Adding fuel to the fire

The government takes an unpopular decision and faces the heat

KUNDA DIXIT

Give credit where it’s due: the Dhruva administration has shown considerable courage in taking a potentially-suicidal political decision. Knowing fully well that there would be all hell to pay on the streets, it went ahead to announce hefty fuel price increases because it simply couldn’t delay the decision any longer. The price rises announced on Tuesday were necessary to stave off Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) from bankruptcy, ensure future fuel supplies, harmonise prices with India to stop smuggling, and reduce the kerosene-diesel differential to curb adulteration.

True, it did it only when refineries threatened to cut supplies, banks refused to lend, and there are murky questions about complicity of politicians and the NOC in allowing dealers to hoard fuel in the past week. But, says Bhusan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal: “Finally we have a government that has the guts to raise petroleum prices, this was long overdue and it deserves public support.”

The government was aware that this was going to be a hugely unpopular move, and was prepared for flak from the four-party agitation who latched on the knee-jerk populism of the fuel agitation to its anti- ‘regression’ street protests. Indeed, the demonstrations have been nationwide with party-affiliated student unions, transporters and trade unions joining in.

What the government didn’t expect was the UML feigning ignorance to point fingers at their own comrades in the governing coalition. This has backfired badly against the UML because in the public’s eye it exposed the party’s confusion about whether it is in the government or the opposition.

The NOC is running losses of Rs 300 million a month and is over Rs 5 billion in debt. It also needed to bring fuel prices at par with India to stop smuggling across the open border. The price gap has now been reduced, making smuggling less lucrative.

It’s just not the government that is arguing that the fuel price hike will not hurt the poor. “The majority of really poor people in Nepal do not benefit from low petroleum prices,” explains Tuladhar. “only nine percent of the energy consumed in Nepal is from petroleum products, 77 percent is from firewood and biomass.” What will perhaps hurt the rural poor is the inflation that the fuel price hikes will trigger.

The government says it has ensured a safety net by providing a transportation subsidy so that there will be no surcharge on kerosene supplied to 22 remote districts. And it is now going to allow the NOC board to review international crude costs every two months and set domestic prices as a step to keep politics out of petroleum.

Environmentalists also favour higher petroleum prices that reflect the true cost to the biosphere of burning fossil fuels. The economy will then be forced to turn to renewable.

Editorial

Oil and politics don’t mix

Running on empty

Interview

Ishwar Pokhrel

Energy like hydropower of which Nepal has in abundance. This switch will lessen Nepal’s crippling and growing dependence on imported fossil fuels, they add.

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Old is gold

The great thing about getting older is that the rest of the world thinks you are also wiser, although you know it for a fact that this isn’t necessarily so. There are lots of advantages to being youth-challenged in Nepal these days and one of them is the admiration and respect that society has traditionally reserved for old timers like us.

That is why we can get away with a lot more than we used to when we were young students vandalising public property. Like when you get to be a certain age (and, no, I won’t tell you exactly what age that might be) you can order people around to do the vandalising on your behalf for old timer’s sake.

Some of you who are getting older as rapidly as me will realise that as one gets in years, hair starts sprouting from one’s ear lobes. This is perfectly normal. It is when it stops growing that you should start getting worried. In fact, when you approach the autumn of your life, you want to have as much body hair as you can lay your hands on, especially in the slightly more unconventional parts of your anatomy. Adding extra fleece to the skin is Mother Nature’s way of keeping our cockles warm and toasty throughout the long winters. My nostril hairs have now grown so long that I have to tell my barber: “Not too much off the nose cone today, Rajan.”

The other habit that starts to creep in as one gets long in the tooth (where does this expression come from, since my experience is that we start losing even the tusks we have?) is that one starts reading all the spam that comes into one’s hotmail account. And we find ourselves lingering longer over items in the inbox that offer free trials of hair-loss remedies, botox treatment and a certain blue pill that guarantees to increase the size of your endowment overnight.

As they say, the child is the father of the man. Age allows one to become an adolescent pyromaniac again. So when Girija Prasad Koirala orders his friends to stop burning tyres on the streets they take his instructions seriously and instead set cars on fire. With age comes wisdom, political acumen and astuteness, which is why Girijababu can get away with proving to us once more that he is a complete and utter arsonist. In future, the army should train its bomb dogs not to lift their hind legs while sniffing out choppers carrying octogenarians.

Senior citizens are allowed by law to be less fussy about carrying out bodily functions in public. In fact, doctors tell them not to lock their bathroom door in case, god forbid, they do something stupid like fall asleep on the commode. Unfortunately, this increases the chance of some disgustingly young teenage member of the extended clan barging in while you are attending to an emergency situation trying to untie the injar of your survival before nature beats you to it.

But the beauty of it is that something which would have made you die of embarrassment in the old days doesn’t upset you at all when you cross 50. This applies equally to letting out a high-decibel borb in polite company or engaging in some hit-and-run passing of the trade winds when no one is looking.

One is only as old as one feels and my feeling is that none of us are getting any younger. Like me, there comes a time in everyone’s life when it is advisable to switch from injar to elastic in your survival.

Kunda Dixit
Tej Prasad Sitaula in Desantar, 9 January

For the last 240 years, the Shah dynasty has directly or indirectly ruled Nepal. In between, the Ranas ruled for 104 years with an iron fist. Over the past 12 years, the country has suffered from malgovernance of political parties. For the last two years, it has been under direct rule of the king. We speak with pride about how we never became foreign slaves. Ironically, we are slaves in our own country. Pritibi Narayan Shah believed in fostering national integrity. None of his successors displayed the same sense of responsibility and dedication to the nation. No ruler was capable of keeping it united. Consequently, Nepal was defeated in the Nepal-British War (1814-16) and we lost much of our territory. In the eyes of the British, the war ended with the recruitment of Gurkhas into their armed forces, thus undermining our Nepali identity. It was only after the 1960 revolution that Nepalis were truly free again.

The Ranas were arqphiles. They sent Nepali boys to die for the British Empire. Nepalis became known as people who were ready to die for foreigners. During 100 years of their autocratic rule, the Ranas pocketed the taxes that poor Nepalis paid. They stashed the money abroad and plundered the treasury to build palaces.

It took two brave patriots like BP Koirala and Ganeshman Singh to usher in democracy. Unlike today’s leaders they shared a vision for the country and worked together. Foreseeing trouble, the two leaders warned that fighting for democracy was the easy part. One false step could jeopardise hard-won freedom. But the leaders after them were selfish, with vested interests and no focus on national development. They looked the country and were obsessed with power. Once in the government, there is no question of anything if he made the king happy. Sher Bahadur Deuba, Madhab Nepal, Pasupati Shambher, Mohammad Mohsin and Sachal Shambher seem intent on restoring the Panchayat system, which is evident in the way Mohsin advocates authoritarian rule. Good quality and character are virtues of a leader that none of them possesses.

The country is witnessing a triangular battle between the king, the Maoists and the political parties. The king is self-centred and will neither bow to anyone nor talk to any party. He is not popular among the public and puts all his trust in the army. Maoist activities are based on violence and they have distracted themselves from the people and their political purpose remains unclear. The political parties lack harmony and cooperation within themselves. They are gradually losing popular support. India, the US, UK and Europe are making it worse with their supply of arms. They have lost hope for the restoration of multiparty democracy. All these signs show that the country will be pushed towards authoritarianism. Nepal desperately needs someone who can unite constitutional powers.

