We need to talk

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

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

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 2006 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 sticking all on its ability to restore peace.

Political analysts say the UML doesn’t really have any other option but to stay in the 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 Deuba.”

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 fair and free.

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 Dahal, the people are waiting to exercise their democratic rights. Whoever obstructs the process will be seen as anti-democratic.”
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 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 road to the future’, #228) creates.

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.

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 his 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

OUTER RING ROAD

I have come across only one concrete reason for constructing the Outer Ring Road: 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 brother, architect Robert Weise, was called by the Anchalaphal 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 plan out all the problems with an Outer Ring Road (‘Willing to go after defaulters’, #227). When the law and policies don’t work, public defaulter 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
A division of the spoils

Head honchos of the reigning coalition have been squabbling over the nomination of a new governor for the Nepal Rastra Bank, a battle that has gone on for well over a week. Such unnecessary political jostling over a routine appointment is trivial and par for the course.

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

STATE OF THE STATE

CJ Lahir

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

The uneasiness between the premiership and the party is also inconsequential.

Once the phone rings from Narayanpathi, 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 the council of ministers doesn’t include the power to choose high officials.

The public bickering proves the old saying about political contest being nastiest when the stakes are lowest. Even if some pork barrel benefits, neither Death, in corner how troubled nor Bharat Mohan Adhikari’s reformed communists can gain anything by pushing their choice as a successor to an exemplary non-performer at the Rastra Bank.

In places where a new appointment can somehow 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 Singh Durbar differ on almost every political, administrative or economic issue of any significance.

Consequently, they end up kowtowing to the dictates of the de facto rulers behind the curtain.

To that extent, the present government is a textbook example of “consonational arrangements” prescribed by donor community for developing countries. Theoretically, consonational institutions are supposed to represent highly divided societies to help the growth of democratic polity.

In actual practice, such institutions 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 of the time, they remain 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 arms of a democratic state.

Hence, any attempt to eliminate those who don’t agree with authoritarian or totalitarian regime, 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 financiers, the 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 far side of the electoral spectrum.

After October Fourth splintered the badly fractured polity even further, each political force was left to the other in pleasuring donors.

Diplomats have further intensified their campaign of creating unity between “constitutional forces”. These ended up justifying the Maoist claim that the “national 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 minor players on the scene.

Once excluded from the agenda-setting role that the parties are meant to play, they have no other common concern. In any engage themselves in the game of pulling each other’s plates.

In the ensuing confusion, outsiders often do anything but appropriating the lion’s share in the name of resolving the conflict.

Issues concerning appointments to public posts is merely a symptom of the deeper disease of a depoliticised government.

If the affiliation spreads, it is sure to result in total anarchy or totalitarianism.

In the history of a country, wrangles over the spoils of office have seldom been settled amicably. The right way to show that the normal changes is still the way of democracy with rule of law and a system of checks and balances to moderate claims and reduce the possibility of excesses.

PROUD TO BE NEPALI

Be 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, Kopandole

TRAFFIC DARMNISHWIN

To acknowledge that Darmnishing is at work in the anatomy of Kathmandu 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 of management of traffic rules.

Kathmandu’s traffic sense will not attain overnight enlightenment by providing drivers with a crash course in human relationship management. Educators and intellectuals function on the premise that their own personal research and study can somehow exude 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 traits in human drivers also drive the drivers entrenched in traffic regardless of which society we live in, countries that have ample and excellent traffic rules, an outlet has been provided for these selfish, narrow-minded traits to be unleased.

For example, the use of four or more lanes is an innovation that can maintain traffic as well as provide an option for aggressive drivers to drive whatever psychological malymph is going on in their minds. Stower 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 courteses potential drivers 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 inner 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 reaction from people of those countries as well.

The problems of traffic chaos and the added mean spirited, self-centred nature of the drivers has more to do with our onerous traffic infrastructure than with anthropology. Civic sense plays an important role in helping 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 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 tolerate traffic lawlessness because it is a part of their life. People’s traffic rules are an uneasy compromise of hierarchy and authority rather than an attempt to impose on citizens a single type of vehicle, colour of the number plate and rugged, selfish individualism.

