit organisations. Even commercial sex workers now want to be called “female sex workers”.

Across the developing world, including Nepal, the term ‘commercialisation’ now has a negative connotation and business people have been attached an anti-social stigma. This is unfortunate because the country’s economic backbone, the sector that could take Nepal forward, has been vilified. The prime minister publicly scolds and demoralises the business community every chance he gets. It has become a cliché to bad mouth commerce, sending the wrong message to the public and future generations.

NEPALI PAN
Rajeeb L Satyal



On the other hand, there is an obsession for anything that has the prefix ‘social’ on it. ‘Socialisation’, ‘social service’, ‘social workers’. That is why at some point, even the most successful businessmen, industrialists or entrepreneurs underrate their own profession and choose to project themselves as social workers. Society has been over-projecting pseudo-social workers as heroes and the business community as villains. This is having an impact on commercial activity in the country and is reflected even in government policy.

There is a role and value for socially-oriented organisations and some do exemplary work. But their role has been overrated, and are acknowledged far more than businessmen and entrepreneurs even though legitimate questions can be raised about their ‘non-profit’ status or voluntary nature.

And since international donor agencies are required to fund only ‘non-profit’ organisations, there has been an epidemic of fly-by-night groups that are ‘non-profit’ just for registration purposes. In fact the number of ‘not-for-profit’ organisations outstrips registered commercial organisations in Nepal.

‘Non-profit’ has become a profitable tag for donor-driven organisations to attract international grants. It is about time Nepal’s funders realised that there are few genuine ‘non-profit’ or ‘voluntary’ organisations even though these esteemed values may be incorporated in their charters.

No organisation can run without money and every organisation must save some surplus between what it gets and spends in order to sustain their organisations. We should encourage existing non-government development outfits to adopt business techniques and management procedures to streamline administration and improve productivity. Every organisation must be allowed to generate revenue so it can sustain itself after project funding is terminated.

In fact, we should stop calling them NGOs and treat them like ‘professional service organisations’ geared for efficient and effective service delivery, allowed to charge a reasonable fee for overheads instead of pretending to be a charitable non-profit.

This will get us out of the dependency trap, foster sustainability and take prosperity to the grassroots. The country can achieve prosperity only if there is equal and equitable division of commercial opportunities, skills and resources among all Nepalis.

Commercialisation and privatisation have actually made the delivery of health and education more efficient, it has made hydropower a viable proposition and encouraged competition in the telecom sector. Deregulation of the domestic airline industry has improved services and brought down prices. In retrospect, whatever little development Nepal has achieved over the years have been mainly due to commercialisation, privatisation and better marketing of consumer goods and services. Commercialisation of agriculture has improved farmer’s incomes from fruit and vegetable produce. The reduction in poverty is reflected in better health of farming families. Community forestry user-groups that are run commercially are the most viable and successful.

Open and transparent commercial activity serves the people’s needs better than corrupt and pretentious ‘social service’ either by the state or through the non-profit sector. It’s time to wake up from this spell, break the negative stereotype about commercial activities and the abhorrence we have developed for the profit motive and private initiative.

Rajeeb L Satyal is a management and social marketing consultant.



Nepal becomes

Smugglers along the Indo-Nepal border trading in illegal CFCs could jeopardise Nepal’s obligations to protect the ozone layer



SR Joshi with seized contrabands.

NARESH NEWAR

Nepal is one of the 188 countries in the world that have signed and ratified the Montreal Protocol to phase out chemicals that harm the earth’s ozone layer. But unscrupulous traders have been using Nepal as a trans-shipment point to smuggle these chemicals to India and we are in danger of being put on the non-compliance list.

Not only has this besmirched Nepal’s international reputation but Nepali officials have found it difficult to convince the United Nations that it intends to adhere to its treaty commitment to phase out ozone-depleting chemicals by 2010.

It all began in 2001 when Birganj customs seized an illegal shipment of 74 tons of India-bound CFCs, the chemicals used in old model refrigeration units that are banned under the Montreal Protocol because they harm the ozone layer. The government expected to be congratulated on having made the seizure, instead it was blacklisted as a conduit for smuggled ozone-depleting chemicals.

The Montreal Protocol is one of the few international treaties that has been successful in stopping a global environmental threat.

Under it, developed countries agreed to phase out production and consumption of CFCs and other substances, while Third World countries were given time to switch to ozone-friendly chemicals.

All consumption and production will be banned after 2040, but even in the past 15 years scientists have noted that the hole in stratospheric ozone layer over the South Pole has stopped growing. It is expected that by the middle of this century the ozone hole will have repaired itself. Ozone depletion destroys the earth’s natural filter against harmful ultra-violet radiation that leads to an increase in the incidence of cancers.

Nepal’s consumption of CFCs is very low and the smuggled chemicals were all bound for India through Nepali re-exporters who used the open border. But the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is very strict about compliance and monitors smuggling regularly.

India’s demand for CFCs and HCFCs is 40,000 tons a year and it consumes up to 40 percent of the total global production of ozone depleting chemicals and imports it from licensed manufacturers in Europe. “The illegal trade in ozone-depleting substances if left unchecked could undermine global efforts

to phase out these chemicals,” says UNEP’s Bangkok-based regional director for the Asia-Pacific, Surendra Shrestha.

It took almost three years for Nepali delegations at international ozone conferences to convince the Montreal Protocol secretariat that the impounded shipment in Birganj were brought illegally into Nepal to be smuggled to India and the government hadn’t issued any import licence.

“Nepal has always complied with the Montreal Protocol since the beginning but the secretariat has been hassling us because of that illegal consignment,” explains Sita Ram Joshi, national ozone officer at National Bureau of Standards and Metrology (NBSM). The bureau hosts Nepal’s National Ozone Committee to coordinate the kingdom’s phase-out targets.

In 2000 when the government was planning to introduce the Ozone Depleting Substances Consumption (Control) Rules, which would make it mandatory for importers to obtain a license, there was immense pressure from traders. When the ministry refused, the companies filed a case in the CIAA alleging the government officials of corruption.

The Nepal connection

Nepal’s problem is that it borders two of the largest consumers and producers of CFCs. The main problem is India, and the open border is a haven for those who trade in contraband ozone-depleting substances.

Several years ago, some environmental journalists went undercover along the Nepal-India border to investigate the trade. They infiltrated the businessmen importing and storing CFCs, refilling them in innocent looking cylinders and transporting them across the border in Jogbani and Raxaul in rickshaws.

It named a network led by Shanker Todi who is linked with Nepali companies importing CFCs. The agency reported that he works closely with a certain Ashok Agarwal to smuggle CFCs into India via the Birganj border area. The CFCs are filled in 13.6kg cylinders which are packed in cardboard cartons and then taken to storage facilities in Birganj. The cylinders with false labels are then moved to Inarwa village near

the Indian border at night and are transported in tractors and trailers by more remote and dangerous routes via Biswaha or Sikta.

Another smuggling route is in Biratnagar where smugglers decant CFCs from cylinders to larger 105kg cylinders which are commonly used in the Indian market. A Nepali company was identified as a key smuggler working closely with Indian counterparts. It is involved in importing large quantities of CFCs in disposable cylinders through the Customs Transit Declaration system via Calcutta. The Nepali company used to move large quantities of the cylinders and declared them empty after reaching the Indo-Nepal cross border. But it altered the method after 79 cylinders were seized in 2000.

Custom officials have cracked down on the smugglers but they change their routes and methods frequently and hard to catch.

Source: *Unfinished Business Bulletin*

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Long dark winters ahead

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Supply is not keeping pace with rise in the electricity demand

This week's two-hour power cuts caused by the malfunction in one of the three Kali Gandaki turbines proves just how precarious the electricity supply situation in Nepal has become.

In fact, an internal assessment of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) forecasts power cuts from later this year up to 2008. The reason: surging demand and delays in new power plants like Middle Marsyangdi.

This week's power cuts are temporary and will be lifted once the turbine is fixed but all signs point to long and chronic load shedding in the coming years. This week, NEA has distributed power cuts so no one area suffers more than two hours a week. "We cut power first along the border towns because we can switch them to the Indian grid," says NEA's load dispatch centre chief Shyam Sundar Shrestha.

But by this time next year power cuts will be nationwide and routine because shortfalls in the supply will be an unprecedented 53 megawatts (see chart). At the rate demand is rising, peak load will touch 560 megawatts this year, while the installed capacity is merely 610 megawatts.

The problem is that most of Nepal's power is generated through 'run-of-the-river' schemes which depend on water levels in the rivers and actual production is always below installed capacity. Nepal's power production and consumption is skewed because none of the power plants have large storage reservoirs except Kulekhani. This means power production is highest during the monsoon, when demand is lowest. And when demand peaks in winter and pre-monsoon summer, the rivers are at their lowest.

Urban demand is shooting up because of the influx of people in urban centres due to

the insurgency. NEA had forecast an eight percent increase in peak load this year, 7.8 percent next year and almost nine percent in 2007. But supply has been stagnant and no major capacity has been added since the 144 megawatt Kali Gandaki went into operation two years ago. The construction of the 70 megawatt Middle Marsyangdi was supposed to be finished this month but is already two years behind schedule.

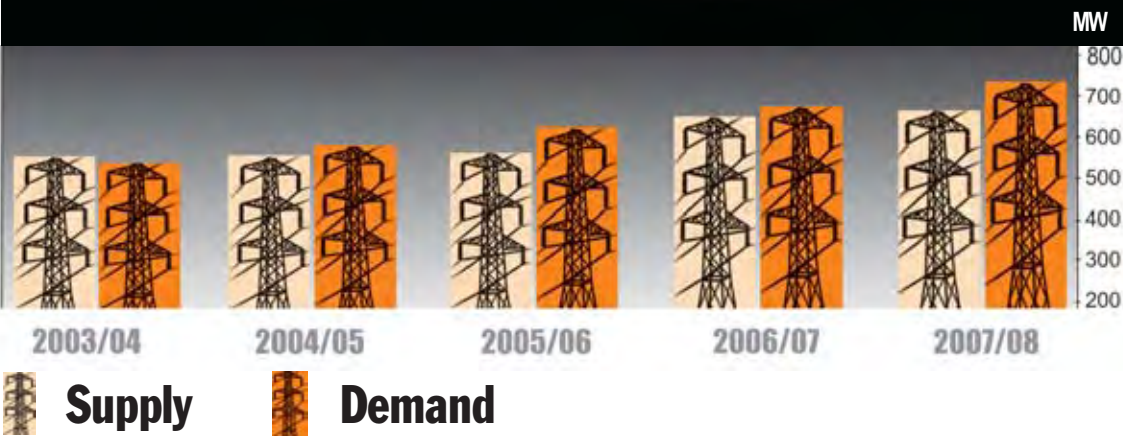
Although small independent power producers have built three hydropower plants, Chakukhola, Sunkosi Small and Rairang, they can cumulatively generate only five megawatts. Other power projects have been delayed because of the insurgency and the military's ban on transporting dynamite for construction. Meanwhile, NEA has a list of 24 major hydro projects that could together generate over 22,000 megawatts but most of them will take at least 10 years to complete even if construction began right away.