KIRAN PANDAY

We need a unifier

National Life & General Insurance Company takes pride to be the first insurance company to provide insurance policy for historical monument sites of Nepal
Running on empty

The government gets its oil price rise but will it now tackle the oil mafia?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The government has decided to bell the cat and announce the hefty hikes in fuel prices this week, he expected criticism from the media. Pradhan, however, said the Cabinet’s decision meant the Nepali Oil Corporation (NOC) would not go bankrupt. “The new prices finally reflect the cost of the fuel but it still doesn’t ensure a profit margin,” says the Planning Commission’s Shankar Sharma, coordinator of the price recommendation committee. The main reason for the crisis is volatile international fuel prices. For instance, even after the government increased prices last August when NOC was still incurring a monthly loss of Rs 580 million, losses rose even higher to Rs 700 million in November. A month later, the losses came down to Rs 480 million. This week’s price hike will allow NOC to go back to the banks and borrow for next month’s imports, says Sharma, “Now the commercial banks will resume lending to NOC because it is bankable again.” The NOC had borrowed Rs 2 billion from Rastra Baniya Bank and Standard Chartered Bank last August to tide over the deficit. But since then, it had been having a tough time getting other banks to lend it money to pay Indian Oil which supplies refined petroleum products. Pokhrel blamed political meddling in the NOC by previous governments for its woes and claims to have corrected the irregularities by allowing the board to fix prices based on international fluctuations. (See interview, page 31.) It remains to be seen whether the board will really be allowed to be autonomous. There are plenty of examples of the politicisation of other supposedly independent boards.

But Sharma says the board is serious about revising prices on a bi-monthly basis based on international and Indian prices. “We are looking forward to a decrease of prices in the Indian market because of the downward trend in the prices in the international market,” says Sharma, adding that if that happens domestic prices will also be revised downwards. Besides smuggling across the border into India, there is also the question of cleaning up NOC with its sleazy management and corruption that leads to rampant adulteration. For example, retailers say the corporation doesn’t send out tankers before noon so they can claim compensation for evaporation loss. “That is how they pocket the difference,” says Krishna Man Shrestha, chairman of the Association of Retailers of Kerosene. Then there is rampant unauthorised sales of subsidised kerosene to industries and business houses that are required to use furnace oil by law. “The corporation has been selling kerosene to bulk industries that are supposed to use furnace oil, we have records to prove it,” said Bijay Man Singh, chairman of Nepal Kerosene Dealers Association.

Hoarding around

The government got its price rise but this doesn’t mean it has a clean chit on the supply front. It needs to address the corruption that drives adulteration of diesel and petrol with subsidised kerosene. Until the rise in the prices of petroleum products was announced on 10 January, the Nepali Oil Corporation was supplying not even 10 tankers of kerosene a day in Kathmandu. The people were queuing up all day and they sold all that they had in a day. The government was sold to dealers who would start selling for higher prices the day it was announced. Now the government has allowed private dealers to hoard. The NOC Act allows private dealers to maintain their stock without being subject to inspection during price changes. This is a license to stockpiling and in anticipation of oil price rises. Minister of Commerce, Industry and Supply Ishwar Pokhrel admitted there was such a provision and he came to know about it only on Wednesday. “I have just come to know about it and we will do something to change that,” he said.

Kishorman Shrestha, the chairman of the Association of Retailers who sell kerosene at a subsidised price says the NOC seven sends out information on impending price hikes so dealers can hoard. This time, too, consumer rights activists believe NOC and the dealers were in cahoots to share the profits from hoarding. “The networking of the oil mafia is an open secret,” says Prem Lal Maharan, general secretary of Consumers’ Forum. “But former Commerce, Industry and Supply Minister Mahesh Lal Pradhan has justified the rules saying dealers need to keep stocks of fuel because the government doesn’t pay compensation when prices go down.

“The government should not be talking only about price hikes. What we need to address is the corruption that drives adulteration of diesel and petrol with subsidised kerosene. Until the rise in the prices of petroleum products was announced, we were selling kerosene at a subsidised price says the NOC seven sends out information on impending price hikes so dealers can hoard.

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Minister of Commerce, Industry and Supply Ishwar Pokhrel is from the UML but his own party has singled him out for attack because of the fuel price hike this week. In an interview with the Nepal Times on Wednesday, Pokhrel admitted he was a scapegoat. He also makes the surprising admission that the government has allowed fuel stations to hoard petrol-products and that there are many unchecked deliveries within the Nepal Oil Corporation.
Casualties of conflict

- Bhop Bahadur Shrestha was taken away by Maoists in Dudhkhanish VDC near Butwal and killed in July 2002. His wife, Kopila (right) was pregnant then. Today their child is three years old. Kopila dreads the day when he will ask, "Where is Daddy?" Kopila has mourned for three years but now she is worried about her son; feeding, educating and raising him. No one has come to help and there has been no government assistance.

- Dharmagat Basyal is also from Dudhkhanish. In May his 21-year-old son was taken away by Maoists and beaten to death. "It seems like yesterday. I am more dead than alive myself," says Dharmagat hoarsely. No one ever came to ask what happened to his son and he doesn't understand the senselessness of it all.

- Parwar Adhikari (right) from Ramapur still can't understand why reason the Maoists had for killing his 16-year-old son, Hari. Villagers have murmured that it was probably because he was a "spy", but no one wants to help him.

- Tulsi Pandey, 65, had two sons, now both are gone. Last year, soldiers killed her elder son in Parroha. The younger one, 21-year-old Yubaraj, was taken away last year and hasn't been heard from since. The mother's grief has been compounded because her sons are now classified as 'terrorists'.

Ram Krishna Bhandari in Butwal

justice system

provisions are the main reasons for violence against women and need to be annulled," Indira Phunyal, coordinator of Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children in Nepal told us.

Women victims of abuse agreed to speak out in the Women’s Court because they were frustrated with the way things were going in the real court system. "In most cases, the courts were of no help and the women wanted an alternative justice system," Phunyal added. Like in a real court, the Women’s Court also had a jury and in its summation it stated, "The cases presented show a clear case to question our legal system and serious revisions from the gender perspective." The organizers said that even when the laws were correct, legal loopholes allowed perpetrators of violence to get away.

The jury even went into the nitty-gritties like the fines that perpetrators of violence are required to pay. At present, the compensation paid by traffickers or abusers goes to the state coffers, but the jury ruled such punitive damages should henceforth go to the victim.

Even though this was a virtual court and the jury’s rulings are not legally binding, Phunyal maintains that the court set a social and political precedence.

Ironically, the court saw almost no participation from the government even though they had been invited. "This just proves the lack of seriousness on the part of the government on women’s issues,” said activist Meena Poudel.

This is the second time a Women’s Court has been organised in Nepal in the past 10 years and Poudel says it proved there has been no letup in the prevalence of abuse.

fend for themselves
T he Maoists are neither benevolent enough to liberate the downtrodden, nor do they seem to want a truly democratic environment. The revolution is full of contradictions, and it is being undermined by their shortsightedness and lack of a sustainable long-term political agenda.

**GUEST COLUMN**

Sadip Bahadur Shah

Essentially, the Maoist ideal is a shortcut to power through violence against a democratic state. Their ultimate aim is to establish a totalitarian communist regime. Accommodation and compromise are not a part of the plan. Even if demands for major constitutional changes are met, the Maoists propose to subvert the system to achieve their ultimate goal. Addressing the economic and political grievances of the people is therefore an absolute necessity, but not sufficient to delude or dissolve the insurgency.

The Maoists have built the ability to concentrate human and material resources tactically in support of operational goals through use of coercion. But the terror tactics have created a backlash. The Maoists have realised the erosion of their popularity, they fear the emergence of splinter cells and their acts smack of desperation. Let’s not forget that the Maoists are waging a war to reverse the democratic process initiated 14 years ago. Democratic governments are vulnerable to this form of warfare. Infused with the ideology of individual and political liberty, the state may be unaware of the threat, reluctant to acknowledge it and restrained from adopting prompt and effective measures to counter it. The key to the conflict is the support of the public. The Royal Nepali Army firmly believes that resolving the Royal Nepali Army’s conflict with the Maoists requires understanding their concerns and managing the confusion that has arisen. It is the Royal Nepali Army and the Unified military forces of Nepal that, with a more sophisticated and better understanding of the Maoist threat, will be able to figure out a way to resolve the conflict.

Even by the reckless standards of Dhanya Prakash Singh, Nepal’s Maoist insurgency is not in a position to be taken lightly.

**OIL AND POLITICS DON’T MIX**

P oliticians are known for populist grandstanding, that is what they are made for. So it’s not surprising the UML comrades want to have it both ways: Supplies Minister Ishwar Pokhrel hikes petrol prices with a flourish, but weekly and his party’s student wing is out on the streets vandalising public property in protest. Even by the reckless standards of Dhanya Prakash Singh, Nepal’s Maoist insurgency is not in a position to be taken lightly.