Traffic practices produce and reproduce as well as reflect social relations, and are in fact an important cultural feature 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

ARUNA UPRETI » NAGAPPATNAM

I t was like any other beautiful day on the stretch of beach near Chennai. The breeze from the Bay of Bengal was bracing, the sun glinted off the azure ocean. The palm fronds swayed in December. Women

The only thing missing was the presence of human beings. The beach near Nagappattinam, 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, Muhhi, 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 that my dog Ramu saved my daughter,” says Prabhakaran. Ramu had waded out as the waves receded to drag the floating Muhhi 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 of the 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 beach. The men realised they were piling the bodies of babies from the beach. I saw the blistered 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 Sri Lanka. The aftermath of the earthquake in the Iraqi city of London was exactly a year ago (see page 10, #183). But nothing prepared me for this. 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 insulated 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 Nagappatnam.

This is one of the worst affected regions of southern India and 45 women and girls were killed and over 650 injured in the first 24 hours of the tsunami. “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 washed away from the arms of their parents.

A mother and three of her children were sitting down for breakfast in Nagappatnam 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.

The coast is the village of MGR where I saw a soggy unopened envelope, it was a letter from a certain Karunasesha in Riyadh to Mr Kabirutan in the same village. I asked around but no one seemed to know of the man. I wrote a letter to Karunasesha 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 survive 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 trawlers 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 Nagappatnam is in ruins.

NAGAPPATNAM—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, clambered 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 we walked along the fish market, it didn’t happen last Sunday. The market was what drew people to their death. 26 December. Women were buying and selling fish with their children running around nearby when the tsunami struck and death and devastation.

Wrecked fishing boats and houses reduced to rubble. Crotons grown fat on unspeakable meals beneath the debris. Men wandering the shattered streets of home, frantically looking for their families, their fates. Government ministers clambering over wreckage to get in front of television cameras, drenched as they go.

This is the face of the tsunami in South India. I write from the heart of the devastation here. The town of Nagappatnam in Tamil Nadu has been used to a chaotic, dusty but rather well off fishing port. Hundreds of wooden towns, a future lit up its harbor and the Sunday fish market on the beach drew people from surrounding districts to get the freshest dolphin and tuna.

Now Nagappatnam is the centre of a vast relief effort aimed at helping the hundreds of thousands of survivors of the tsunami, men, women and children.

The sheer volume of aid that has come from informal sources in India is remarkable. Donations from Bangladesh donating their services, Kerala students who’ve collected toys, plastic tents and shoes and brought them all around the country. Volunteers from Lions and Rotary clubs cleaning up schools and picking up the pieces, along with the affected people themselves. It is truly remarkable.

The biggest job for Indian officials has been co-ordinating all that generosity and putting it where it’s needed most.
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

If someone had been reading history carefully, the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean would have had a tsunami early warning system in place by now. Under pressure from Indonesia, 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 2001 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 the sudden shift of the oceanic archipelago that had been discovered. There were unprecedented advances in scientific understanding and exploration of the natural world.

Krakatoa for the first time showed us that the things that we are 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 kilometers of that was dumped 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 Peru, Columbus and Manila, barometres in Washington DC and Hawaii detected the pressure changes caused by the explosion. Winchell 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 tsunami affected another war torn region: Sri Lanka. A cartoon in the Sri Lankan papers last week showed 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 total absurdity of civil strife. And if there is one good thing that can come of this, it would be the 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. Winchell suggests 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 colonialists by zealots clad in white robes can be seen as precursors to similar events like the bombing of the nightclub in Bali in October 2002.

Although Krakatoa 120 years ago was a much more spectacular trigger event than the 8.0 magnitude earthquake that hit the other end of Sumatra last month, the tsunami 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 Galé. A news item from the Ceylon Observer of the sea’s behaviour at Galé 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 larger. 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 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, exuding a terrible price in human lives. But unimaginable as it may seem, future catastrophes may be far more frequent, and thus more severe, 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 impervious 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. Kenny Sieth, 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, Sieth 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-scaping 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, the 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 visor.

Tel Aviv, 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 28,000 people were essentially crushed by their own homes. Electors oficials 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 Geo hazard International.