The 750 megawatt West Seti Australian joint venture for a mammoth storage dam is making some headway but its power is designed for export to India. India's state-owned National Hydropower Corporation had shown interest in going ahead with the 300 megawatt Upper Karnali project during Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to New Delhi in September. Even if these two projects were to sell power to the domestic grid, they would not be ready to fill the supply gap between now and 2008.

NEA officials admit they are worried too, and have contingency plans to refurbish the Debighat and Sunkosi power plants and to increase capacity to meet next year's demand. Says NEA Managing Director Janak Lal Karmacharya: "For the next shortage in 2007-8, we are trying to upgrade the capacity of Chilime by adding 40 megawatts to the same system."



Growing gaps between generation capacity and consumer demand for electricity spells load shedding from 2005-2008.



SOURCE: NEA

If these ideas work, and it is a big if, they may partly be able to meet the rise in demand in the next four years. But if they don't, the resulting power shortage could seriously undermine the economy.


This is the reason why hydropower experts are pushing for a storage type project to generate power even during dry season. "The need for a storage type project was felt long back and Sapta Gandaki was studied," says former NEA

managing director, Santa Bahadur Pun. It was the same story with the 122 megawatt Upper Seti reservoir project which was planned for 2010. Political foot-dragging has caused both to gather dust even when the need for a storage project is now becoming urgent.

Some energy experts say since plans to augment supply are slow, immediate attention needs to be paid to the demand side. One way to do this is differential tariffs. "We could

avoid load shedding by suppressing peak time demand in the dry season making it more expensive," says senior chartered accountant Ratna Sansar Shrestha, who has been working in the energy sector.

Time-of-the-day pricing has been implemented for the industrial sector but the biggest chunk of power consumers in the country are domestic and non-commercial which would be the target group for peak hour pricing. ●





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नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०४७ ले प्रत्येक नेपाली नागरिकको आधार भूत मानव अधिकार सुरक्षित गरी स्वतन्त्रता र समानताको आधारमा नेपाली जनताका बीच भ्रातृत्व र एकता कायम गर्ने कुरामा जोड दिएको छ। जुनसुकै विचारधाराका भए पनि नेपाली सबै एक हौं भन्ने भावनाले राष्ट्र निर्माणको काममा अग्रसर हुन सके मात्र यस देशको विकास तीव्र गतिमा हुन सक्ने हुँदा विचार फरक भएका विषयहरूमा आपसी समझदारी र सहयोगको भावना लिएर छलफल गरी निष्कर्षमा पुग्नु र संपूर्ण नेपालीलाई भ्रातृत्वको दृष्टिले हेर्नु प्रत्येक नेपालीको कर्तव्य हो।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा संचार मंत्रालय
सूचना विभाग

Governor deadlock

The appointment of a new governor at the Nepal Rastra Bank is still in limbo as Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his deputy Bharat Mohan Adhikari continue to lock horns over their preferred candidates to lead the central bank.

After crossing swords with the prime minister for more than a week, Adhikari has made it his party's prestige issue. The UML has officially said that the new governor should be one of the three names recommended by a committee headed by Adhikari who is also finance minister. Party leaders have begun to warn that if someone not recommended by the committee is appointed in the top post of the central bank, it will quit the government.

The three recommended names are reportedly Yuba Raj Khatiwada of the National Planning Commission, Deputy Governor Bijay Nath Bhattarai and economist Parthiveshwar Timilsina. The prime minister is reportedly pushing Chief Secretary Bimal Koirala, but he would settle for extending incumbent Governor Tilak Rawal's term.

The PMO has made no comment and, despite repeated efforts, Governor Rawal could not be contacted. The UML's advisers have blamed donors for pushing their blue-eyed boys. (See: 'Cor blimey, guv'nor', #228)

Tools of trade

Universal Trading Centre has operated in Nepal for nearly four decades. After their success with power tools for 15 years UTC strengthened their partnership with Black & Decker by investing in the home appliance range in May 2000. Currently there are more than 100 outlets in Nepal. Its two-year warranty scheme has proved popular.



Standard Charter to the rescue

Standard Chartered PLC committed at least \$5 million to relief and reconstruction activities in countries affected by Asia's tsunami. The amount will be channelled through local relief funds in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and Malaysia.

Privilege concern

Photo Concern has launched its privilege card which allows holders attractive discounts and additional benefits. It has 66 alliance partners that also allow discounts to cardholders.



Handheld devices

After launching in the Indian market, Xda II mini and other Xda models have made it into the Nepali market. Users have access to email, Net, video, music, games, a comprehensive range of Microsoft Pocket PC tools and more. The authorised distributor for Nepal, Ocean Computers, have priced them at around Rs 55,00.



Old for new

Sagtani Exim Pvt Ltd, dealers of IFB home appliances, now offers the exchange of old washing machines for new IFB front load automatic washing machines. The offer runs for the month of January.

The new governor

Can he rise above the political drama and donor bidding?

After 47 long years, the Nepal Rastra Bank Act was revised two years ago. Effective from 31 January 2002, the new Act laid down a non-political procedure for the appointment of the new

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



governor. But that seemed not to matter this week as politicians, apparently in tandem with some donors, went head-to-head with one another over who should be made the new governor.

A list containing the names of three candidates was floated before last week's cabinet meeting. But it was set aside at the last minute to allow time for one name, supposedly favoured by the Prime Minister's Office, to be on it. Meanwhile, a pro-UML economist, who mastered his monetary policy concepts in the USSR, was busy accusing others of lobbying for certain candidates. And so it went: the political soap opera of selecting the next governor. Lost in the muddle were two basic questions: Why would anyone want this technical job through political connections? And how would anyone change the job to be of any lasting significance?

Whoever replaces Tilak Rawal as the next Rastra Bank governor, will have an increasingly technical and autonomous job. He is not to please political masters by printing money but to keep both the national financial system and the value of currency stable. A stable financial system makes it easier for banks, firms and individuals to make use of capital to engage in more

economic activities. And a stable value of currency rewards those who earn, save, lend and invest money. If the Rastra Bank gets these two goals wrong, then a collapse of the banking system coupled with rising prices will hurt all of us. That is why, ideally, the governor should be a discreet, technically competent macroeconomist who has an international orientation, some private-sector (particularly banking) experience, an ability to make sense of a disparate array of information and a high tolerance for ambiguities.

But in all likelihood, the appointee emerging out of our political horse-trading will have few of those characteristics. If we are lucky, he will at least be a donor's darling, whose unspoken mandate will be to stick to the task of steering the boat of template-driven financial sector reform activities to shore. If not, he will be a toady to serve the short-term interests of politicians. Either way, he will be fulfilling others' agenda with nary a voice of his own. But all this is understandable because the mere act of granting more autonomy to the central bank through legislation does not mean that autonomy will actually get exercised.

Still, there are two ways the new governor can put his lasting imprint on the job. First, he should use it as a bully pulpit to drive home the point that it is imperative for Nepal to make use of clear and transparent rules and regulations that are compatible with the best practices from around the world. This means



that, yes, probably wilful major loan defaulters get no quarters from anyone and cleaning up our collective financial mess is the first signal we can give others about being serious, ensuring the soundness and the predictability of our financial health. And second, in these times of internal strife, there is great temptation for the government to use the central bank as a piggy-bank to help pay for all sorts of defence-related expenses. Instead of doing the government's bidding, the new governor should aim to rise above the inevitable politics of the appointment process to assert the Rastra Bank's operational independence by keeping it loyal to the goals of a stronger economy. ●

“Nepal has a two-tier market economy”



KIRAN PANDAY

Anuj Agrawal is the director of Vishal Group, a diversified business house involved in the manufacturing, trading and service industry. It also oversees United Telecom, which plans to launch new phone systems in Kathmandu soon.

Business must be difficult in times like these.

It has certainly been a difficult time and not just for business. We want a peaceful solution to the conflict. From the business point of view, there has been substantial direct negative impact but perhaps even more important is the general sentiment, which has become rather pessimistic.

Since your business has to do with imports, what was the impact of the recent Maoist-imposed blockade?

The impact was substantial in all the sectors we are involved in. Manufacturing and trading suffered due to goods becoming stationary. Even service sectors, such as life insurance suffered because agents could not move and exchange of policies came to a standstill.

What about production of steel, how much has the insurgency hampered it?

There has been direct impact with plants having to shut down periodically. Construction activity and infrastructure projects (with the exception of Kathmandu) have slowed down across the country, resulting in a much lower demand for steel.

Nevertheless, has the purchasing capacity of consumers risen, especially in urban areas?

We are starting to see a two-tier market economy in Nepal. There are consumers whose purchasing capacity for high-end goods is rising and luxury or indulgence goods are seeing strong demand. Then there is the low tier consumer whose purchasing power seems to have shrunk, particularly outside Kathmandu.

Where does Nepal stand among steel manufacturers?

Nepal manufactures only front-end steel products. Our steel sector is focused on serving the local demand with limited exports of GI pipes to India. It's not fair to rank Nepal against countries that have core steel manufacturing capacity. From the local market point of view, Nepal's steel manufacturing ability is quite good with several plants producing world-class steel structures.

Is the government acting as a facilitator or is it creating hassles?

The government is doing its best but is faced with severe constraints especially when it comes to security issues. What we can learn from international experience is that gradual lowering of duties is the way forward. The government also needs to generate a base basket of revenues to meet national demands. It is trying hard to balance the need for progress with the sheer essence of generating revenue.

Do you plan to expand UTL's phone services?

We continue to evaluate options. Clearly there are opportunities as this is a fast moving sector but at this point, there are no concrete plans.

Where do you see the Nepali economy headed?

The potential for economic turnaround in Nepal is tremendous. Just a few right steps can make Nepal a wonderful investment destination. There are several areas of core competence in Nepal such as hydropower and tourism, where Nepal can achieve success.

And the winner is...

Hitting you where it matters, this year's Hits FM Music Awards promises to recognise new talent and launch careers



(Above) Mukti and The Revival perform at the 1999 Hits FM Music Awards.

(Below L - R) Nima Rumba and Kunti Moktan arrive at the 1996 Hits FM Music Awards in a helicopter. Deep Shrestha pulls a hattrick at the 2000 Hits FM Music Awards and Dimple wins the award for Best Song in a Foreign Language in the 2002 Hits FM Music Awards.