The basic idea of the business is you can’t sell a product for less than what you bought it for unless you are: a) stupid, b) a welfare state or c) Nepal Oil Corporation. To be able to afford subsidies, a government needs to be honest, i.e. it has to have a revenue source. Our government is none of the three. So, NOC is putting up public property as collateral to borrow Rs 2 for petrol and a whopping Rs 5.49 for aviation turbine fuel. (It makes some people think about the money for petrol.)

J N DIRECT

A S Panneerselvan says in his obituary for J N Direct (A metaphor for ‘Killed’, X229) that the late Indian diplomat ‘symbolised all that is good, bad, ugly and indifferent in the India-Pakistan narrative. Perhaps the right. But, when he wrong when he alludes to the case of Bhutan, referring to Nepal-Meet Dirg Dixit instigated, if not overly assisted, Bhutan’s absolute monarch to annex the 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutans who are languishing in refugee camps for over a decade now. Afterward Dixit created hordes so that these stateless people could not make a bid to return to their homeland. In other words, he effectively conspired to get these refugees ‘assimilated into Nepali society’. Clearly, Panneerselvan is misstating the consensus for consistent.

**COMMERCIAL**

Rajeev L Satyal’s Nepali Pan contribution (Not non-profit, X220) was more than appropriate. Indeed, the paucity of ever-developing countries like ours is not just commercialism-the article reminded me of a recent dinner in which I was rubbing shoulders with prominent Nepalis. A doctor introduced himself who was returning to Nepal. An engineer was similarly proud to introduce himself. It was a business man, and I asked him to sign the sofa and murmured something like “do business.” Such is the self-esteem of our business community. In New Zealand a few years back the immigration officer at Auckland Airport asked a doctor ahead of me on the line what his purpose of visit was, and was naturally very happy to stamp entry on his passport. When my turn came, he asked me the purpose of my visit. I said I was there to explore investment opportunities. The officer’s face glowed and he grappled with the permit, adding with a smile: “Welcome to New Zealand, sir!” Now, how many immigration officers at Kathmandu airport show this kind of gesture to potential investors in Nepal?

Ananta Amatya, Dhulikhel

Perceive

I couldn’t agree more with the thrust of your editorial! (A people’s ‘tsunami’, X229) in which you ask the king, the Maoists and the political parties to recognise their enemies. It is the inability of all three to recognise their true adversaries that is at the heart of the problem. Even Man Mohedan realized this in his little red book: ‘Joining a revolution is not like going to a banquet...in a revolution you must know who is your friend and who is your enemy.’

Mirnal Kumar, email

**KNOW YOUR ENEMY**

I earn regular reader of Nepal Times and once again would like to thank you for bringing to our attention a widely read news items from the Nepali press to public notice like ‘New year’ from Budhakal week. (From the Nepali Press, X229.) I was taken aback reading the column even though the incident described seems to be a pretty common occurrence. I am a student of political science, and our last class before winter vacation was on ‘Justice’. There have been different definitions given by thinkers, intellectuals, idealists, liberals though the ages. The ancient Greek had a simplistic idealization that justice is the interest of the stronger.’ This quite sums up the meaning of justice in modern Nepal. Where is the application of justice here? Are the rules and norms just applicable for the poor and weak classes of the society? Or is it that the prince’s position makes all these rules and norms applicable? Anybody should understand that respect bought with money is not worth much.

Milan Gurung, email

**MAMMAD DEATH**

I fully agree with Kanak Mani Dixit’s Southasia Beat column (Other deaths, X229) which argues that mammad deaths are worse, and nature is actually kinder. The tsunami gives us the ideal opportunity to realise that natural disasters like the Gujarat earthquake and the tsunami will not kill so many people if we did not live in unsafe houses, along vulnerable coastlines and were more prepared for the aftermath. In
neighbouring countries while Nepal forces systematically sanitise designated areas, ensuring security manpower and air assets.

Should the government declare a ceasefire too, the Royal Nepali Army is fully trained to function accordingly due to its peacemaking experience. The insurgency is stalemated, and it demands more seriousness from the Maoists for a credible ceasefire and a peaceful resolution. The current conflict must be seen as a part of the process of democratisation and the country’s transformation into a liberal democracy. The nature of the policy determines the nature of war. Should the Maoists opt to continue imposing violence, it would be within the ambit of the government to escalate the application of force to bring them to the negotiating table. If it is possible at all, but possible, relative strength at a decisive moment with help from India to neutralise the allies of the opposing side would clinch the issue.●

Excerpted from paper presented by Lt General (Retd) Sudd Bahadur Shah at a India Nepal Track II conference in New Delhi last month.

Adding fuel to the fire

The cost of energy and the price of power

During a middle-class Nepali meal, a slice of lemon is first squeezed, dipped in dal, and then squeezed again. This process is repeated until the last drop of juice is squeezed out of the lemon. The UML has adopted this technique in ministries under its control to extract every benefit from them before being kicked out.

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal

The sugar-shortage during Dusshera-Tihar, the Korean labour export fluxes, the mass transfers in ministry of finance, and the top-tosass in the Nepal Rastra Bank-governor have all been coordinated from Kathmandu to drive maximum advantage for UML cadre and coffers. Tuesday’s hefty hike in fuel prices seems to have been designed to pre-empt the presentation of the half-year budget by ordinance, and then offer sopps later to derive political benefits. The UML’s high-wire walk of remaining in government while being critical of it has been an admiral balancing act. Also, the gains may turn out to be illusory, if not harmful, in the long-term. By adding to inflation, Minister of Commerce and Supplies Ishwor Pokharel’s infamous that comrades Bharat Mohan Adhikari in the finance ministry will not be too able to control it. It may turn out that the schemers in Kathmandu have been looking for too smart for their own good.

In view of their own survival, comrades Adhikari and Pokharel have not seen the writing on the wall: despite a temporary spurt in revenue collection, the country’s economy is in a tailspin. For the first time since the Indian economic blockade in the late-eighties, Nepalis are losing hope of a revival. This has set off a cash crunch. Labour export has gone up, but the remittance flows are either decreasing or noising. This can mean only one thing: capital is leaving on the hourly channel.

The raging national economy is even more visible in the preliminary data for the fourth quarter released by Nepal Rastra Bank. The state spend only Rs 825 million on development but regular per capita expenditure during the same period crossed Rs 12 billion.

The agriculture sector is in trouble. Its insurgency has hit harvests hard, the government has reduced irrigation, and removed subsides without offering any protection from cheap imports. Other than for subsistence, it makes no sense to farm in Nepal anymore.

Tourism is limping along, but income is willing. Visitors are now confined to the Lukla-Pokhara-Sauraha triangle, and even here frequent blockades and bandhhas have taken their toll. Undercutting is rife, and our tourist industry actually ends up subsidising the Nepali trip to Tusita. And the domestic airline industry is doing well for the wrong reason: travel has become too hazardous.

Manufacturing isn’t doing much better. Other than instant noodles, biscuits, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages, most other imports are in trouble. The rebels have killed the goose that lays their golden eggs: businesses on which they depend for extortion money have shut down because of the economic blockade. Infrastructure, which is the single largest employer in the construction sector, has already fallen prey to insecurity. The urban construction boom in Kathmandu Valley and a few safer towns in the tarai keep contractors partially occupied. But they are not yet enough to sustain dozens of steel rolling mills and cement packaging factories.

The only sector doing well seems to be trading, which perhaps explains the rise in revenue collection from import duties. Not surprisingly, the trade gap between banks and low interest rates have been the engine of growth and remittances, as people with secure income take on more debt to finance consumption. Car sales have gone up, and so has the market for consumer durables. But this segment is too small to make a dent in employment; investment and consumption doesn’t create a value-chain in Nepal because most of the items are imported.

If the present coalition is asked to leave after King Gyanendra’s India visit next week, no tears will be shed. Nobody expected anything from premier Sher Bahadur Deuba anyway. But the Unified Marxist-Leninists squandered their political capital by wheeling-dealing just like the communists, business-cum-politicians in the reigning coalition. Its alternative vision of the economic system continues to suffer the biggest casualties of the UML’s association with Deuba opportunism.●

addition, we have to take into account what we have done and are doing in the name of ‘development’.