A recent study by Tsafand 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 tsunami. 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 catastrophes that receive no blanket news coverage: malaria, AIDS, crop failures and even global overpopulation.

“We are at a period in 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.”

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

This road was once covered by ocean waters during the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco. It’s now in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

The Day the Earth Exploded: Krakatoa by Simon Winchester

Hardback: $29.95

5 - 13 JANUARY 2005 #229

ASIAN QUAKE

7
Not non-profit
Commercialisation is not a bad word

By Rajeeb L Satyal and management and social marketing consultant

W
hy 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 time he\,\,\, he’s pleased with a bad mound commerce, sending the wrong message to the public and future generations.

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 businesses, individuals or entrepreneurs undermine their own profession and choose to project themselves as social workers. Society has been over-projection of 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 the past has been overly romanticised 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 how Nepal’s funders realise 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-governmental 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 develop the capacity to run the country. Nepal can achieve prosperity only if there is equal and equitable division of commercial opportunities, skills and resources among all Nepalis.

Commercialisation and competition have actually made the delivery of health and education education even more efficient. It has made hydropower a viable proposition and encouraged competition in the telecom sector. Deregulation of the domestic air industry has improved services and brought down prices. In retrospect, whatever little development Nepal has achieved over the years has 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 stereotypes about commercial activities and the abhorrence we have developed for the profit motive and private initiative.

NARESH NEWAR

Nepal is one of the 183 countries in the world that have signed and ratified the Montreal Protocol to phase out chemicals that harm the environment. However, 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 non-compliance list.

Not only this bemarcached 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 Birajang customs seized an illegal shipment of 74 tons of Indian-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 caught the smugglers. Instead it was blacklisted as a consult 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 in the middle of 21st century the ozone hole will have repaired itself. Ozone depletion causes 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 Nepal by 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 HFCs is 40,000 less a year as 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 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 Birajang were brought illegally into Nepal to be smuggled to India and the government hadn’t issued any import permits.

“Nepal has always complied with the Montreal Protocol since the beginning but the secretariat has been hassling us because of that illegal consignment,” explains Sitaram Joshi, national ozone officer at National Bureau of Standards and Metrology (NBSTEM), 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, there were complaints from exporters to 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.

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 environmental journalists who went undercover along the Nepal-India border to investigate the trade. They infiltrated the businesses importing and storing CFCs, selling it in poor-quality looking cylinders and transporting them across the border in Jagan Flaxed in rice sacks.

Nepal’s smuggling is mainly carried out by the same persons and groupings that were involved in smuggling of CFCs in India.

A smuggling network of up to 100 persons, who are identified by contact reports.

Customs officers have slowed down the smugglers but they change their routes and methods frequently and hard to catch.

Source: Uninished Business Bulletin
Nepal tops it in South Asia

The South Asia Intelligence review (www.sais.org) compiles a weekly table of casualties in insurgencies around South Asia. Nepal has consistently topped the list in 2004. The figures for the last week of 2004:

**Weekly Fatalities: Major Conflicts in South Asia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Most deaths were in Birganj this week asked for Rs 50,000 in 'donation' to the revolutionary cause. Most businesses have no choice but to pay up.)
Long dark winters ahead

Supply is not keeping pace with rise in the electricity demand

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

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 (low count). At the rate demand is rising, peak load will touch 560 megawatts this year, while the installed capacity is merely 16 megawatts.

The problem is that most of Nepal’s power is generated through open-circuit 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, Chakikhola, Sunkosi Small and Raian, 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 Hydro Power 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.”

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 jockeying has caused both to gather dust even when the need for a storage project is now becoming urgent.

Some 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 Sanasar 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.
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 January 2002, the Act lays down a non-political procedure for the appointment of the new governor.

Strictly Business
Ashutosh Tiwari

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

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 amusing others of lobbying for certain candidates, but not the political soap opera of selecting the next governor. Lost in the muddle were 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 Dilip Raiwal 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 means those who earn, save, lend and invest money. If the Rastra Bank gets these two quite wrong, then a collapse of the banking system coupled with rising prices will be the end result. 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 others out 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 a wary 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 regulations and that are compatible with the best practices from around the world. This means that, yes, probably willful 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 institutions. And second, in those 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.