AARTI BASNYAT

91.2 is not just a fresh, young and vibrant voice in Kathmandu Valley's FM firmament with its eclectic mix of Nepali and international music. Hits has also been a pioneer in encouraging musical talent through its annual awards, Nepal's own Grammys.

The station has encouraged artistes, allowing them to perform on air and helping release albums. It was also the first to organise an event honouring and awarding musicians for their effort, and the mark by which listeners measured the quality of the sound.

Since its establishment in 1997, the Hits FM Music Awards have come a long way. Started with no sponsorship and only seven categories, the Hits parade now has 18 categories and is considered one of the most prestigious musical events of the year in Nepal. The by-invitation-only format makes it an honour to be there. The

uninvited can stay home and watch artistes become stars live on television.

The Hits awards is truly democratic in its selection process of nominations of musicians in the various categories. Half the nominations come from the listening public and the other half is decided by the Hits board based on the popularity of the songs going on air.

This year, three new categories have been added to the awards. They are: Best Rock Composition, Best Pop Composition and Best Composition. We asked Jeevan Shrestha, executive director of Hits FM, the reason behind the inclusion of the new categories. He explained: "Nepali music is growing and as more artistes and genres of music emerge, so does the need for more categories."

The Best song in a foreign language category, which was introduced last year, received some complaints. Why English? Why not a category for songs in regional Nepali languages as well? "If you show

me enough artistes with good songs in regional languages, I will consider introducing a new category," says Shrestha, "Right now, there aren't enough songs or artistes popular enough to incorporate the category into our awards."

The Best Composition category used to include what is known as adhunik Nepali music, works such as Narayan Gopal and Gopal Yonjan. But today's emerging genres of adhunik have taken twists and turns. So, Hits FM has decided to stick with best composition and remove the adhunik category.

In spite of influence from the west and across the border, music here seems more popular when a dash of Nepalpan is added to it, be it through the mellow sounds of the sarangi or remixing old Nepali songs. This sort of originality and quality is the reason that Nepali music has begun to stand out and Hits FM encourages originality above all. Says Shrestha, "It would be nice to have some

Nepalpan in music but they should do a good job of it, not just include it for the sake of having a Nepali feel."

Indeed, if last year's winning lineup is anything to go by, this year's awards on 14 January at the BICC will also be those songs that echo the heartbeat of the Nepali soul.

The Hits FM awards have been a dramatic evolution within the Nepali music industry. As Shrestha tells us, "Artistes today think if they have a voice they can become singers. The old days when we promoted 1974AD and had concerts with them are gone. Now they use studio musicians and when we ask them to perform they can't do it." This has resulted in many songs but few true singers.

Focusing on originality, quality and substance like always, this year's Hits FM awards will be a definite entertainer with new artistes, sounds and entertainment surpassing all that has gone before. ●



Madhyanha wins Best Performance by Group or Duo with Vocals in 1998

Awards night highlights

- Tulsi Parajuli nominated for Folk Record of the Year category will open the show
- The Moktan family performing for the first time: Kunti Moktan nominated for Best Female Vocal Performance, Sheetal and Shubani Moktan who won the Best New Artistes last year and Shila Moktan, musician and composer for the albums recorded by his wife and daughters.
- The nominees for Best Male Pop Vocals will come together for the first time in one performance.
- Udeshe Shrestha, Mahasatwa Bajracharya and Amul from 'The Destiny' perform a tribute to Arun Thapa.
- A performance by the Lifetime Achievement Award recipient.
- Garima Gurung, nominated for two of her songs in the Best Song in a Foreign Language category will close the show.

8th Hits FM Music Awards 2061 Nominees

Best New Artist

Anita Subba
Bharat Sitaula
Laxman Gurung
Mahasatwa Bajracharya
Sudip Giri

Best Song in a Foreign Language

Here I Come - Abhaya and the Steam Injuns
Life's So Strange - Full Circle
Rock Me - Garima Gurung
She N' I - DXP3
Slide - Garima Gurung

Best Music Video

Alok Nembang - Dubna Deu
Bhusan Dahal - Kahiley Timro
Colour Cubes - Ek Mauka
Maya - Timi ma Bhandra
Simosh Sunwaar - Saanjha Ma Pani

Best Rock Composition

Adhuro Prem - The Axix
Baato - Lochan Rijal
Chaha Chaina - Cobweb
Jeevan Ma - Nabin K Bhattarai
Pinjada ko suga - 1974 AD

Best Pop Composition

Bus Stand - Sanjeev Singh
Dubna Deu - Anil Singh
Eh Joon - Bidur Shrestha
Pal Pal - Bishwo Shahi
Yehin Ho Ta Maya - Pranil L Timalsena

Best Composition

Aau Maya - Sambhujit Baskota
Bachan Tode - Raju Singh
Kahiley Timro - Alok Shree
Pardesh Bata - Karna Das
Timilai Jitne - Kiran Pradhan

Best Song Originally Recorded for a Motion Picture Soundtrack
Aankha Bhari Ka - (Music Director) Ranjit Gazmer - (Film) Dui Kinarama
Baadal Barsha - (Music Director) Sachin Singh - (Film) Kartabya
Kasto Nasha - (Music Director) Rahul Pradhan - (Film) Lakshya
Saanjha Naya - (Music Director) Sambhujit Baskota - (Film) Suvakamana
Timi Phool Manjari - (Music Director) Laxman Shes - (Film) Upahaar

Best Vocal Collaboration

Pranil L Timalsena / Nabin K Bhattarai - Yehin Ho Ta Maya
Ram Chandra Kafle / Sindhu Rana - Lathi Charge
Udit Narayan Jha / Deepa Jha - Banmaara Ley
Udesh Shrestha / Bhugol Dahal - Yo Junima
Various Artists - Garima Garima

Best Performance by Group or Duo with vocal

1974 AD - Pinjada Ko Suga
Nepathya - Sa Karnali
The Axix - Adhuro Prem
The Boffins '98 - Ma Mare Pani
The Seasons - Suneko Kura

Folk Album of the Year

Bara Ropo Chhaya - Dilendra Rai & Friends
Ghintang - Tulsi Parajuli
Hamro Sanskriti - Subi Shah/ Narayan Rayamajhi & Friends
Kafal Gedi - Mahesh Budhathoki / Sindhu Malla
Subha Bibaha - Buddi Sagar Basyal & Friends

Folk Record Of the Year

Banma Kanda Cha - Bhagwan Bhandari
Bhannu Nabhako - Dinesh Kafle / Gita Devi
Maya Ko Bheti - Prabin Rai
Phool Ko Dalima - Hari Devi Koirala/ Purushottam Neupane
Sunkoshi Kinarama - Tulsi Parajuli

Best Female Pop Vocal Performance

Anita Subba - Timinai Timi
Eli Sherpa - Hardin
Mausami Gurung - Parelina
Pratima Rajbhandari - Najau Najau
Sukmit Gurung - Pal Pal

Best Male Pop Vocal Performance

Anil Singh - Dubna Deu
Nabin K Bhattarai - Chaina Jun
Nima Rumba - Sajha Ma Pani
Sanoop Paudel - Sambandha
Sugam Pokharel - Maya Ko Baato

Best Female Vocal Performance

Chanda Dewan - Na Garzi De
Gyanu Rana - Aasha Ko Diyo
Kunti Moktan - Manko Maya
Reema Gurung - Timro Biyog ley
Sukmit Gurung - Yo Maya Lai

Best Male Vocal Performance

Karna Das - Pardesh Bata
Ram Krishna Dhakal - Bachan Tode
Shishir Yogi - Jun Ley Sodhyo
Thupthen Bhutia - Timro Biyog ley
Udit Narayan Jha - Kahiley Timro

Song of the Year

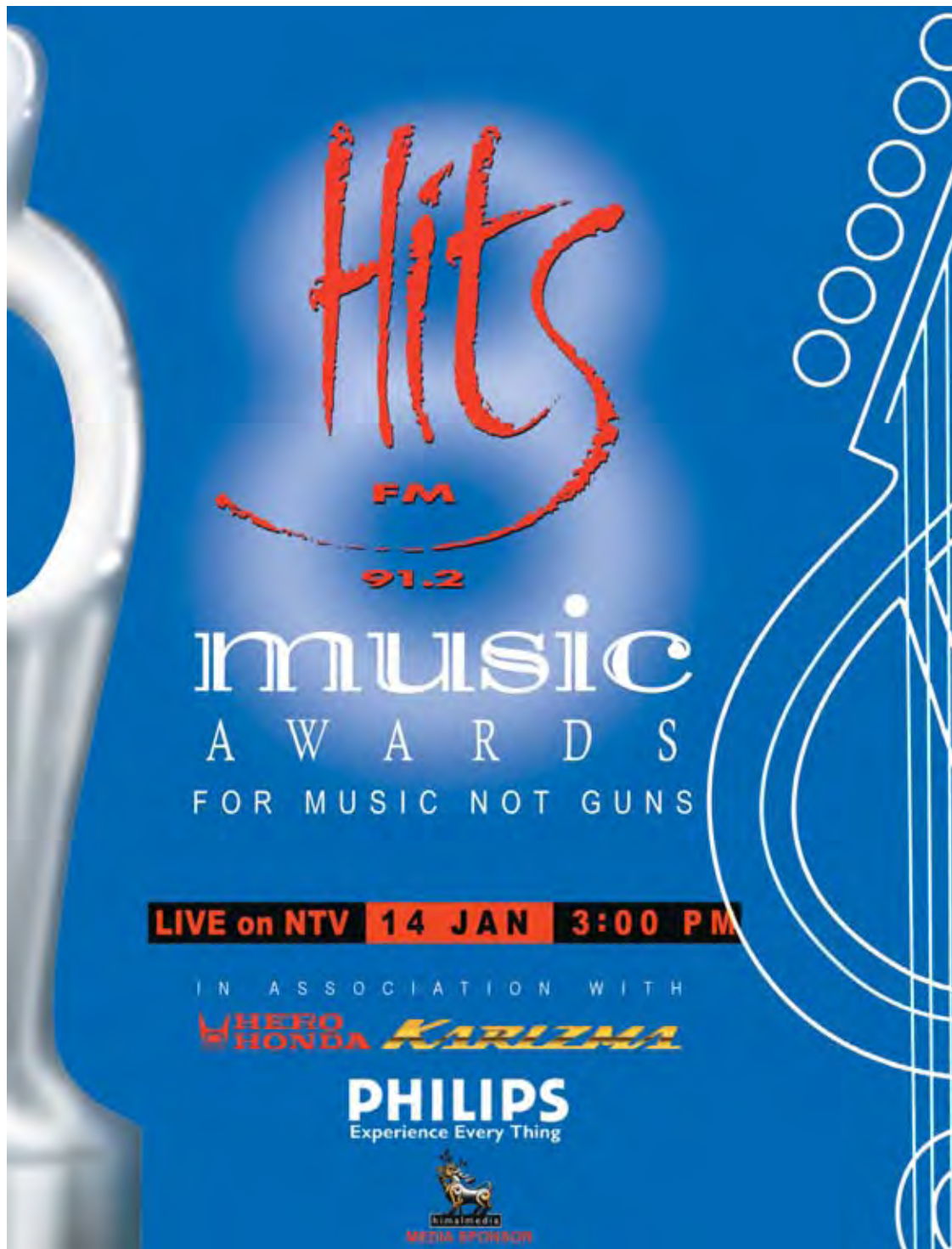
Aru Ko Jastai - Naresh Dev Pant
Ma Mareko Chhaina - Arun Tiwari
Ma Sapana Ko Kura Garchu - Shree Purush Dhakal
Pardesh Bata - BB Thapa
Pet Michi Michi - Rajan Raj Shivakoti