Natural disasters are devastat- ing but we need to remind ourselves that we live at nature’s mercy and should learn to respect its generosity in providing every kind of support that living creatures need. Negotiating this fact, human beings think themselves very powerful and try to dominate and compete with it. Governments haven’t learnt their lessons and design grand projects like India’s river-linking project, construction of huge dams displacing tens of thousands in the name of infrastructure. We chop down trees and make our children grow up in concrete jungles. Maybe nature is just reminding us to be prepared for future manmade disasters and to reconstruct our harmony with the ecosy.

Bhawan Upadhyay, Anand, Gujarat

MANUSHREETH TRAPAH

Though her analysis on gay rights may have some merit (Reverse lenses’, #26), Manushree Thapa needs to re-educate herself on the ‘bald dali’ issue. Being a column writer and supposedly an intellec- tual, she does not seem to get out of man-made caste systems. It should be clear to her mind that women are not made-man since they have some physical characteristics while the disyllable is the cruelty of Hinduism. If Manushree is an intellectual, she needs greater understanding and confidence to analyse the inhuman discrimination inherent in our society.

Bhesh Bhardwaj, Australia

As a person who has read Govinda Barlam’s Sohel Sanjhir, and treasure the experience of reading it, I was shocked by Manushree Thapa’s review of the book. (62 cups of tea, #24). ‘Shocking’ is the word Thapa uses to describe that Barlam chronicles in his book his drinking of 62 cups of tea. ‘What is shocking, Thapa writes, is not that he had so much or cigarettes but he wrote about it in such detail’. I would ask Thapa: Since when has it become a bad thing to describe mundane aspects of life—or, the consistence of the mundane and the dramatic in our lives—in a work of literature? Barlam’s book is not just about the ‘broken lives’ of the people in war-torn western Nepal, suffering whose he so poignantly conveys. It is also about the travel that he and his friends undertook. The book gives an exceptionally compelling account of what it’s like these days to travel from Kathmandu to western Nepal in a search of an understanding of the effects of the conflict, and of what goes through the mind of a sensitive writer during such travel. The travel, as Barlam precisely describes, does not consist exclusively of dramatic encounters with the ‘wounds of the war’. It also characterised by daily routines, infinite waits, and idle talk with fellow travelers and shopkeepers. Thapa赴美而不被触动的与伤痕无痛苦，被剥去享受便说‘goofy’. For some reason, Thapa, a

novelist herself, wants to see Barlam’s work reduced to a straightforward reportage with a simple political message. This is foolish. It is unjust. It may be the case that Thapa, as a particular kind of contemporary writer, sees no value in the transformative role that literature can play in our lives. Perhaps Thapa also gets bored reading Flaubert or James Joyce, but I suppose she, personally, has a right to feel that way. But I believe most ordinary readers like myself would enjoy Barlam’s work in its entirety, as a work of literature, and be deeply grateful to him for producing a compelling point of view, and helping us to try to recognize the historical moment in which we live.

Tatsuro Fujikura, Lalitpur

TV VICTIMS

The Linda Civil in Under My Hat jokes fun at the diversity visa protests in the streets of Kathmandu. ‘Comedos we’d like to see in our crazy’ #229) is deadly serious issue. I can’t understand why we are so desperate to come to America. Yes, we are facing serious hardships because of the Maoist crisis, but why don’t we think about the problems here in America: no sense of family, alienation, discrimination and many more. We only think about America’s dollars, good life but lunch, a third eye to other problems. We will be lot happier if we try to solve the problems facing our country and stay in our country. Fleeing to America is not a solution.

Bhumika Ghimire, Florida, USA

HERO IN ISTANBUL

While waking the ancient waterfont of Istanbul on new year day, I spotted a familiar image. We are webbed into a holiday vacation too, or is he an archetype? Maybe there’s a little Henri as all of us.

John Child, Kathmandu
Nepalis go underground

Compassion slips away to be held in reserve for the next tragedy

From years of poverty in Butwal to a pitiable livelihood in East London. From a respected teaching job in Pulchowk Engineering Campus to a tatty shelf stacking job in Reading. From a threadbare existence in Nepal to England and beyond. Many Nepalis in the UK have done well for themselves as doctors, bankers and managers. But there is a whole population of forgotten Nepalis in Britain’s migrant network.

Bikram Ale came to England six years ago and has been working in a London hotel as a barman ever since. Badri Bishaijot got a Chevring Scholarship for postgraduate studies and is now working in a bakery shop in Reading City. A former assistant dean at Pulchowk Engineering College now stacks grocery store shelves. These are some of the more decent jobs Nepali illegal migrant workers can get in Britain these days.

Students come to England, get enrolled in phoney colleges that sell documents and certificates and go to work full time. Hundreds of others clean hospital lavatories and the truly wretched ones who come in via the package service of human traffickers and end up applying for asylum disappear into the underground economy. At any given time 600,000 illegal migrant workers are estimated to be working in the UK, most have fled desperate economic conditions back home, some have run away from political persecution. But it is getting harder and harder to tell the difference. Across Europe, the phenomenon has hardened attitudes towards foreign workers with headlines like “Europe under Siege” in Britain’s tabloids. Middle England is convinced asylum seekers and illegal workers are taking away their jobs and benefits.

For a country struggling to keep in its young employed, and paying pensions for the growing ranks of the elderly, illegal labour is becoming a political hot potato. Cheap migrant workers play a vital part in the British economy, doing work locals wouldn’t do and for much less. At 2.50 pounds an hour, the underground economy adds an estimated five percent to Britain’s GDP, according to a BBC estimate. Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown even bases his growth forecasts on the current, unprecedented rates of migrant labour.

“The black economy involving illegal migrant workers is no longer in the periphery, it is in the mainstream of our economy,” says Harriet Sargent of the Centre for Policy Studies. They number in the millions and fill the chronic shortage of manpower in the agricultural, manufacturing and catering sectors. The British state provides them with nothing, and they work for a pitance, often below the national average of 4.50 pounds per hour. They help keep the wages down, while paying VAT like everyone else.

The migrant labour force has become the lifeblood of hotels and hospitals throughout Britain. In Peterborough, illegal farmands working below minimum wage for Indian gangmasters dig for onions. Some 30 Chinese illegal workers smuggled into Britain by snakehead gangs from Fujian were caught in a tidal bore in Merseamue Bay while picking coconuts last February, 20 drowned. The restaurant business is swarming with illegal workers, most of them are South Asians and Chinese. There are some 8,000 plus Italian restaurants, half of them located in London. But crackdowns in the cities are pushing many illegal workers to rural areas.

As elsewhere, Nepalis pack to where there is already a concentration of fellow Nepalis, leading to a build-up of little Nepals up and down the country. They intermingle only with fellow Nepalis or other

The world moves on

Compassion slips away to be held in reserve for the next tragedy

GALLE, Sri Lanka — Exhale from the horror of it all, a pause to reflect on how quickly the world moves on. For a week or so after 26 December 2004, it seemed as if tsunami and its devastation were all we knew. Vicariously, through television and tragically, through first hand experience, the world’s people came to fear their planet and its wrath.

Drawn to disaster and need to earning a living. I flew from the far side of the globe to join the gable of puzzled, shocked and horrified media voices. Safely ensconced in business class and niffing on smoked salmon or some such luxury, I wondered if I was doing the right thing. If getting the information out about suffering and loss was useful or mere voyeurism.

But on the ground, no time for such thoughts. There was work to do. I huge amounts of it. The heroic efforts of humanitarians since first and the stunned government agencies eventually got their acts together. Communities that had lost almost everything nevertheless found reserves of strength.

In Galle, Sri Lanka, a jeweller whose entire stock had disappeared when the waves crashed through his shop was feeding villagers who’d lost even more. His house was open to visiting doctors. Muslim imams, Buddhist monks and Christian nuns ran eumenical relief centres, all were welcome. Villagers whose houses still stood helped devastated neighbours clear debris and bury the dead. An Israeli psychiatrist lead Sri Lankan students in trauma counselling camps, encouraging survivors to rebuild their networks of community, faith and commerce. Austrian soldiers ferried children to clinics. British sailors rebuilt fishing boats.