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 Khattawad of the National Planning Commission, Deputy Governor Bijay Nath Bhattarai and economist Parthiveshwar Timotia. The prime minister is reportedly pushing Chief Secretary Bimal Koirala, but he would settle for extending incumbent Governor Tikal Raiwai’s term.

The PMO has made no comment, and despite repeated efforts, Governor Raiwai could not be contacted. The UML’s advisers have blamed donors for pushing their blue-eyed boys. (See: ‘Cor blimey, guv’nor’, #229)

Tools of trade
Universal Bank has added to its list of mini branches for nearly four decades. After their success with power tools for 15 years UTLST 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 guarantees are more than 100 outlets in Nepal. Its two-year warranty guarantees are more than 100 outlets in Nepal.

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 relief funds in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and Malaysia.

Privy 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 Nepal market. Users have access to email, Net, video, music, games, a comprehensive range of Microsoft Pocket PC tools and more. The authorised distributor in Nepal, Ocean Computers, have priced them at around Rs 55,000.

Old for new
Saganti Exim Pvt Ltd, dealers of IFB front load automatic washing machines, has offered the runs for the month of January.

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 a 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, was what 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 no 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 temporarily. 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 indigence goods are seeing strong demand. Then there is the lower 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 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.

AARTI BASNYAT

1.2 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 artists, 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 artists 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 artists 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 me enough artists with good songs in regional languages, I will consider introducing a new category,” says Shrestha. “Right now, there aren’t enough songs or artists 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 Namgay Gopal and Gopal Younjan. 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 Nepali 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 Nepali music 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, “Artists today think if they have a voice they can become singers. The old days when we promoted 1074 AD 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 by few true singers.

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

Awards night highlights

- Tuls Parajuli nominated for Folk Record of the Year category will open the show.
- The Moktan family performing for the first time. Kunli Moktan nominated for Best Female Vocal Performance, Shetal and Shubani Moktan who won the Best New Artists last year and Shila Moktan, musician and composer for the albums recorded by her wife and daughters.
- The nominations for Best Male Pop Vocals will come together for the first time in one performance.
- Udeesh Shrestha, Mahasawta Bajracharya and Anu from ‘The Destiny’ perform a tribute to Anu 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.

Madhyansha wins Best Performance by Group or Duo with Vocals in 1998
8th Hits FM Music Awards 2061

Nominees

Best New Artist
- Anita Subba
- Bharti Shrestha
- 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
- Adhikari Niraj Gb - Dubna Deu
- Bhuwan Dash - Kathay Tierra
- Colour Cubes – Es Maaka
- ‘Mai - Timire Bhikha’
- ‘Smich Sunwar - Saari Mu Pan’

Best Rock Composition
- Adhara Shrestha - The Axix
- Bachi Bahi - 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
- Dhunj - Biplav Shrestha
- ‘Pal Pal’ - Bishwo Shahi
- Yehin Hu TuMaaya - Pranil L Tiwalsena

Best Composition
- Alok Nembang - Dubna Deu
- Bhusan Dahal - Kahiley Timro
- Colour Cubes - Ek Mauka
- ‘Maya - Timire Bhikha’
- ‘Saanjh Ma Pani’ - Simosh Sunwaar

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
- ‘Saanjh Naya’ - (Music Director) Sanriwheel Baskota - (Film) Urukanamara
- ‘Timi Phool Manjari’ - (Music Director) Laxman Shes - (Film) Upahaar

Best Vocal Collaboration
- Pranil L Timilsena / Nabin K Bhattarai - Yehin Hu TuMaaya
- 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
- Nepaliya - Sa Karmal
- Tha Aka - Ashish Prem
- The Bottta - Ma Mara Pan
- The Boxers - Sundar Kark

Folk Album of the Year
- Baisi Reep Charho - Dendrai Rai & Friends
- Ghimbing - Tulsh Parijat
- Hamo Santtal - Subhi Bhayi Narayan Prayag / Friends
- Katha Sai - Mahesh Budhavali / Shripan Mata
- Subhi Bhayi - Budi Sagar Basel / Friends