Album Of the Year

Higway - Sugam Pokharel
Megahertz - Anil Singh
The Blue - Nabin K Bhattarai
Upahaar - Udit Narayan Jha
Voice - Sanoop Paudel

Record of the Year

Bachan Tode - Ram Krishna Dhakal
Dubna Deu - Anil Singh
Kahiley Timro - Udit Narayan Jha
Ma Afnai Aagan Ma - Yash Kumar
Sajha Ma Pani - Nima Rumba



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People rule

KV Rajan, former Indian ambassador to Nepal in *Nepal*, 9 January



नेपाल

The Maoist conflict is as much a matter of concern for India as it is for Nepal. India has also been affected with the same nature of conflict. In the name of rebellion, guns have been used for many years in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. We hear India can solve Nepal's problems if it so wished and poses an obstacle to Nepal's peaceful resolution. This is not true. We have not been able to solve our own problems.

We respect our relations with Nepal and will not interfere in her internal affairs. I don't believe it is even ethical for India to lecture Nepal about democracy and her problems. India is not short on public dissatisfaction in her own democratic system and governance. Instead of lecturing Nepal, what we can do is interact and support each other to find solutions. Nepal's problem is not merely the conflict between the king, the Maoists and the political parties. The key problem is how to help Nepali families who have suffered because of the conflict. There has been enough talk about the future of monarchy or the direction of the conflict. More concern should be raised about the system of people's governance. After the multiparty system was established in Nepal in 1990, people had high expectations in democracy. Despite shortcomings, the democratic process was evolving. Then the Maoist rebellion began and pushed the country into crisis. On October Fourth, the monarchy stepped in to become active in a bid to solve the country's problems. King Gyanendra probably had no other vested interest when he made his move. Perhaps he wanted to prove that the palace was more capable than the political parties in finding a solution. But his assumption proved wrong.

The conflict intensified after his interference in state affairs. Nepal's political powers have to understand that no rule is successful without public support. The constitution has defined boundaries for monarchy regarding its responsibilities and authority. It should not cross this line. Nepal is now heading towards a failed state and monarchy is the most at stake. If it continues to cross constitutional jurisdiction to pursue political ambitions, it would do great damage.

As for the Maoists, they base political power in the use of terror. During its initial phase, the Maoist movement impressed the public because it advocated genuine issues in favour of the underprivileged. But their recent activities have pushed the people away. The rebels know that the situation will only grow worse. The political parties and the monarchy should unite to find solutions. Political parties should start pushing for national consensus. Nepal has no choice but to hold general elections. It would be best if the Maoists joined mainstream politics and went for elections too.

Digging bunkers

Rajdhani, 2 January

राजधानी

The Maoists have transformed all the schools in Kalikot district into war zones. They have got students and teachers to dig bunkers in the playgrounds and erect poles to prevent security force helicopters from landing. The rebels use schools as training grounds to lecture students, hold Maoist cultural programs and for military training. Most of the bunkers lead to nearby jungles as an escape during attacks. Anyone who defies bunker digging is punished. Rebel leaders say the government school curriculum is useless. "We have been fighting and the bunkers aim at making practical education accessible to the common people," said a local rebel leader. Some of these bunkers are so long that they actually link adjacent villages. Villagers fear an army counterattack and are lying low. Primary school students who are not deployed for bunker digging play hide and seek in them. Teachers, students and even parents are not allowed to leave the village because the rebels need the manpower for digging. They have even imposed the 'one-house-one-bunker' policy. Under this, each house is supposed to have a bunker. Digging apart, students are made to work like sentries and collect firewood for the rebel's 'people's meeting' or cultural programs.

Bad choice

Bikash Thapa
in Kantipur, 3 January

कान्तिपुर

On Nepal's behalf, the Department of Electricity has been selected for the Nepal-India joint feasibility study of the Kosi High Dam. The choice

is bad because the department has neither the technical capability required nor the manpower. Its functions include promoting, implementing and developing hydropower in the public and private sector. Since the Kosi High dam will not only generate power between 3,000-5,000 megawatt but will also deal with flood control, navigation and irrigation, the department will have no role to play in areas other than hydropower development.

For a multi-purpose project such as this, the Water and Energy Commission would have been the right choice. Ironically, its offices have been transformed into a dumping site. While we bungle with wrong choices for the study, India has established at least four offices in Nepal. This will result in only India conducting the study in Nepal. India will bring out a report of the pros and cons of the 280m high dam. If the right agency represented Nepal and field studies were conducted in Bihar also, the Indian state directly affected by the project, Nepal would know its shortcomings and about India's ambitious river-linking project. Without studies in India, how can Nepal know the benefits India will reap from the high dam? An office must be established in Bihar, just as they have been in Biratnagar, Dharan, Siraha and Janakpur.

Hopes, resolutions

Rituraj in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 1-15 January

हिमाल

Here are my new year resolutions for 2005:

1. A night-cap before bed, and only Royal Tag whiskey since it has the word 'royal' in it and enhances our commitment to constitutional monarchy.
2. Since breathing Kathmandu air is like smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, I will start smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. Why not get the real thing?
3. Since I am feeling powerless, unprotected and abandoned, I will petition the king for royal protection.
4. Despite all the news about robberies, plunder, arson, rape, bombs and abductions, I will try my level best not to be admitted into a mental asylum.
5. I will desist from doing anything that will lower the morale of the security forces, I will therefore never set out on any domestic travel. I will only travel abroad.

Here are my hopes for 2005. Who cares if they don't come true, one can only hope:

1. Whoever for whatever reason can call a banda as long as the number of closed days total 52 in a year. That way I can have a long weekend every week.
2. Let's hope no pedestrian singer or songwriter has to lose his life after colliding with a speeding 1200 Harley Davidson Streethawk.
3. Let's hope Charles Shobraj finishes his book and publishes it while still in detention. This will boost Nepal's crime-

tourism.

4. Let's hope just like my neighbourhood your neighbourhood also has its own morning bhajan on loudspeakers. That way you don't need an alarm clock.

On return from India, there is talk of neo-authoritarianism. Can't wait to see what a 21st century neo-authoritarianism feels like.

New year

Buddhabar, 6 December

बुधवार

The Armed Police Force organised a cultural program and dinner party for Crown Prince Paras on the occasion of his 34th birthday. Instead, he spent the whole night at a disco. On new year's day, the prince returned to Nirmal Nibas at around six in the morning. After attending an event held by the APF, he went to Soaltee with his whole family. At the hotel, a new year concert had been organised by Indian citizens. The entrance fee was Rs 4,999. When the prince was barred from entering, a bloody fight ensued. Many Indians were hurt and crying. Following this, the prince headed for the Yak and Yeti where a bystander witnessed him yelling 'Happy New Year'. He ran over the feet of the daughter of the former army chief, Prajwal Shamsheer Rana, and headed for Baber Mahal and then to Galaxy at Everest. All news of the incidents reached the palace only after the prince had returned to Nirmal Nibas at 6.30 AM. In June, following an incident at the Everest, the prince was sent off to Pokhara and Jomsom. This time, he was sent to a tea garden in Damak on 2 January. Princess Himani and the children were flown there in another army helicopter later that afternoon.

Unite, or else

Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Bal Bahadur KC in *Deshantar*, 2 January

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

In our party, it is the person (Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba) who has become powerful but the organisation has remained weak. It was this same undemocratic style that led to the division of the Nepali Congress. But even after splitting and forming the splinter Nepali Congress (Democratic), the functioning style of our party has remained the same. The party has not been able to provide any outlet to the crisis of the country. It has not been able to perform well and that is why there is no reason for it to stay in the government.

In the recent central committee meeting, I raised the issue of the state of our party. I told them we had split from Nepali Congress to steer a democratic course but since the party had shown no sign of being democratic, there was no point in staying separate. That is why I urged the party to merge again with the Nepali Congress.

I also raised the issue of the



Mohsin to Deuba: Hurry up and jump! Seems like there is no other choice
Cooking Pot: Elections

कान्तिपुर *Kantipur*, 3 January

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



Party workers have reached the conclusion that Deuba has shaken hands with the palace where he has handed over democracy.

Bijay Gacchedar, NC (Democratic) leader in *Rajdhani*, 2 January

reinstatement of parliament. It is true that getting the parliament through elections is the best way. But elections cannot be held in the present situation without cooperation from the Maoists. Hence the need to restore parliament. The country has not envisioned the state without parliament. If the king, the Maoists and all quarters agree, constituent assembly can be a way out too.

All members of my party’s central committee agree with me in principle. Majority of our central committee members are in favour of the reinstatement of the House. They think so because they believe all constitutional forces should stand as one, especially in the present context. Parliament is the right forum allowing these constitutional forces to unite. No force can tackle the complex situation alone. As per the issue of the Constituent Assembly, almost everyone agreed it was the third alternative. But majority believed that it would not be possible without the forces recognising one another.

Camp Sanskrit

Gorkhapatra, 5 January

गोरखापत्र

A Muslim student in Biratnagar aimed to read Hindu epics *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* and to that end, Istiyak Alam, has begun learning Sanskrit. Considering Alam’s determination, his parents allowed him to join a temporary camp in Biratnagar where Sanskrit is taught. “I will not just study Sanskrit but also speak it,” he said while attending class.

More than 80 students have come to learn Sanskrit in the camp. Among them are those of the Mongoloid caste such as Tamang and Rai. However, Alam is the only Muslim student. All these students feel that learning Sanskrit will help them acquire knowledge. The camp is run by Mahendra Sanskrit University, which plans to run similar camps in different parts of the country.

Leaderless

Nabin Pandit in Ghatna ra Bichar, 5 January

घटना-बिचार

Everyone saw how Girija failed when his party was in power. Similar leadership failures were seen in Lokendra, Surya Bahadur and Deuba when their parties led the government. All these leaders have called each other unsuccessful but none has admitted his own failure as a

leader. But no matter how ineffective and inefficient they proved, they have not stopped fighting for the top government seat. We can’t afford to put these same leaders back in the prime minister’s seat again and again. It is time they realised they can’t solve the country’s problems because they are a part of the problem. There is no hope for a solution despite the slogans and frequent protest rallies. They are only making the situation worse.