India’s aid effort was more indigenous but equally energetic. The middle classes from outside the affected areas were generous, sometimes overly so, but always willing to lend a hand or send whatever was needed. Schools skipped spending money on new uniforms or excursions to send ruppes to the Indian Red Cross. A few politicians, not many but a few, gave up a day’s salary, as did India’s president. All in a good cause, a great cause, an irristible cause.

But now, nearly three weeks on, we’re getting on with life, in the hardship coastal areas and elsewhere. America is back to politics as usual. The Canadians are debating a stolen ice hockey jersey. The British prime minister and his finance minister are feuding, as before. Germany is deep in angst about its waning economic miracle and the French are, well, doing whatever it is they do.

It’s not that the forces of good within those countries aren’t still helping tsunami survivors and beleaguered South Asian governments. They are. Debt relief has been promised and aid continues to flow. Never mind that neither promise has been lived up to in past humanitarian disasters. Let’s hope the media holds good intentions to account this time.

But even in the affected countries, people are moving on. Schools are reopened, television chat shows are back to blathering about local celebrities and various daily ephemera is filling the public spaces of the nation.

Meanwhile, at the fringes of fading consciousness, a million or more devastated lives recede into the shadows.

For once, tragedy united dozens of wealthy countries with the world’s subsistence majority. Tourists and holiday makers perished and were blighted by the waves, just as the fisher folk were. It must be devastating for the bereaved and the traumatised to see compassion fade into content, then slip away to be held in reserve for the next tragedy.

But it’s the only way we can cope.
in Britain

Divided and exploited, desperate Nepalis work illegally in Britain’s migration network

South Asians. The educated young work as waiters in Indian and Bangladeshi eateries. Those with poor English skills throng restaurant kitchens. And the rest (like many married women who come to England as spouses of students) end up using hospital facilities.

The Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading County alone employs over 100 Nepalis, mostly women, as cleaners. “The number could be anywhere up to 150 people. And that is just one little hospital in the south of England,” says Krishna Dhakal, a registered ‘full-time student’ in a computer training institute who works 70 hours a week as a cleaner in the hospital.

Due to the lack of legal protection and official recognition, the newly arrived illegal Nepalis have no option but to seek integration into the British intern community. “The space to manoeuvre in British society is nonexistent when you are a Nepali, especially when you want to start a new life in England based on who you know rather than what you know,” says Subindra Bogati, a documentary film maker and international relations scholar.

For a grennborn like Krishna Dhakal, there is little else to do than follow ‘what everyone does,’ register for a course in a shady college like University Tutorial College in Reading City that charges 500 pounds a year; fill enrolment papers, get the visa extended as a student and keep working in a hospital without going to college in the hope of striking it rich some day.

The idea of ethnic integration that Tracey Blair’s liberal left government tries so hard to apply could not be more remote in this underground migrant community. A Pakistani sticks with Pakistanis, a Bengali will not have anything to do with the rest, the Indians do not venture anywhere else than their restaurants and their ramshackle houses. The Nepalis are busy eking out a living but still have time to backbite and categorise themselves just as they do back home even though they are all in the same boat, being exploited by gangmasters.

Reading City’s 500 plus Nepalis have set up two separate communities segregated along ethnic lines. As with other South Asians, ethnic division seems to become more pronounced when abroad. Bajans, Cibetians and Newars celebrated Dasain with the Reading Nepali Society UK and the rest (mainly Rais and Garungs) bond together in the Tamauduli Reading Nepali Society.

Marko Bojum, professor and expert in east-west migration patterns in Western Europe says, “When you don’t know what your rights as a migrant worker are, you get tossed and kicked around, exploited and oppressed.” Kamal Basuta, a Jhapa resident gots dumps for Peter Ricketts, an infamous gangmaster in Norfolk. He works 16 hour shifts, best double. He paid Rs 600,000 to a human trafficker in Maharashtra to get smuggled into the UK via Saudi Arabia and Algeria. The final stretch was a horrendous ordeal in which he had to travel as a stowaway in a freight train across France. Immigrant hotspots like Reading and Norfolk are under constant surveillance by the Home Office. But with only 193 full-time immigration enforcement officers, the ministry is overstretched to crush the network of traffickers and illegal farmhand employers. The government is all too aware of the ground situation, but seems to be able to do little more than get the media to accompany them on occasional immigration raids.

Meanwhile in farms, factories, hotels and hospitals across Britain, South Asians refuse to talk to each other, yet alone integrate into British society. Indians continue to dig dikes and work in hideous factories for less than 2.50 pounds an hour. Pakistanis are actively setting up corner shops and grocery stores in their own ghettos. Bengalis are busy importing brides. And Nepalis stick to their own divided ethnicities, while working at Indian restaurants.

International certification for forests

Nepal’s community forests have been awarded an international certification for sustainable extraction of herbal and medicinal products. The Rainforest Alliance is to award the first community-based forestry certification in Asia to the Federation of Community Forestry Users of Nepal (FOCOUN) whose members supply herbal products to the international market.

The Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) certification will help stem the destruction of herbal products in the Himalaya and the exploitation of villages who extract them. Eleven community forest user groups in Bajhang and Dolakha covering 10,500 hectares of community forests will get the certification.

Letter to Prachanda

Kingm Chamraj Phuyal (AI) has written an open letter to Prachanda sharply criticising his party’s human rights violations, including the recent attack on civils in Dalihe. In the letter to the Maoist supreme on 12 January, AI has asked the Maoists to investigate all cases of human rights abuse by its cadre. The London-based group has listed a series of killings, abductions and torture committed by the rebels. It also urged the Maoist leadership not to recruit and use children in conflict in any way.

Gurkha pay, pension revision

The Gurkha Army Ex-servicemen Organisation (GAEXO) has said the British government’s decision to review pay and pensions of recruits as a victory. British Defense Minister Geoff Hoon on Tuesday informed the British parliament that Gurkha pay, pension and other benefits of Nepali soldiers in the British Army were being reviewed.

After years of legal battles, GAEXO believes the posture of the British government is an indication that the Gurkhas will now be treated at par with their British counterparts. The organisation said it was all set to go to a British court late last year when the British government asked it to wait.

Hits Day

Hits FM is holding its eighth Music Award 2061 at the BICC on Friday and the event will be televised live on NTV from 4PM onwards. The number of categories have gone up to 19 and nominations are based on listeners’ preferences and evaluated by an independent panel. The categories include: Best New Artist, Best Female Vocal Performance Pop, Best Male Vocal Performance Pop, Best Performance by Group or Duo with Vocal, Best Rock Composition, Best Pop composition, Best composition, Best Music Video, Best Vocal Collaboration, Best Female Vocal Performance, Best Male Vocal Performance, Best Song Originally Recorded for Motion Picture Soundtrack, Folk Rock Record of the Year, Folk Album of the Year, Best Song in Foreign Language, Song of the Year, Album of the Year, Record of the Year and the Lifetime Achievement Award. Popular musicians such as 1974 AD have performed live at the Awards before. For this year’s performances, see Nepal Times #229; the list is in no particular order.
Khem Bahadur Khatri was killed in a security force encounter on 31 July at Baisawa in Chitwan. Human rights organisations which investigated the case certified he was not a Maoist combatant, but more than six months later his family has received no compensation.

Khem Bahadur left behind nine dependents. On top of the shock of losing their sole breadwinner, they have had to struggle to survive from one day to the next. Khem Bahadur’s elderly parents, his two widows and five children have been surviving on nettles and cattle feed. Some days, even that is not there and the family goes to bed hungry.

Khem Bahadur married his second wife, Kopila, as is the custom in some of these remote villages in Chitwan. A few months before he was killed. She gave birth to their son on 26 December, and looks frail and malnourished. “She should be eating food to restore her health but we don’t have anything, just dhindo,” says Kopila’s mother-in-law.

Khem Bahadur’s first wife, Krishnamati, had also given birth to a boy last month and she is worried about both Kopila’s and her own health. The family lives in Shahikikhor and don’t even know how to go about it. Luckily, a charity is now helping them but the need is great and the help is not enough.