Folk Record of the Year
- Banjara Diva Cha - Bhagwan Bhandari
- Bhanu Nabnam - Dinesh Kati / Gita Dari
- Maya Ko Bhaye - Prabin T Rai
- Pras P Dalma - Har Dei Koru Panchamat Naipane
- Sunkoshi Kinalmai - Tulsh Parajil

Best Female Pop Vocal Performance
- Anita Subba - Trimil Timi
- Bisheshi - Hari Dhan
- Masamn Gurung - Pantriwa
- Purnima Rajhendri - Nipa Haja
- Sunil Gurung - Pari Pal

Best Male Pop Vocal Performance
- Arlid Singh - Dubna Deu
- Babri Bhattarai - Chaicho Jina
- Nima Rumba - Chada Ma Pan
- Sanjib Pradhan - Santoshima
- Sugan Prabhakar - Manu Ko Basa

Best Female Vocal Performance
- Chandai Deiwor - Na sar Dha Gyan Desai
- Aaryahu Dho - Kunji Thakuri
- Manju Magar - Timro Bajya
- Reena Gurung - Timro Bajya
- Suniti Gurung - Yo Mayalu

Best Male Vocal Performance
- Kama Dei - Pandit Bajo
- Ramji Ramji - Chakal Bachan Toda
- Shree Ji - Ati Lily Sodhi
- Thupthi Bhakta - Timro Bajya
- Uddie Narayan Jha - Khalery Timro

Best Album Performance
- Jairam Ramji
- Narayan Das
- Narayan Das
- Ramji Ramji
- Uddie Narayan Jha

Song of the Year
- Jai Ramji
- Narayan Das
- Narayan Das
- Ramji Ramji
- Uddie Narayan Jha

Festivals:

Anywhere within the Kathmandu Valley
24 x 7 days Wireless Internet connectivity
High-speed stable link (64 / 128 / 256 kbps)
No telephone cost
Best for individuals, home users and small offices
Free email: one-email@yourcompanyname.com.mp
Online daily usage information
24 hours Customer support service ‘Call Centre’

Schemes:

Consumer Broadband, Volume
Consumer Broadband, Infinitude
Consumer Broadband, Cybercloud (hour)
Digging bunkers

Rajibhata 2 January

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 servants and collect firewood for the rebel’s ‘people’s meeting’ or cultural programs.

Bad choice

Bikash Thapa
in Kantipur, 3 January

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 necessary 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, project navigation and irrigation, the department will not have any role in other areas than hydro project 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 bungled 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 project. If the right agency represented Nepal and field studies were conducted in Nepal, the Indian state directly affected by the project, Nepal would know its shortcomings and about India’s development. For example, Without studies in India, how can Nepal know the benefits India will reap from the high dam? An example must be established in Bihar, just as they have been in Biratnagar, Dhanai, Sinha and Janakpur.

Hopes, resolutions

National Kathmandu, 1-15 January

Here are our new year resolutions for 2005:
1. A night-cap before bed, and only Royal Tag whiskey since it’s ‘worthy’ and enhances our commitment to constitutional monarchy.
2. Before breathing Kathmandu air is like smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. I will start smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. Nor will I 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, bribery 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.
When we don’t come true, one can only hope: 1. Whosoever for whatever reason can call a banda as long as the number of destroyed days total 52 in a year. That way I can have a long weekend every week.
2. I can be a pedestrian singer or songwriter to lose his life after colliding with a speeding 1200 Harley Davidson Streetvovk.
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 neighborhood your neighborhood also has it’s own morning blaston on loudspeakers. That way you don’t need an alarm clock.
5. On return from India, there is talk of neo-autoritarianism. Can’t we wait to see what a 21st century authoritarianism feels like.