How can one be a real leader when they lead an anarchical visionless crowd of protestors? People should not repeat mistakes by supporting a leader who only speaks for his party’s benefits. If this same trend continues, there will be no value of politics. This will only lead to anarchy and opportunistic politics. UML, for one, supports Girija’s ideals and quickly leans towards Prachanda and turns around to collaborate with Deuba. It has no shame in making demands for the reinstatement of the same parliament, which it did everything to undermine. UML ministers have started lecturing us about democracy! It wants to prove it is against regression though it has joined the regressive government. As for Girija, all he does is sit in Ratna Park calling for peace and democracy, making no visible effort to visit villages where democracy is non-existent.

Ministerial fight

Dristi, 4 January

दृष्टि

Minister for Forestry Badri Prasad Mandal and General Administration Minister Krishna Lal Thakali nearly had a fistfight in the cabinet meeting on 3 January. The bone of contention was the appointment of the director general for the Department of Forestry. During the cabinet meeting, Mandal nominated Sharad Rai but Thakali said Rai was a junior official and did not merit the position. No sooner had Thakali made the remark when Mandal spat out it was none of his (Thakali’s) business anyway, and he (Mandal) could do whatever he liked in his ministry. Mandal even threatened to resign if he did not get to appoint the person of his choice. Thakali argued it was not fair to use his resignation as a bargaining chip. According to sources in the cabinet, the debate grew heated and the two ministers nearly came to blows. Prime Minister Deuba had a tough time mediating.



KIRAN PANDAY

Security crimes

Dristi, 4 January

दृष्टि

The following incidents substantiate how security force personnel have been crossing their limits of power to prove they are above the law:

- On 14 December, the robber who looted almost Rs 6 million from Nabil Bank used a pistol belonging to police inspector Madan KC.
- On 26 April, police inspector Rajkumar Silwal opened fire at a club in Thamel and assaulted a foreign woman. The club employees requested him to stop harassing the woman, instead the police officer pointed his gun at them.
- On 26 May, RNA soldier Lila Karki, posted at Maharajganj threatened to falsely accuse Chatra Chhetri from Gangabu of being a Maoist activist unless he paid Rs 200,000.
- On 9 August, police constable Bhim Bahadur Malla working with the unified command of security force in the Valley shot dead 25-year old Santosh Kumar Dhakal of Santagul.

Security force personnel who are supposed to protect citizens are causing terror instead. People are losing their trust after security forces began misusing government owned weapons to kill, abduct, cheat, loot and rape civilians. Even their superiors have not made an effort to convince the public that strict action will be taken against law breaking personnel. Instead, they have concealed the crimes committed by their staff, making it easier for them to break the law and get away with it. Although some security personnel have been punished, both the army and police have not been able to curb the illegal activities carried out by their men.

According to the police headquarters, action was taken against 3,483 personnel ranging from constable to officers involved in various crimes. Similarly, the

army legal section reported that 39 army personnel ranging from junior soldiers to senior officers received penalty. According to brigadier general BA Sharma, crimes by the army personnel are committed once they are outside the army barracks and not while on duty. “The security force is taking advantage of vulnerable civilians terrified and traumatised by the Maoists,” says military specialist Indrajit Rai. He blames the police organisation, which has not been able to discipline police personnel. Lack of stern action against such criminals of the law enforcing authorities is also the reason why these crimes have been repeated time and again.



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Mixed legacy

WASHINGTON—World Bank President James Wolfensohn says he will not seek a third term at the helm of one of the world's most important financial institutions, as Bank watchers say he is leaving a mixed legacy marred by a series of failures and disappointments for the world's fight against poverty.

During a television interview, the septuagenarian former Wall Street banker said he was unlikely to stay in his post and hinted that there was a lack of support from the US government, the dominant power within the World Bank. "I've had 10 years and I think that's probably enough but if the need is there, I'll do whatever the shareholders want," said Wolfensohn, who is a naturalised US citizen. "My understanding and my belief is that probably during the course of this year, I'll give over to someone else."

So far, no clear successor has emerged for the high-profile post. World Bank insiders said that the president, who took over in June 1995, would like to be remembered for reaching out to the Bank's critics within civil society and development organisations. They said his legacy included focusing on corruption, demanding better governance, pushing for increased debt forgiveness and introducing initiatives that emphasise country ownership of poverty reduction strategies and more interaction between governments, private sector and non-governmental organisations. (IPS)

Canada adopts disaster orphans

OTTAWA—The Canadian government is offering to allow relatives here to adopt tsunami orphans and bring them to Canada under a program to fast-track immigration from the disaster areas. Immigration Minister Judy Sgro has urged Canadian-based families of children whose parents were killed in the disaster to contact the government so discussions can begin. Sgro acknowledged the governments of the countries involved in the disaster must agree to the plan.

Thousands of Sri Lankan Canadians are members of the country's Tamil minority who were allowed into Canada as political refugees. Canada's Indonesian minority is quite small and is also made up mainly of political refugees. While the country has a sizeable Indian community, most discussions so far have been with the Sri Lankan government. "The challenge is that the governments in Sri Lanka and India don't want to lose their children. Their children are also the future of their country. It's a very complex issue," Sgro said.

Prominent humanitarian groups like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have warned against well-intentioned but potentially traumatic adoptions of children still struggling with the horror of losing their families. "Wherever possible, children should be placed within their own communities because that's where people know them best, that's where they have their friends, they have extended family members who can look after them," Shima Islam, a UNICEF spokesperson, said. The tsunami disaster has left as many as one in five Sri Lankan Canadians with relatives killed or missing. The Sri Lankan government has reportedly expressed openness to relocating children to communities abroad. (IPS)

Was Burma spared?

BANGKOK—It remains one of the greatest mysteries so far on how Burma with over 2,000 km of its coastline along the Andaman Sea, directly exposed to the devastating tsunami waves that killed over 140,000 people in the region the day after Christmas, managed to escape with minimal damage. A simulation produced by the Japan-based National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology showed the tsunami waves, which on 26 December were spawned by a huge undersea quake in northern Sumatra, hitting the coast of Burma's Arakan state, the Irrawaddy and Tenasserim divisions. Logically speaking, southern Burma should have been hit as bad as neighbouring Thailand where the death toll is currently more than 5,200. But no, says Anthony Banbury, the World Food Program's regional director for Asia. "I honestly have no explanation at all why that coast was spared compared to other areas that have had tremendous damage from the tsunami," he said.

On Tuesday the WFP managed to get an assessment team into Tenasserim division's Kawthaung, at the southernmost tip of Burma directly facing the Andaman Sea and reported that the damage was minimal. Burma's military junta has put the number of dead at 59, a figure that Banbury said was "fairly accurate". "The reports of deaths that we're aware of and which we believe are accurate are a total of between 30 to 60 deaths caused by the tsunami," he said. But the WFP director said the estimate was by no means conclusive and the UN agency would be doing more assessments on how to bring emergency food aid to the affected areas.

Suspensions were raised when on 27 December, the day following the disaster, the junta-controlled *New Light of Myanmar* reported only "messages of sympathy" sent by the generals to neighbouring countries, while giving no report on local impact. "It took two full days for the regime to officially report a minimal of 36 deaths, 45 injured, 14 missing, 788 homeless displaced and 17 coastal villages destroyed," said the Burma lobby group ALTSEAN in a report on the tsunami impact on the country. "On 1 January, the regime updated these figures to 59 dead, 43 injured and 3,205 made homeless," added the report. What's worrying is that the situation has been less clear on Burma's islands. This is where the regime together with the Chinese armed forces have their military installations. So for obvious reasons these areas will remain off-limits to relief agencies. (IPS)

Feeling Aceh's pain in Bali

Across the vast archipelago, the tragedy unites Indonesians



Shortly before midnight on new year's eve, we drove through the villages, which lie on the outskirts of Ubud. On a typical new year's eve, the streets of Bali are crowded with people celebrating. Last Friday, the streets were almost totally empty. As 2004 slipped into 2005 there was silence across the paddy fields, the parties and fireworks were cancelled or turned into fund-raising drives.

Indonesia is in mourning for its uncountable dead. The appalling physical scale of devastation is almost impossible to take in and one of the things that complicates the relief operation is that those who provide community leadership in times of crisis are dead. Dead also are the shopkeepers, writers, musicians, farmers, fishermen/women and homemakers. Lost are the thoughts, stories, talents and aspirations of several generations.

The Balinese are particularly well placed to empathise with their neighbours in Aceh. The suffering of the 2002 bombs in Kuta, although on a vastly different scale, is still very fresh in the collective memory. Beside the highway leading out of Denpasar, college students hold cardboard donations boxes at traffic lights. In Ubud, Bali's main craft and artistic centre, posters urge people to donate to relief operations.

The emphasis of the drive is the creation of 'care buckets' which will double as water containers. Each bucket is filled with a variety of urgently needed supplies including purification tablets, oral rehydration salts, toothbrushes, sanitary napkins, first aid medicines, flashlamps, non-perishable foods, quick drying

clothes and stoves.

My brother's friends, Made and Sam, have volunteered. They are builders who are going to use their construction skills, which are usually deployed in building the expensive villas and hotels that dot the Balinese landscape, to help with the clean-up campaign, to assist with the provision of temporary shelters and ultimately with reconstruction. Journeys by sea, however, are hazardous, as piracy is common and despite the best intentions, all relief assistance is moving very slowly.

Aceh is in the throes of a long-running separatist conflict but two days after the tsunami the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian Military (TNI) stated that they had agreed separately to a temporary halt in hostilities. But the military now states that it is carrying out both 'humanitarian and security operations'. Ongoing hostilities have raised concerns from humanitarian aid workers who fear that the fighting will undermine their relief work and jeopardise their safety and the safety of those they are trying to assist.

The Indonesian media features countless stories of tragedy and destruction but it also chronicles some miracles of survival. Twenty-six-year-old Riza saved her badly injured neighbour's twin daughters but then struggled to swim and hold onto the girls when a snake the size of a telephone pole, which was being carried along by the current, approached her. She and the two nine-year-olds clung to the python and were eventually carried to higher ground.

A Banda Aceh-based reporter tells the story of Haiwati who is due to give birth any day and had taken refuge in a mosque, which was subsequently flooded.

As she stood in neck deep water with her son hoisted on her shoulders she prepared for death when a large can floated by. Although exhausted, Haiwati finally summoned up enough energy to cling onto it and was carried to safety.