As the only man in the family, the responsibility now rests on Khem Bahadur’s father, Gagan Bahadur Khatri. “I am old, at a time when others are supposed to take care of me. I have to handle five children 15 days old to nine years, two widows and my elderly wife, how can I do it?” Gagan Bahadur tells us, fighting back tears.

Gan Bahadur Muktan was killed in a security force action in May in Lothar in eastern Chitwan. He has also left behind his wife and four children aged four to 12. The family’s ancestral farm only yields enough food to feed the family for three months in a year. Besides, there is no one now to plough the fields. Gan Bahadur’s wife, Sitama, tried to earn money carrying firewood and working as a porter to feed her children. “Sometimes, there is no work and we all go hungry,” she says. Even though her husband was not a Maoist, she has not received any compensation.

No one offered sympathy until a charity appearing with war victims, JMC Nepal, came to help. For families of those killed like Khem Bahadur and Gagan Bahadur, the organisation has become a lifetime. The organisation is also helping send the orphaned children to school, but the immediate need are those of food and survival. In Chitwan alone, there are so many families that need help that much more assistance is required. Every day that the conflict drags on the misery throughout the country is multiplied.

ANIMAL KINGDOM
Jiggy Gatol

War victims left to their own devices
Families have not just to overcome the shock of bereavement, but also struggle against hunger

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Bull by the horns
A short manual on how to earn holy brownie points by rescuing Kathmandu’s abandoned street cattle

For those of us living in the Kingdom, the sight of a wandering ox is no big deal, unless of course you have been stalled in traffic at Chabahil Chowk for the past 15 minutes, waiting for the resident bull to finish his bran.

In its female avatar, the holy animal is worshipped as the embodiment of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. But sometimes when one sees a local shop owner dosing a cow with hot water, in order to rid herself of the chore of cleaning cow dung from the pavement, one wonders. The other day, when a local water truck slammed into a car and spewed off in the middle of the right, one wondered again about the spirituality of the driver. But such is the life of Kathmandu’s street cattle.

Personally, I admire the practice of letting cows run free on the streets. Better off there than where I hail from, where cows are raised in tiny pens and turned into burger behind closed doors. Still, there are accidents and abuse, even in the Kingdom of Nepal, and our cows need help. Despite strict punishment to drivers that collide with stray animals (and probably because of it) there are quite a few hit-and-run cases where urban livestock have to face with serious wounds. Many are left to rot on the side of the road. So far all of us, is a short user’s manual on how to save a cow:

1. If you see a cow in trouble, don’t ignore the problem. It is not about to go away.
2. Entice the help of others, as cows are generally heavy things and cannot be lifted into a rescue vehicle alone.
3. Secure adequate transportation. A Maruti taxi won’t do as the cows won’t fit in the back seat. A flatbed truck with folding sides works best.
4. Offer the driver expenses as petrol is becoming harder and harder to find these days.
5. Using a blanket or other soft material as a makeshift qurban and gently roll the cow into it. Then, with six or more helpers, lift the cow into the vehicle using the blanket. Sometimes cows use their god-like prerogative to struggle or baffle but don’t be dissuaded, as talking calmly to the cow in Nepal and being firm will do the trick. (However, do stay clear of flailing horns and hooves.)
6. Transport the injured or sick cow to the SPCAN Veterinary Hospital in Sital. A veterinarian will be called and the cow will be cared for. Now you can relax, knowing you have done a deed that will have the gods eternally shining down their appreciation on your kind soul. So that’s how it’s done, not a big deal really. But for Laksmini who got caught on the wrong end of a water tanker the other day, it was a life-saving event.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals-Nepal has opened a shelter in Sital where sick and injured animals are cared for by donations.

www.animalnepal.org
animalnpal@hotmail.com

INDRA DHÖJ KŠHETRI in CHITWAN

An alternative
Fed up with the real courts, women appear by work

Nevin Singh Khadka

If it hadn’t been for the Maoist insurgency, the problem of violence against women in Nepal would have been a national one.

But worried by the prevalence of abuse, activists and women’s groups are trying to spread awareness even though it is overshadowed by the conflict. They are convinced that talking openly about abuse, as they did in a unique “Women’s Court” in Kathmandu recently, is the first step in empowering Chitwan women ensuring legal reform. “The ‘court’ sessions lasted three days at the Royal Nepal Academy with dozens of women narrating the pain and agony of violence they had to undergo at the hands of family members and others. Their experiences left the audience and jury stunned. Most of the women were victims of trafficking, some had suffered domestic violence and a few had been physically tortured by soldiers or rebels in the conflict.”

“My husband suspects I am having an affair at an age when I have grandchildren,” related Aishnchi Bika from Sinduphalchok. “He beats me up every day and wants me to leave him. Where do I go at this age?”

Such marital abuse is not new in Nepal, what is new is that Bika stood in front of hundreds of people and publicly related her suffering.

A while later, Anandi Rai got up and narrated her suffering from the same stage, proving the point that not all abuse is in the open. “It has been more than 10 years since I was rescued from a brothel in India but people still treat me like an outcast,” she said softly.

Astika Thapa from Nawakot was not able to speak clearly when she stood on the stage. All she could say was, “I have been severely beaten on my head and I can’t remember things,” she said, fuddled.

The Women’s Court was organized by a consortium of women’s groups working on reducing violence against women, who felt that most Nepali women are now willing to share their experiences as a means of unburdening themselves and also to build up solidarity. Aside from their personal experience, the organisers concluded that the root causes of the violence are familial.

“The Women’s Court clearly showed that all discriminatory laws including constitutional
It's the economy, ulla
Let's keep politics out of it

We couldn't understand the economic problems of Nepal's far-flung areas so we politicised it. The result is a conflict that shoves no sign of subsiding. We wanted to give the country's economy the best person to lead as chief of its central bank but the appointment is mired in politics.

We make political decisions while changing heads of state enterprises and let the decisions. The current coalition government, like its predecessors, is the perfect example. You have one set of people in the party that will constantly and consistently talk about withdrawing from the government while the other set sits in to make hay while the sun shines. 

Passing scathing remarks, they let their affiliated organisations rise in agitation while they pretend to be clean. Everyone in the coalition is out to make a quick buck as long as it lasts. And this is a great time to rake in: no parliamentary accounts committee to organisations bleed to death. We use every opportunity to hit back at political foes and educate students to vandalise and destroy property clearly knowing that oil or electricity prices are pure economics. Irrespective of any political force in power, they cannot stem price hikes. We, as businesses, lobby politically to make loan defaulting kosher. We have a management association headed by the prime minister's wife that has little to do with corporate management cadre.

Political parties need to fuel their own cash flows and there is nothing like leveraging economic policies and scrutinise them, no public inquiry into expenditures, budgets are ordained by ordinances...it can't get any better than this. With the anti-graft body having figured out which side of their money is the scha, political parties are rocking big time. And of course those not involved in all this are crying foul. They want their chance too. Set up an all-party government and this will not change.

The more delineated politics is from economics, the better are benefits to citizens. We should drive the economic and not political masters. Innovative businesses that create jobs and keep the consumer happy drives the economy. The IT and outsourcing boom in India has created a whole new class of people who are driving the new economy. The reason it is thriving is because politics is kept out of it. 

In Nepal, the presence of multilateral and bilateral agencies along with numerous non-profit organisations have not served the purpose of delineation. Aid is about assisting the economy, not crippling it. The way it has politics at the user's end has complicated matters.
Dining out in style

It’s not just what you eat but where and who you eat it with

Aarti Basnyat

It is said there are two kinds of people: those who live to eat and those who eat to live. In the first category are those for whom partaking of food is not just the physical act of chewing and swallowing but a ritual of companionship and camaraderie. So it is not just what you eat, but where and who you eat it with.

Ever since the hippie era, Kathmandu has evolved a cosmopolitan range of eateries. With boutique restaurants the Valley’s cuisine is now entering a new era. As the world grows smaller and horizons expand, Kathmandu-dwellers are exposed to various new genres of music, art and culture. With this expansion, their culinary tastes have also diversified. Nepalis are exploring beyond dal bhat and aalu tama into salmon, pasta and steak.