New year

Budhakota, 6 December

The Armed Police Force organized a cultural program and dinner party for Crown Prince Paras on the occasion of his 134th birthday. Instead, he spent the whole night at a disco. On new year’s day, the prince returned to normal around six in the morning. After attending an event held by the AFP, he went to Scalee with his whole family. A new year concert had been organized by Indian citizens. The entrance fee was Rs 4,999. While dancing and drinking from entering, a bloody fight ensued. Many Indians were hurt and returned to India, including the prince headed for the Yak and Yeti where a bystander witnessed him yelling ‘Happy New Year’. He ran over the foot of the daughter of the former army chief, Pratwab Shcherbar Rose, and then to Galaxy at Everest. All news of the incidents reached the palace only after the public was informed. He returned to Nirmal Niwas 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 Dhamark 2 days ago and the children were flown there in another army helicopter later that afternoon.

Unite, or else

Nepal (Democratic) leader Bali Bahadur KC in Dhankuta, 2 January

In our party, it is the VC (Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba) who has become powerful but the organization has weakened. It was this same undemocratic style that led to the division of the Nepali Congress. This led to the splitting and forming the splinter Nepal Congress [Democratic], the functioning style of our party is not the same. The party has not been able to provide any outlet to the crisis of democracy. 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 constituent committee meeting, I raised the issue of the state of the party. I told them that we split from Nepal Congress in the 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
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 recognizing one another.

Camp Sanskrit

Govinda Pratapa, 5 January

A Muslim student in Biratnagar aimed to read Hindu epics Mahaabharat and Ramayana and to that end, Jitayk 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 Mahatma Gandhi University which plans to run similar camps in different parts of the country.

Leaderless

Nabin Pandit in Katmandu, 6 January

Everyone saw how Girija failed when her 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 benefit. 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 Prachands and turns around to collaborate with Deuba. It has no shame in making demands for the reinstatement of the same assembly, 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 Raina Park calling for peace and democracy, making no visible effort to visit villages where democracy is non-existent.

Ministerial fight

Dhulikhel, 4 January

Minister for Forestry Badi 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 not official and did not merit the position. No sooner had Thakali made the remark when Mandal shot 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.

Security crimes

Dhulikhel, 4 January

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 Stwal 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 Maharajgunj threatened to falsely accuse Chitra Chhetri from Gangabu of being a Maoist activist unless he paid Rs 200,000.
- On 9 August, police constable Bhum Bahadur Malla working with the unified command of security force in the Valley shot dead 25-year-old Santosh Kumar Dhakal of Santaul.

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 Indrak Ra. He blames the police organisation, which has not been able to discipline police personnel. Lack of stem action against such criminals of the law enforcing authorities is also the reason why these crimes have been committed once again.
Mixed legacy
WASHINGTON—World Bank President James Wolfensohn 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 not sure if he would stay in his post and added 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 that’s the case, then 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 somebody 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 emphasised 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 hope 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 adoption 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 they’re known best, that’s where they have their friends, they have extended family members who can look after them,” Shima Islam, UNICEF spokesperson, said. The tsunami disaster has left a variety of families whose parents were killed in the disaster to families of children whose parents were killed in the disaster to

shortly before midnight on new year’s eve, we drove through the streets of UBud, which lie on the outskirts of UBud. On a typical new year’s eve, the streets are almost 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 events.

Indonesia is 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 are also 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 equipped to emphasise with their neighbours in Aceh. The suffering of the 2002 bombings in Kuta, although of a 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 culture centre, posters urge people to donate to relief operations.

The emphasis of the drive is the creating of ‘loan buckets’ which will double as water containers. Each bucket is filled with a variety of goods, most needed supplies including purification tablets, oral rehydration salts, toothbrushes, sanitary napkins, first aid medicines, flashlamps, non-perishable foods, quick drying clothes and stove.

My brother’s friends. Made and broken. Almost. They are builders who are going to use their construction skills which are not only valuable and are 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 pinacy is common and despite the best intentions, all relief assistance is moving very slowly.

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

Aceh’s only newspaper, Sexualidad Indonesia, which has survived threats from both the government and the rebels for its habit of presenting the destruction of their printing presses and the likely death of 100 of their 250 staff, was back in circulation six days after the tsunami.

The plight of 35,000 children either orphaned or separated from their parents, many too young to tell what happened, 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 are at risk of being trafficked. One organisation was warned Acehnese orphans to potential parents via SMS.