Aceh's only newspaper, *Serambi Indonesi*, which has survived threats from both the government and the rebels for its hard-hitting coverage despite the destruction of their printing presses and the likely death of 100 of their 250 staff, was back in circulation six days later.

The plight of 35,000 children either orphaned or separated from their parents, many too young to tell who they are, has touched a deep note across Indonesia. Not all those concerned with children are motivated by altruism, however. More than 20 Acehnese children have reportedly been smuggled out of the area in the aftermath of the disaster and many others are at risk of being trafficked. One organisation was offering Acehnese orphans to potential parents via SMS.

Had the mammoth waves hit here in Bali, the death toll would have been enormous. The celebration of Saraswati on Christmas day was followed on 26 December by Banyu Pinaruh when Hindu Balinese purify themselves in the waters around the island. If the tsunami had occurred here, hundreds of thousands who made the pilgrimage to the beaches that morning would have been killed. ●

Judy Pettigrew is an anthropologist who has conducted research in Nepal since 1990. She often visits Indonesia where her brother and family live.



I had known Jyotindra Nath (Mani) Dixit ever since he moved to Sri Lanka as India's High Commissioner in 1985. My last meeting with him was in October 2004 at a media gatekeeper's workshop as part of a peace building exercise between India and Pakistan at Bentota in Sri Lanka.

TRANSITION
A S Panneerselvan

In this interregnum, both of us have switched careers. I quit active journalism and to the surprise of many, including Dixit, I moved out of Chennai into Kathmandu. Dixit had become a columnist and joined the Congress, and when the coalition it led returned to power, he was appointed National Security Adviser. We never agreed on anything but shared a very cordial and warm relationship. I opposed the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of 1987 and he was its

Asia's post-tsunami future

The Asian giants are not emerging but re-emerging

There can be no underestimating the scale of human devastation wrought by Asia's horrific tsunamis. Family members have been lost, homes destroyed and livelihoods ruined. As is often the case in natural disasters, the poor are suffering the most.

And yet, even with damage to infrastructure such as road and rail links, the tsunamis' overall economic impact is expected to be minor. In the worst hit parts of India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the immediate interior was unaffected, while the tourism and fishing industries—the lifeblood of wrecked coastal areas—account for only a tiny share of these countries' GDP, as liberalising reforms have fuelled economic diversification and rapid growth.

It was not always this way. Historically, it has been difficult to convince Asians that international trade is not a zero-sum-game, with Asia invariably the losers. This is one reason why, after Mao Zedong's communists triumphed in China in 1949 and other Asian nations gained independence, most Asian countries adopted protectionist inward-looking economic policies aimed at building domestic strength, keeping the 'imperialists' out and achieving self-reliance.

Historical experience incites this suspicion. In 1820, Asia's share of global GDP was 60 percent, with China accounting for slightly more than half. That was two decades before the first Opium War. With the emergence of truly global world trade over the ensuing century and a half, Asia's economic dominance withered. By 1950, China's share of world GDP had fallen to under five percent, while all of Asia accounted for just 18 percent, the biggest chunk of which was attributable to Japan despite its defeat in WWII.

The winds of global change began sweeping through Asia roughly two decades ago, first in East Asia, then



engulfing China and in the course of the 1990s, blowing on to South Asia, most importantly India. What we are witnessing is thus not 'emerging' Asia, but the 're-emergence' of a continent that comprises 60 percent of humanity. Its two giants—India and China—are especially determined, as Indian author Ashutosh Sheshabalaya recently put it, "to return to their 19th century status, when they accounted for well over half of world economic output".

One result of this is that China and India are seeking to make a bigger impact on global economic policy. Both countries were signatories of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the precursor to today's World Trade Organisation) in 1948 but China under Mao subsequently left. Although India remained a member, it was often a recalcitrant one.

Asia's current share of global GDP (about 38 percent) is still far from what it was in 1820 but both countries feel that they can, and must, participate in calling the global shots. It took China's government a protracted 16 years to negotiate its re-entry into the GATT/

WTO but it soon showed its mettle.

So the Asians are coming: as markets, as states, as consumers, as financiers, as scientists, engineers and as corporations. Is the west ready? In an article in the *Financial Times* in July 2004, Standard Chartered CEO Mervyn Davies wrote, "westerners are realising how big Asia's corporate ambitions are". There is, however, a large difference between recognising that change may be coming and making necessary adjustments.

In contrast to the emergence of the west in the 19th century, which proved such an economic disaster for most of Asia, the continent's re-emergence can have an immensely positive effect on the 21st century's global economy, including, needless to say, the west. But this requires careful preparation, adjustment and management. This is of vital importance, especially in light of the fact that Asia's populations are still booming: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will see an increase in the next 15 years from 1.4 billion to 1.73 billion inhabitants, while China's population will grow from 1.3 billion to

1.42 billion. Little wonder then that these countries accept the imperative of a dynamic, open, growth-oriented and job-creating global environment. Yet despite these gales of change, institutional atavism prevails. Global economic policy-making remains very much a western game. It beggars belief that China and India are not members of the G-7. The Bretton Woods organisations—IMF, World Bank and WTO—remain heavily western in structure, leadership and mentality. This is especially true of the WTO, where Washington and Brussels seem more concerned at settling old scores than in engaging with new players. China will soon be the world's biggest trading power. Yet euroatlantic introversion still permeates the WTO. This mindset is also pervasive in western governments, industry, business schools and the media. None of these institutions in the west is ready for Asia's re-emergence.

History is not particularly encouraging when it comes to adjusting to profound changes—new actors and shifting balances of power—as the 20th century tragically and repeatedly demonstrated. The tsunami that so devastated much of Asia has provided an opportunity for all key players—in government, industry, academia, media and civil society—to look at Asia anew, at both the challenges and the opportunities that have arisen from its resurgence. These opportunities need to be seized with as much alacrity as the world has responded to Asia's sorrow. ●

Fan Gang, Director of the National Economic Research Institute at the China Reform Foundation in Beijing, is a member of The Evian Group Brains Trust; Michael Garrett is Chairman of The Evian Group and Executive Vice President of Nestlé SA for Asia, Africa, and Oceania; Jean-Pierre Lehmann is Founding Director of The Evian Group and Professor at IMD, Lausanne, Switzerland.

metaphor for the Indian state

National security adviser, J N Dixit, dies at 68

architect. I did not subscribe to his antagonistic postures during his tenure in Islamabad and he called me a "naïve peacenik". I was appalled by his decision, as India's foreign secretary, to court Israel and he said that I was "ideologically blinkered" to the post-cold war reality. He firmly believed that India's nuclearisation was a stepping stone to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and I have spent all my adult life campaigning against the nuclear establishment. When I heard about his death on Monday, there was lump in my throat.

Why am I missing a person who never saw eye-to-eye with me on any issue? What is my loss? For three years, between 1995 and 1998, Dixit and I worked for the same weekly magazine, *Outlook*. And when I was hosting my weekly show *In Focus: South Asia* for Sun TV, Dixit was one of it's frequent panellists.

Posthumously, I realised the importance of J N Dixit. He is the most obvious metaphor of the Indian nation state. He symbolised all that is good, bad, ugly and indifferent about India. And as an Indian diplomat and the arm of the Indian state, he put the country's interest above everything else, including the people's wish and regional aspirations.

His notion of national security, the country's interest, progress and regional leadership as a stepping stone towards a centre stage at the global arena all flowed from the cold war logic and he was successful in assimilating the hegemonic strands of both the Warsaw Pact Countries and NATO. Devoid of any ideological stand (in fact he was fond of saying ideology of any variety is a trapping that limits elbow room for both diplomatic and political navigation) his approach

was straight, overbearing and pragmatic from the Indian point of view.

This pragmatism helped both Dixit and the Indian state get out of many messy situations, though it was India's unilateralism that created the mess in the first place. Nothing exemplifies this more than the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka. From the bloody deployment of the Indian army in the late 80s, which resulted in one of the country's biggest diplomatic disasters and led to the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, India became a completely passive observer in the 90s. Dixit was instrumental in the former as Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and he authored the latter as India's foreign secretary.

Dixit is undoubtedly the most South Asian among the entire corps of career diplomats in the region. He has served in all South Asian

countries except the Maldives but including Afghanistan. One area in which he was consistent with all countries in the region was the question of refugees. He aligned with Soumyamurthy Thondaman to fight statelessness among the Indian Tamils in the Sri Lankan plantation areas, he was instrumental in providing basic amenities to Bangaleshi refugees after the 1971 war, he tried his best to impress the royalties of Bhutan and Nepal to treat Bhutani refugees in Nepal with dignity and even suggested during the post-People's Movement in Nepal to create a system where these refugees could be assimilated into Nepali society.

Talking to him always helped me understand the direction in which the Indian state was moving at any given point of time. Now, I am not sure who I can touch base with. ●

A S Panneerselvam is the Executive Director of Panos South Asia based in Kathmandu.



Radioactive hobby

Ham enthusiasts establish Nepal’s presence on the airwaves

AARTI BASNYAT

Like all hobbyists, radio amateurs are completely consumed by their pursuit. So much so that their friends and relatives wonder whether they are sane.

They are cooped up in their attics, calling people halfway around the world just so they can log the call and add a notch to their list. They are called ham radio amateurs and use frequencies in the short wave range of the radio spectrum which allows transmissions to bounce off the ionosphere to reach the other side of the planet.

The history of ham radio in Nepal is long and illustrious, and that is mainly due to the contribution of one man: Fr Marshal Moran the American Jesuit priest who started St Xaviers School in Godavari in 1951. At a time before Internet, before international phone calls, even before teletype, Fr Moran could reach any part of the world at the push of a



microphone button. Ham rules don’t allow operators to use their equipment for commercial purposes but hobbyists have been a big help during times of crisis or momentous events. Fr Moran became the point man for early mountaineering expeditions, including the first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953. Famous ham operators have included King Hussain of Jordan and King Juan Carlos of Spain. Ham operators in Japan have provided invaluable services

during major earthquakes, in New York during 9/11 and during last week’s tsunami hobbyists were the link to the disaster-affected areas at a time when all other communications failed. (See box).

After Fr Moran died in 1992, the torch was passed to a new generation of Nepali ham enthusiasts. Satish Kharel is one of five licensed Nepali Ham radio operators. Kharel is a lawyer but was always interested in electronics and even before he knew about ham radio he was tinkering with his shortwave set trying to tune into distant broadcasts.

Kharel had to sit for an exam held by the Ministry of Communicaitons to get his radio amateur license in 1993 and since then he has been flying the Nepali flag, as it were, on the radio waves. He built his first short wave radio through which he transmitted using Morse code, and it cost him around Rs 800. Today, Kharel has equipment worth approximately Rs 20 lakh though he is unable to install and use them all.

“Ham radio as a hobby is not very expensive,” explains Kharel, “and you can make it as sophisticated as you want. But the most expensive transceiver doesn’t compare to the pleasure of making your own radio.”