It has become important for good food to be served in an ambience that gets the diners into the right mood. Boutique restaurants are not just about being expensive or exclusive but about maintaining the quality and dignity in food and décor. The size of the restaurant is another factor: most occupy a cozy and homely space.

Price is not the issue here. Most managers of boutique restaurants in Kathmandu say their clients are looking for the ambience and company and are willing to pay more for the right mix. Kunal Lama of café Mitra says, “When people walk into my café they know they will be treated well and the décor itself tells them that it will be a little more expensive than regular restaurants. But we guarantee satisfaction and a great experience overall.”

The market has expanded to include restaurants that not only provide great service but also specialise in exclusive Italian, Malaysian, Chinese and even Nepali tastes.

Chandan Kayastha of La Dolce Vita says, “It’s better to specialise in one thing and be very good at it than put everything from Mexican to Indian on the menu till it ends up being a hotchpotch.” He maintains that it is possible to run a restaurant based on one cuisine especially if the quality of food products is good.

In this exclusive arena of great food and good service, restaurant owners all over Kathmandu are learning the art of fine culinary tastes matched with an aesthetically appealing environment with which to please their clients. It is an upcoming business which will add sophistication to the tastes of the Nepali palate as well as provide cosmopolitan food for tourists should they want a taste of home. Or other people’s homes.
La Dolce Vita

Probably the best ristorante italiano in Thamel, it was established in 1986 by an Italian but is now run by the Roadhouse group and reconceived. Comprising of three floors with a restaurant, an espresso bar and a terrace, the food here is piu romantico in una città romantica. The pasta is homemade or imported and the spices used are from Nepal. Though the cooks are Nepalis, they get on-the-job refresher courses regularly from Italian professionals. The prices are reasonable and worth it. Guests are mostly regulars who have grown used to the excellent service and delicious food. La Dolce Vita is featured in Lonely Planet and has a quick turnaround budget lunch involving a 10” pizza and Coke for only Rs 125.

Krishnarpan

Krishnarpan Restaurant at Dwarika’s has become a must-see for expats and tourists. Even locals who can eat dal bhat at home find its spread and service exquisite. The menu is fixed and has set new standards for dining in style. Once you make a reservation and it is preferred that you do, customers get personalised menus with their names on it. The menu is fixed and ranges from a six-course dinner to a whopping 22-course one depending on the diner’s appetite. The experience is thoroughly Newari and the restaurant’s décor and floor seating reflect this. The menu is designed to include food items from all Nepali cultures, from Newari to Tibetan food. There is a special price for Nepalis at Rs 999 for the six-course meal.

Zen café

The Zen café is appropriately located next to the Buddha Art Gallery and used to be known as one of the more expensive eating places when established with a limited menu and specialised teas. Now the management has decided to revamp the place with a menu that is more extensive than expensive. Continental food with free Internet, the Zen promotes good food and art. Besides the Buddha Art Gallery, it hosts classical performances every Saturday from 5PM and plans to have Irish and other traditional bands performing soon. With a lounge environment and a big screen TV, seating is limited. Plans include addition of a cocktail bar. A delightful feature of the Zen café are free refills of tea or coffee. They are also open to the idea of catering for seminars or parties for which they open their terrace.

Jalan Jalan

Jalan Jalan is the new Malaysian restaurant that recently opened next to Bluebird Department Store at Lajimpat. Catering to people who want exclusively Malaysian food, the proprietor, Shailesh Bhatta says, “There are many restaurants in Nepal but none that caters exclusively to Malaysian food.” Those familiar with Malay cuisine will find all the familiar aroma and tastes of the peninsula, with a choice of degree of spiciness in the food from mild, middie to spicy. Bhatta’s mother, Dange, who worked as a chef in Malaysia for 12 years manages the kitchen. The prices are promotional and the restaurant hopes to attract middle class Nepalis. Real coconut and authentic spices especially flown in are used here.

The Chimney

The Chimney at Hotel Yak and Yeti was first conceived by the legendary Russian resident of Kathmandu, Boris Lissanovitch. In fact, even the name Yak & Yeti was his invention and he started a bar by that name at what used to be the Royal Hotel in 1969. The original copper chimney from that bar was brought over to the new Yak & Yeti Hotel when it opened in the early 1980s and that is where the restaurant derives its name. The menu tries to keep the original Boris touch with his signature specialities including the borscht which hits the spot on cold winter nights. Boris was a famous ballet dancer, big game hunter, master chef entrepreneur and entertainer of royalty. Legend has it that mountaineers on their way back from expeditions even used the chimney as a climbing wall. The Chimney’s warm fireplace and sumptuous food recreates a bygone era. Sorry, climbing the chimney is not allowed anymore.

Café Mitra

Established in September 2002, Café Mitra launched its bar lounge a year later. The café retains the integrity of the 75-year-old Newari building it occupies while creating a colourful retro ambience inside. Though many customers call the cuisine a ‘fusion’, Kunal Lama, the proprietor maintains that this is not so. Coming from an hotelier background, when he studied hotel management from Switzerland, it was only normal for Lama to open a restaurant after he returned to Kathmandu. Customers at Café Mitra are a pleasant mix of tourists, residential expats and Nepalis. Lama says that customers are usually friends and if they aren’t, they become friends through repeated visits to the restaurant hence the name, Café Mitra. The menu here is limited but everything on it has been approved by the management and is changed according to the preference of the customers. Café Mitra insists on consistency and is proud of the fact that everything on the menu is always available.

Vatika Fairness Face Pack free with Vatika Anti-Dandruff Shampoo!

20g face free with 330ml, 20g face free with 130ml.
Baburam writes
Letter from Baburam Bhattarai in Samaya, 7 January

In the short line that Samaya took to establish itself, one of its pieces, ‘Gadari ko Lahan’ (Trail of betrayal) caught my attention. I am not in a position to state how far the facts in the article are true or false. Since Lenin’s time, communist parties have followed the tradition of forbidding comrades from making internal discussions public. Until the 10th Convention of Russian Communist Party in 1921 Lenin allowed party factions to disseminate information on their own. But after that the party only put out an agreed line. Under Stalin, a strong tradition developed in which no cadre was in a position to air party differences in public. That tradition has carried on this day in communist parties. As a party member, I am not in a position to express any opinion in public. But it gives every right and responsibility to defend in public false things written about me. The Samaya piece says: “Most senior Maoists who surrendered were those on Bhattarai’s side. I don’t think anyone who has known me closely during my 27 years of political life and 24 years in the Communist Party would characterise me as a leader of surrenderees. None except those who joined a revolutionary movement out of rage or emotion ever quit. Those who deeply understand the meaning of revolution and translate those values into their life will not be lured away. Such individuals will be communists all their lives. It makes no sense associating me with those who have quit the party. It has become a routine task for the royal army to assassinate my character. The royalists have been especially hard on me since my writ was published about the palace massacre. I know the royalists were unable to digest my presence even in the last peace talks. But what don’t understand is how eminent journalists are unable to report facts. I urge journalists not to deal such serious issues with frivolity but to employ their pens on the behalf of truth.

Yubasari Ghimire in Samaya, 13 January

In Baburam Bhattarai’s letter, one can see original thinking on the differences between principle and practical matters, the existence of minority and defeated factions in the present conditions and the practice of Janabandha in the CPN Maoist. What is important is the fact that Prachanda, the party’s chairman allowed the letter to be published. Bhattarai, right now is not a thinker, he has become Comrade Lalody because of his commitment to communist philosophy and tradition. That is why he is not a leader but a follower. After his line was defeated or fell to the minority during the plenum four months ago, he gave himself up to the majority’s decision—the campaign for armed struggle. It is the government’s compulsion. The compulsion is based on the responsibility the government was given at it’s formation. When Sheh Bahadur Deva was appointed prime minister more than seven months ago, he was given the responsibility to form a government including all sides, maintain law and order and begin the election process of the House of Representatives by the end of this Nepali year. We still hope that the rebels will come for talks. That is why the government has been reiterating its appeal. The rebels have been creating obstacles by saying that they will hold talks only with the king. Under what provision of the constitution can the king hold talks with the rebels? The rebels have not yet made their strategy clear on why would they like to hold talks with the king directly. Surely, they would like to alliviate their stature by holding talks with the king. Otherwise, why should they talk at all with the government? The king has declared that the present government does not have executive powers. The government has not removed the terrorist tag and the red corner notice because the rebels have shown no sign of holding talks. As soon as they indicate that they are ready for talks, the government will remove the tags. As per the Maoists’ demand for a constituent assembly, how can the government that was sworn in under the present constituent act accept it? Accepting constituent assembly would mean trashing the present constitution. Can the government do that? But since the government has said it will discuss all issues raised by the rebels, the issue of constituent assembly can also be discussed during peace talks.”