Had the mammam waves hit inner-Bali, the death toll would have been enormous. The celebration of Sarawari on New Years Day was cancelled on 26 December by Banyu Pinlarah when Hindu Balinese purify themselves in the waters around the island in preparation for the New Year. It had occurred here, hundreds of thousands who made the pilgrimage to the beaches that morning would have been killed.

Judith Pettigrew is an anthropologist who has conducted research in Nepal since 1997. She wrote this piece from her home where her brother and family live.

I had known Jyotindra Nath (Mai) Dutt even before he became the 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 Bento in Sri Lanka. TRANSITION S Panneerselvan

In this interview, both of us have changed careers. I quit active journalism and now am the manager of a law firm. Dutt moved from Christchurch to Kathmandu. Dutt had been a cabinet minister and joined the Congress, and when the coalition it led returned to power, he was appointed National Security Adviser. We never talked on anything but shared a very cordial and warm relationship.

I oppose the Indro-Sri Lanka accord of 1987 and he was its
Asia’s post-tsunami future
The Asian giants are not emerging but re-emerging

T
here can be no understating the scale of human devastation wrought by Asia’s horrific tsunami. 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 roads and rail links, the tsunami’s overall economic impact is expected to be minor. In the wake of the disaster in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the immediate interior was unaffected, while the tourism and fishing industries — the livelihood of wreathed 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’ at bay 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 trade over the ensuing century and a half, Asia’s economic dominance waned. 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 global financial crisis began sweeping through Asia roughly two decades ago, first in East Asia, then engulfing China and in the course of the 1990s, blazing on to South Asia, most importantly India. What we are witnessing is thus not ‘emerging’ Asia, but the ‘re-emergence’ of a continent that has witnessed 60 percent of human history. Its two giants — India and China — are especially determined, as Indian author Ashutosh Sheshadri has 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 are signatories of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, the precursor to today’s World Trade Organisation) in 1946 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 India’s government a protracted 16 years to negotiate its re-entry into the GATT/ WTO but it is soon showed its mettle.

So the Asia is 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 ambitions are”. There is, however, a large difference between recognising that change may be coming and making necessary adjustments.

Thus the contrast between 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. 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 1.7 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 dynamic, open, growth-oriented and job-creating global environment.

Yet despite these gales of change, institutional paralysis 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 interventions still permeate the WTO.

This mindset is also pervasive in western governments, industry, business schools and the media. None of those 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 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 are arising from its resurgence. These opportunities need to be seized with as much alacrity as the world has responded to Asia’s sorrows.

Project Syndicate

Fan Gang, Director of the National Economic Research Institute at the China Reform Foundation in Beijing, is a member of The Evian Group. He was a former chairman of The Evian Group and Executive Vice President of Nestle SA for Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Jean-Pierre Lehmann is Founding Director of The Evian Group and Professor at IMD, Lausanne, Switzerland.

National security adviser, J N Dixit, dies at 68

architect. I did not subscribe to his antagonistic posturing during his tenure in Islamabad and he called me a “naive 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-war reality. He firmly believed that India’s nuclearisation was a stepping stone to a great power. In the ‘90s, 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.

Who is mournin 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 its frequent panelists.

Posthumously, I realised the importance of JN 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, the people’s wish and regional aspiripations. 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 hems both political, and national political system) 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. He never 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 Soumyanath Thondamond to fight statelessness among the Indian Tamils in the Sri Lankan plantation areas, he was instrumental in providing basic amenities to the Bangladeshi refugees after the 1971 war, he tried his best to impress the royaltys of Bhutan and Nepal to treat Bhutani refugees in Nepal both 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. I am not sure if I can touch base with.

A S Panagariya 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 crazy. 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 enthusiasts 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 Marshad Moran the American Jew who started St Xavier’s School in Gokulvati in 1951. At a time before Internet, before international phone calls were possible, Fr Moran could reach any part of the world at the push of a microphone button. Fr Moran didn’t rule out 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 Hussein 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. Hams blamed the lack of reliable communications for the disaster.