His legal work allows Kharel to use his radio only on weekends and during holidays when he is able to contact a lot of people. During Dasain alone, he logged 7,000 contacts all over the world in 10 days. He says, “You have to be able to devote three to four hours once you get connected. There are so few Nepali users that everyone wants to talk to you.” Kharel has totalled 50,000 radio contacts since 1993.

Kharel’s radio has also been of use to various people needing help during the Kobe and Gujarat earthquakes. His dream is to start a club station where licensed users can come and use the equipment. He feels that people have been unable to use ham radio due to lack of equipment and the fact that the Ministry hasn’t held the license exam since 1998. ●



Himalayan hams

When Rudolf Schwenger started off as a ham hobbyist in Germany, he had always wanted one day to locate a radio transmitter in Nepal. He had visited Kathmandu in the early 1970s and fell in love with the place.

Together with a fellow ham enthusiast who had an electronic joint venture project in Nepal, he worked towards that goal. When his friend died a few years ago, Schwenger decided to make the dream of making radio contact from Nepal true in his memory. It took a year of planning, and with help from local contacts and Nepali ham operators Schwenger finally set up his mast on top of the tallest building in Patan, the Nepal Bayern plant.

In one month, Schwenger and an Italian colleague were transmitting and receiving radio communications from all over the world—sometimes logging up to 100 calls per hour. Although the best reception is in 15 mHz, they tried to get a maximum number of calls in lower frequencies like the 1.8 mHz range also.

“It’s a fascination to talk to people all over the world from Nepal,” says Schwenger, who used to work as an electronic engineer for Siemens. The duo were inundated with calls from fellow hobbyists all over the world from who wanted to get confirmations of their calls to Nepal.

Schwegner is delighted to be in here where he says the people are generous and friendly despite all their problems. “In the west, we have all the comforts of modern living, yet we complain all the time. In Nepal there is lots to complain about but the people are still happy, it’s refreshing,” he says.

Schwenger does have a few complaints, the “noise” from vehicular traffic and unprotected electric implements which makes it difficult to pick up feeble signals from around the world. Also, Nepal has high fees for ham operators, a temporary license that costs only \$20 in Singapore is \$1,000 here. Still, the three weeks Schwegner spent in Nepal have been well worth the trouble.

“Andamans calling”

Ham radio operator Bharti Prasad has become the focus of communications with the Indian Ocean island after the earthquake and tsunami of 26 December where some 8,000 people were killed. The New-Delhi based housewife is using her radio to coordinate relief and provide information on survivors to relatives around the world. Prasad, 46, arrived in the Andamans on 15 December, little knowing that she would be at the centre of things within 10 days. Prasad has already handled 30,000 inquires. “When the tidal waves struck, we turned the transmitter towards the mainland and since then we have been flooded with messages which we relay on local telephone lines,” says Prasad who goes by the call sign VU2RBI.

IUCN

The World Conservation Union

Founded in 1948, IUCN-The World Conservation Union brings together states, government agencies and a diverse range of non-governmental organisations in a unique world partnership: some 1063 members in all, spread across 147 countries. IUCN Nepal works from the national to local levels to support collaborative approaches to ecosystem management and sustainable livelihoods.

IUCN's country office in Nepal seeks to recruit dynamic, self-motivated professionals for the 2 national positions of:

SENIOR PROGRAMME OFFICER, ECOSYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

The incumbent will be responsible for providing technical support to IUCN's ongoing national and local initiatives related to ecosystem management and sustainable livelihoods, lead and /or support the development of new initiatives, and will work to ensure lessons learned are fed back into the programme development and implementation process. She/he will work in close collaboration with other team members within IUCN Nepal and may be required to supervise some staff and consultants.

The successful candidate will possess a Master's Degree relevant to ecosystems and sustainable livelihoods, at least 6 years of relevant work experience including at least 3 years of direct field implementation experience in community based natural resource management with emphasis on sustainable livelihoods and equity issues; excellent interpersonal capacity and team working skills; fluency in English and Nepali; and competency with computer applications.

SENIOR PROGRAMME OFFICER, EQUITY AND GOVERNANCE

The incumbent will be responsible to develop, implement and monitor programmes in the areas of equity, social inclusion and local governance related to natural resource management. She/he will strengthen integration of and learning from these issues in IUCN's existing programmes and projects, as well as in broader natural resource management in Nepal. She/he is expected to build the capacity of national and field staff in equity and governance issues and contribute to new programme development.

The successful candidate will possess a Master's Degree, have at least 6 years of relevant work experience in understanding and addressing issues of social equity and inclusion and in promoting governance in Nepal. She/he will also have excellent interpersonal capacity and ability to work in a multidisciplinary and multicultural team; willingness to travel and work in the field; fluency in English and Nepali; and competency with computer applications.

IUCN is an equal opportunity employer; qualified women and members of ethnic minorities or disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply. Only short listed candidates will be notified. Interested candidates should send their CV, names of two referees and a cover letter clearly stating the position they are applying for and explaining their interest in the position by 18 January 2005 to: The Human Resources Officer, IUCN Nepal Country Office, P.O. Box 3923, Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: hr@iucn.org.np. Terms of Reference for the position are available at the Country Office reception desk or on <http://www.iucnnepal.org>

Women play too

Kesang Lama paves the way for other women golfers

It was not all that long ago on the golf course women used be considered just a pleasant addition. Not any more. Today there are more and more women golfers bringing an exciting new dimension to golf here in Nepal as well.

In a tournament last month I was fortunate to be paired with Kesang Lama and was stunned by her striking ability. Never before had I witnessed first hand a lady golfer hitting as well as she did that day. Her drives were well over 200 yards.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



She is the first Nepali woman I have come across who is so

determined to excel in this game with the aim of achieving something special. She only started playing last year and in this short time has reached a remarkable stage where she has won the last three tournaments she participated in. Her present goals for improvement are to get her swing into proper shape and to work hard at perfecting her short game. She is very diligent and seems to never tire of practicing.

I caught up with Kesang recently and stole some precious time from her practice routine.



Me: Kesang, how did you end up playing golf?

Kesang: Well, I was interested in the game long before I picked up a golf club. With the arrival of Tiger Woods, golf's definition got redefined, and that was when a lot of youngsters started this game. While I was working in New York and Hong Kong, a lot of my colleagues played golf. A few times they took me along to golf courses and I just loved the environment. About a year-and-a-half ago I was in the final year of my MBA in London. I went to a driving range for some classes and since then I think I've been hooked.

What should be done to get more young ladies to play this game?

I think golf's image amongst the youth in Nepal is totally different from reality. They think it's an expensive game for retired people. They should be given an opportunity to start the game, for which the golf clubs in Nepal should organise free lessons and provide free balls. I feel social clubs are in a much better position to support this cause.

What do you find are the beautiful aspects of this game?

It's a life long sport. Unlike other sports, you don't need a partner or opponent to play with. Golf can be enjoyed alone, as you are only playing against the course and its natural conditions. I find it a family sport as well. My family and a lot of friends play, so it's really fun. You get to walk like eight km in a round, which makes up for daily exercise. Apart from all that, there is really no danger of being injured.

What are your goals?

Well, for now, I don't want to sound too ambitious. My first aim is to be a single handicapper by the end of this year and play as many tournaments as I can to gain experience, both in and outside Nepal.

How supportive is your family?

I am very lucky that my husband, Wanchen Dhondup, loves golf himself. Being a four handicapper, he is very passionate about golf and wants me to succeed as well. On the other side, my dad encourages me all the time and wants me to be the best in anything I do.

Initially, Kesang regretted not starting the game earlier but has now convinced herself that even taking up the challenge at the age of 27 is not too late. She wishes there were more women her age or younger who would play the game with similar goals as her own.

So, ladies, call a golf club, schedule your first lesson and find out first hand if this sport could be for you too.

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



We ain't seen nothing yet

The Indian Ocean disaster will look like a picnic compared to the cosmic impact tsunamis



Space-related earth science is intrigued about the real Big Bang—the cosmic impact of a large meteor or comet that civilisation will witness, sooner or later.

The biggest tsunamis are not just caused by any earthly process but by cosmic events. Earthquakes on earth can't be bigger than magnitude 9.5, but comet and asteroid impacts have no such limit. The tsunamis they unleash are planetary events and happen once every 10,000 years.

Other planets are carpeted with thousands of craters but not earth. Our planet heals its wounds so quickly thanks to the vigour with which it recycles its surface. Only a few hundred craters are documented and a large number of those are buried. So before the space program, geologists didn't think about impacts as an agent of geologic change. They do now.

In 1979 Luis and Walter Alvarez started telling the world that such a collision was the mysterious event which ended the Cretaceous Period and ushered in the Tertiary Period some 66.4 million years ago. Geologists call this the 'K-T event'. When the buried ruins of the Yucatán Peninsula their argument triumphed and now scientists have rejoined creationists in the philosophical camp of catastrophism.

Consider what the Alverezes found. In rock strata all over the world, precisely on the K-T boundary, is a thin layer of clay and soot. Evidently the majority of the world's vegetation caught fire at the same time and a long rain of fine dust fell on all places at once. Simulations have clarified what must have happened. A rocky asteroid some 15 km across burned through the atmosphere, with a

terrible flash and a roar heard round the world. As it struck the ground, most of its mass and an equal amount of the earth turned into melt and vapour. This mass swiftly shouldered its way out of the atmosphere and condensed into grains of dust, flying in ballistic trajectories and low orbits that carried the grains to the whole planet.

When they came back down, every one of those zillion particles became a shooting star, and the sky lit up at an effective temperature of over 1000°C from horizon to horizon. The brightness stabbed downward for a quarter-hour and when it ended, whatever could burn was in flames. The resulting smoke and the fine dust from the impactor together plunged the world into complete darkness for months. The numerical models suggest by the end of that time, most of the world's land surface was near freezing.

The dinosaurs, the ammonoids and many other groups went extinct and certainly, we would have too. Such an impact seems to occur every 100 million years on average, so maybe we shouldn't lay odds on something that bad happening to us. But a much smaller impact, involving a 500m object would release a few hundred megatons of energy. It would burn up an area some 300 km across if it struck on land. If it hit the Pacific Ocean instead, it would raise a tsunami of up to 100m height at the shore. It wouldn't kill us all but it would be as bad as any of the worst natural events ever to affect us in history. One of those is likely every 10,000 years or so on an average.

When this knowledge sank in, some people began to talk

about watching the skies more carefully. There's a whole population of asteroids whose orbits cross earth's, a couple thousand probably. For this part of the subject—possible impacts and their impact on humanity. NASA's Spaceguard Survey is an excellent detailed study of the size of the problem and especially the types of hazards that impacts of all sizes impose. Read it and lose sleep. Maybe it will lift your spirits if you put on some military music and visit the US Air Force's can-do document, Planetary Defense.