After Fr Moran died in 1990, his students in Nepal started 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 said he did a test for an exam held by the Ministry of Communications to get his radio amateur license in 1993 and since then he has been flying the Nepali flag, if it were, on the radio waves. He built his first short wave radio through which he transmitted using Morse code, and it him around Rs 400. Today, Kharel has equipment worth approximately Rs 20 lakh though he is unable to install and use them.

“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 transmitter 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 Koh-e and Gujratan 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 that the fact that he 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 Nepal ham operators Schwenger finally set up his mast on top of the tallest building in Patan, the Nepal Baptist Church.

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 hobbists all over the world from who wanted to get confirmations of their calls to Nepal.

Schwenger 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 comfort 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 Schwenger 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, with the know that she would be at the centre of things within 10 days. Prasad has already handled 30,000 inquiries. “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.
We ain’t seen nothing yet

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

Women play too
Kesang Lama paves the way for other women golfers

I was not all that long ago on the golf course women used to 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 such a lady golfer hitting as well as she did that day. Her drives were well over 200 yards. 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 that 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.

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 its really fun. You get to walk like eight km in a round, which is good 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 handicap 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, Warchen Dhondup, loves golf himself. Being a four handicap, 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. prdeepak@hotmail.com
MUSIC
- Soul! Live at New Orleans, on 14 January. Tickets Rs 100, 4700276
- Classical vocals and instrumental 7PM, every Thursday at Hotel Vaja. 4257175
- All that jazz with Aasha & The Steam Injuries at Fusion-The bar, Dzokas every Friday, 7PM. Rs 675 per person, includes BBQ dinner. 4473648
- 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 Rose Bar. 4491334
- Happening live jazz in town at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

FOOD
- Seasons Special Luncheon at the Shambara Garden Cafe. Rs 450 per person including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. 4412999
- New delicacies introducing pastas and snacks at Roadside Cafe, Kathmandu. 5527735
- La Soon Restaurant and Vinoteque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchowk. 9537166
- Sizzling Weekend Treat with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Seatite Crowne Plaza, 4279999
- Genuine Thai cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bahundanda. 5552131
- Delicious barbecue dinner Fridays at Summit Hotel, 5521810
- Farm House Cafe Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- Cafe Bahal Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamom tree at Kathmandu Guest House. Thamel. 4700632
- Vegetarian Cuisine at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- Splash Spring BBQ Wednesday and Fridays evening, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- Executive Lunch at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika’s. 4479498
- Dwarika’s Thali Lunch at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- Executive Lunch at Vinotheque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, 4452942
- Executive Breakfast at Top View Restaurant, 9AM. 4478083

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY
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 Patuli Sadak shot up to 511 micrograms per cubic metre. Similarly, in Patan Hospital and the residence Thamel, the PM10 concentration was 469 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.

KATHMANDU VALLEY
Decomposition was completely dry. The first wettest advance early this week produced no rain, except in the hilly mid-regions of the valley. The weather in the Kathmandu Valley on Thursday morning was pretty clear and sunny until mid-morning, with a high of 21 degrees Celsius, which is the normal range. Early next week will see some cloud cover but still no rain or snow.

NEPALI WEATHER

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Decomposition was completely dry. The first wettest advance early this week produced no rain, except in the hilly mid-regions of the valley. The weather in the Kathmandu Valley on Thursday morning was pretty clear and sunny until mid-morning, with a high of 21 degrees Celsius, which is the normal range. Early next week will see some cloud cover but still no rain or snow.

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Leaving his stamp

I took a lot of Trying with initials before he decided on KK Karmacharya. “Just enough Ks,” 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. “It was 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 1975. Karmacharya is no philatelist but he has collected all his first day covers diligently. “It’s hard enough trying to collect my own,” he smirks. 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. •

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.

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

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

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

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 Dhuaka in his Volkswagen Beetle.

Your digital wash

DigitAll Life style

with SAMSUNG Washing Machines

Kiran Panday
Demos we’d like to see in our cracy

Old 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 know tow to authority, toe the party line, practice education 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:

- 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.
- PushpaPatanath Shutdown: The high priests of Pushpapatanath gherao 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 Julius: 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 Cat’.

Corruption Motorcycle Rally: A cross-section of society, including dacists, 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 columnist 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.