There are lots of other boundaries like the K-T in the geologic time scale and some seem to be impact-related. On the whole, though, the really big changes that mark geologic time boundaries—mass extinctions, mostly—seem to be due to earthly causes like volcanism or climate changes.

In today's textbooks, tsunamis appear in the earthquake chapter but in fact two-thirds of all impacts should create tsunamis as they strike the sea. They would create waves many times greater than those triggered by the largest earthquakes. Cosmic impact mega-tsunamis must have wiped every kilometre of the whole world's coastline clean, probably more than once, in any given million years. And a million years is practically a geologic blink of the eye. The signs ought to be there, so we must go back to the outcrops and interrogate the rocks again.

A famous impact happened in the 20th century, in Siberia over the forests of the Tunguska River region. It looked and acted just like a huge nuclear bomb, only without the radiation, but the heavenly body that caused it was no bigger than an apartment building. ●



"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a cartoon character with a bad goatee can be a heroji) - as translated by UNACO - the United Nation's Assn. of Cartoonists

The Adventures of HEROJIG

HELLO. NAMASSTHAY!

by jiggy gaton

Shazam!

CELEBRATING ONE YEAR at NT!

Thank You Readers!

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.

But be a Herojini - and celebrate EVERY day!

"Most modern calendars mar the sweet simplicity of our lives by reminding us that each day that passes is the anniversary of some perfectly uninteresting event."

~ Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) Irish poet, novelist, dramatist and critic ~

Next change: Herojig goes Apartment Hunting in the K-doo.

All the comics can be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com - Send all Congratulations C/O this newspaper - Strip #52 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Dhaka Weaves Almost Spring** An exhibition of exclusively designed and hand crafted products on 9 January at Rita's garden, Patan Dhoka, 11AM-4PM. 5525095, 5520806
- ❖ **Ajanta: The Unseen Jewel** First major photo exhibition of Ajanta paintings photographed by Benoy K Behl at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. Until 19 January. 4413174
- ❖ **Life through the Lens** Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, till 15 January. 4413580, indigo@wlink.com.np



EVENTS

- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Saturdays at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- ❖ **War Photographer** A film by Christian Frei at the Baggikhana, Patan Dhoka on 9 January, 4PM, tickets Rs 50. 5542544
- ❖ **3rd Annual Wave Web Winner 2004** Website designing contest. Entry deadline 15 February. www.wavemag.com.np.
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** every Tuesday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

MUSIC

- ❖ **Soul-T** Live at New Orleans, on 14 January, tickets Rs 100. 4700736
- ❖ **Classical vocals and instrumental music**, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **All that jazz** with Abhaya & The Steam Injuns at Fusion-The bar, Dwarika's every Friday, 7PM. Rs 675 per person, includes BBQ dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

FOOD

- ❖ **Seasons Special** Luncheon at the Shambala Garden Café, Rs 450 per person including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. 4412999
- ❖ **New delicacies** Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **La Soon** Restaurant and Vinotheque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchok. 5537166
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vijayanatha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** Great views, birdwatching and tranquil atmosphere at the edge of Shivapuri National Park. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Dream Holiday** Package tour to Malaysia. Marco Polo Travels and Qatar Airways, 2012345, malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** Night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **AAA Organic Farm and Guesthouse** Rs 950 with three meals. 6631734
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Escape the Kathmandu chill. 4361600
- ❖ **Temple Tiger** One night package \$250. 4263480
- ❖ **Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort** Special packages available. 4225001
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Jomsom Mountain Resort** Two nights-three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, \$199 for expats including airfare and food. 4496110, salesjom@mail.com.np

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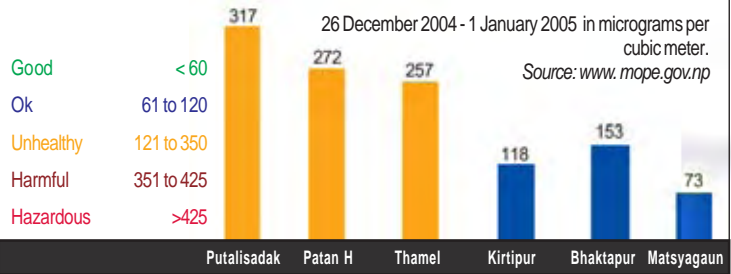
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On new year's day, Kathmandu's pollution level set a new record when the concentration of particulate matter small enough to stay in the lungs in Putali Sadak shot up to 511 micrograms per cubic metre. Similarly, in Patan Hospital and the residential area Thamel, the PM10 concentration was 495 and 424 micrograms per cubic metre respectively. These are new records. Air pollution levels in Kathmandu last week were extremely hazardous for health. The national standard for PM10 is 120 micrograms per cubic metre. Anywhere else in the world, people would be advised to stay indoors.



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



December was completely dry. The first westerly advance early this week produced no rains, except in the trans-Himalayan region. This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows that the days ahead will continue to be dry while morning fog and afternoon haze will affect visibility. (Notice the position of the moon and the earth tilted to expose the South Pole, where the sun doesn't set during the northern winter.) For this weekend through early next week, Kathmandu will see minima at 2-3 Celsius, which is the normal range. Early next week will see some cloud cover but still no rain or snow.

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NEWS STAND



KIRAN PANDAY

UNDER REPAIRS: Patan Taleju Bhabani, a temple in the Patan Darbar Square being renovated, the first time since being rebuilt after the 1934 earthquake.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PRESENT ARMS: The army's valley chief, Major Rajan Basnet, showing the media weapons captured from the Maoists on Monday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PEACE DRUMS: A Japanese youth group beating peace drums at the Kathmandu municipality on Monday.



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

DV DREAMS SHATTERED: People who had won the DV lottery but were denied US visas protesting in Ratna Park last week. The US embassy clarified that winning the lottery does not guarantee a visa.



KIRAN PANDAY

ALL FOR A CAUSE: Kanak Mani Dixit, founder of the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre, on Tuesday, before embarking on a 1,200km fundraising journey to Dhaka in his Volkswagen Beetle.

Leaving his stamp

It took a lot of toying with initials before he decided on KK Karmacharya. "Just enough K's," laughs Kancha Kumar Karmacharya, the 57-year-old artist and Nepal's most prolific postage stamp designer. As he nears retirement this year, KK has been counting all the postage stamps he has designed and there is a grand total of 389 stamps since 1967.

His first stamp was the International Tourism Year stamp on 14 October 1967. "Its hard to choose my favourite," he says when asked to point out the stamp he is most proud of. "I wasn't happy with all of them," he says. The ones he enjoyed doing the most were those reflecting Nepal's biodiversity: blocks of four flowers, butterflies and birds. "They were quite popular," he recalled. Then there was the strip with Mt Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse that were unique when they came out in 1979.

Karmacharya is no philatelist but he has collected all his first day covers diligently. "It's hard enough trying to collect my own," he smiles, "I never was interested in collecting stamps anyway, just designing them." His most expensive stamp costs Rs 25, and sells for Rs 80.

Painting on canvas and designing stamps are very different, says Karmacharya. "When I first began, I was a little baffled because you design on A4 size and then it gets minimised, all the space just disappears. "You have to think little while working big," he says. As an artist, it took quite a while to get used to the miniaturisation, but he did.

As emails replace snail mail, technology has also overtaken postage stamp designing. "All attention has moved to the technical and this has not necessarily been helpful to creativity," he says. Despite all his years at the post office, KK never took to letter writing. His passion remains with brushes and colours. He is well known for his larger water and oil works on canvas. Contemporary abstract compositions are his forte but he likes experimenting with modern figurative works too. KK Karmacharya is designing his last few stamps before retiring in April and he is already looking forward to painting fulltime. ●

Abha Eli Phoboo

KIRAN PANDAY

PRISMA/04

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Demos we'd like to see in our cracy

Hold it right there. Where do you suppose you are going? You think you can just walk in here and start reading this column? Stand back, we need to frisk you first. What is your user name? What is your password? Do you have security clearance?

Easy for you, isn't it? Do you have any idea how difficult it is to produce this junk week in and week out? This is serious garbage we are churning out here, it's no joke.

Anyway, here is my 15-point demand and if they are not met immediately I will begin a decisive relay pen-down strike at Ratna Park and stop all traffic indefinitely and will only call it off after human rights organisations and civil society make a unanimous request in writing duly notarised by a gazetted officer of His Majesty's Non-government.

This is one of the great things about

living in a democracy: the fact that a man on the street can march on the street to uphold the right to kowtow to authority, toe the party line, practice elocution and get some exercise. After all, there can be no democracy without demos and there can be no demos without taking out a post-prandial procession.

This is the land of jatras and no matter if you are protesting regression, demanding peace, desiring an immediate end to corruption, taking out a procession to wish a higher up authority happy birthday, commemorating the International Gastroenteritis Week or an agitated taxi driver, get your placard, light some torches, organise banners, clear your throat and go take a walk in the middle of the street.

The first rule is: for a demo to be successful it must inconvenience the maximum number of people and the best way to do that is to squat on the middle of the road in the middle of rush hour. This week alone, we had a plethora of demos which were a grand success because nothing moved the whole day. They were:

Rally of DV Victims: Hundreds of US diversity visa lottery rejects blocked traffic and shouted slogans like: "Green Card is a Basic Human Right", "Long Live Imperialist Running Dogs", "Long Live the Royal American Army", and "Yankees, Go Home but Take Us with You".

Torch Procession of Gubernatorial Candidates: Several hundred aspirants for the governorship of the Nepal Rastra Bank took out a torchlit rally this evening to stake their claim for the job. If the prime minister won't make them governor, they said they'd settle for peon.

Pashupatinath Shutdown: The high priests of Pashupatinath gheraoed Nepal's holiest shrine and took to the streets of the capital demanding their god-given right to remain middlemen in all cash transactions between ordinary mortals and the Almighty.

UML Anti-government Julus: The main partner in the ruling coalition took out a

procession to protest the acts of commission and omission of their own ministers in government. They carried placards that read: 'Down With Our Very Own Government', 'Our Turn Now To Make Omissions' and 'Give Us Our Cut'.

Corruption Motorcycle Rally: A cross-section of society, including dacoits, crooks, highway robbers and revenue officials organised a motorcycle rally demanding an immediate 20 percent increase in kickback, loot and bribes saying it was getting difficult to make ends meet. "Bribes should keep up with inflation, we haven't had an increase in decades," said one red-handed section officer.

Journalists March: Media persons from all walks of life, including columnists and fellow-communists, took to the streets of the capital for no particular reason. Said one scribe to this scribe: "It's a slow news week and we were bored stiff, so we took out a procession to perk things up." The march was chaired by Rishi Dhamala.

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