Now, army blockade
Dhrishti, 11 January

DANG—The Maoists and the security force are taking turns to disrupt life here. The Maoists have blocked the roads as a retaliatory strategy against the Maoists. The residents of houses from Salyan going to Rukum after many villagers used the route to escape forced recruitment to the Maoist and road gang wars. The Maoists are needed to the villagers to dig the road. The villagers are now forced to use only the Rukum-Solja route. Buses can travel only till Lantai Bajar of Salyan. To make the situation worse, the security forces have started blocking buses travelling to Salyan from Kangurikot. Most buses have stopped operating from Dang. If the Maoists won’t allow free movement of buses, we will do the same. If you can’t travel all the way through Salyan, it’s better to stop here,” an army personnel explained to a bus driver. The people from Rukum and Salyan have been hit the hardest by the current situation. Essential supplies like rice grains, salt and others have not reached villages. It became much worse when the rebels removed markets near the villages of the two districts. The Maoists have announced that buses traveling from Dang to Shantinagar, Panchakule, Purundaha and Bagmati VDC will be given permission only after they register with the people’s government and pay taxes. On the other hand, the security forces have warned bus entrepreneurs that action will be taken against them if they ignore rules and register with the Maoists. “We are caught in the middle between these gun-toting amirs,” say the road people.

Buffer zone
Rajdhani, 9 January

Villagers in and around the Patan Forest Reserve demanded the resumption of the UNDP-supported Participatory Conservation Programme. The program was run in the buffer zone of the wildlife reserve until Maoist rebels ambushed a vehicle carrying conservation staff in the reserve last month. Because of the human and property loss, UNDP withdrew from the 10-year-old program. The program was suspended as it was Rs 1 million, the last installment for the Nepali year. The suspension of the program has left about 550 conservation groups without stuff. Under the program, Rs 7.8 million has been collected as deposit from conservation groups. More than 13,000 families have been associated with the program that has already invested Rs 10 million in the area. Encouraged by the success of the program, members of the consumer groups used to conserve the forests themselves after the security force vacated the area due to the Maoists. “Now there is no program. That is why conservation done at the consumers’ level will also be affected,” says a member of the development committee of the proposed buffer zone development council Santosh Shrestha.

At community forest users’ groups, small scale loan and cooperatives institutions, and other local groups have all urged the government to discontinue the reinstatement of the Participatory Conservation Programme. The Maoists also urged Maoist rebels to commit that they will not harm officials. The local groups are also lobbying to get UNDP to resume the project.

Displaced children
Kantipur, 11 January

DALEHO—Children of displaced families have not only been denied education, they are forced to work for meagre wages to survive. Six-year-old Lal Bahadur Nepali, who was studying in a primary school, now works in the district headquarters with his parents. He earns Rs 10 per day. According to available data, about 150 children under 14 work at the district headquarters. The children employed to carry bricks and heavy loads. Children under 10 years earn Rs 10 and those 10-14 years Rs 15. The DDC has employed refugee families to build the play ground. “I have no choice but to make our children help us carry heavy loads,” says Amarkanta Thulamangam of Naumche.

The fall of Daleikh
Rajdhani, 11 January

Many villagers who launched the movement against Maoists are now fleeing their villages fearing a counterattack by the rebels. They are forced to seek refuge at the district headquarters. The rebels have been ambushing and brutly beating villagers who rebelled against them, not sparing even those who took part in the peaceful movement of blockage campaign. “They could kill us anytime,” says a traumatised village from Basukot. now a refugee in the town. Last week, more than 35 villagers from Basukot abandoned their homes. The Maoists have threatened to start a ‘clean up campaign’ to punish those who joined the women’s movement without 45 yrs. The Maoists call the resistance ‘royalists’ and say they will be chased out. After the security forces were withdrawn from Dullu, frightened villagers have left homes and taken refuge in the Dullu Bajar. The number of displaced families has reached 125 in Naumche. There is a severe food shortage.

This petrol price hike was meant for increase of royal palace expenditure.

Nepal Congress leader Krishna Sitaula in Rajdhani, 12 January

The 13 January deadline for the Maoists to come for talks is not the government’s ultimatum. It is the government’s compulsion. The compulsion is based on the responsibility the government was given at its formation. When Sheh Bahadur Deva was appointed prime minister more than seven months ago, he was given the responsibility to form a government including all sides, maintain law and order and begin the election process of the House of Representatives by the end of this Nepali year. We still hope that the rebels will come for talks. That is why the government has been reiterating its appeal. The rebels have been creating obstacles by saying that they will hold talks only with the king. Under what provision of the constitution can the king hold talks with the rebels? The rebels have not yet made their strategy clear on why would they like to hold talks with the king directly. Surely, they would like to alliviate their stature by holding talks with the king. Otherwise, why should they talk at all with the government? The king has declared that the present government does not have executive powers. The government has not removed the terrorist tag and the red corner notice because the rebels have shown no sign of holding talks. As soon as they indicate that they are ready for talks, the government will remove the tags. As per the Maoists’ demand for a constituent assembly, how can the government that was sworn in under the present constituent act accept it? Accepting constituent assembly would mean trashing the present constitution. Can the government do that? But since the government has said it will discuss all issues raised by the rebels, the issue of constituent assembly can also be discussed during peace talks.”

Maoists’ present majority line does not produce desired results by ago, he gave himself up to the majority’s decision—the campaign for emotion ever quit. Those who false things written about me. The Lenin’s time, communist parties have followed the tradition of Baburam writes

Massacred

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<td>14-20 January 2005</td>
<td>&quot;India's 2005&quot;</td>
<td>Massacre</td>
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Quotes of the Week

This page is a collection of quotes from various sources. The quotes are written in a natural language format and are presented in a tabular form. The table includes the following columns:

- Date
- Place
- Event

As an example, the table entry for 14-20 January 2005 is as follows:

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>14-20 January 2005</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quotes are from various sources and cover a wide range of topics, including politics, social issues, and historical events. The information is extracted from the document and presented in a structured format for easy reading and analysis.
Disaster aids unity
The tsunami united Sri Lanka like nothing else

T

These are surreal times for Sri Lanka’s political leaders. Never before have they been sought after, sympathised with and offered promises of assistance from an impressive list of international figures as has happened since the tsunami ravaged the nation’s coast.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, World Bank President James Wolfensohn and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell were among the leaders in the post-tsunami consultation of donor countries that have promised to help Sri Lanka recover from the disaster. The list of countries offering assistance is over 400 long, with promises ranging from billions of dollars to mere tens of millions.

By the weekend, the Sri Lankan government estimated that the damage caused by the 26 December disaster was over $1.3 billion. Devastation included miles of flattened homes, schools and commercial buildings, long stretches of road ripped apart and the twisted railway tracks along the country’s southern coast. Yet this sudden moment in Sri Lanka, the country worst affected after Indonesia, has given rise to a question aimed at the political leadership: will it give life to a more accommodating and conciliatory vision to rebuild the country or revert to views that divide a deeply fractured land?

Hints of such a shift gained ground during the first week after the disaster with archivials reaching out at times from across the many political divided in this country of 19 million people. Most notable was the common ground reached by sections of the government and members of the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels to help the tsunami victims in the heavily battered eastern regions.

At the same time, the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga appeared willing to work with the country’s opposition United National Party, a move that was applauded by the local press and commentators on television. However, the little hope Kumaratunga triggered that her administration will pursue a policy of accommodation has begun to fade in the wake of moves that betray a clear political bias rather than the more urgently needed humanitarian one.

Colombo demonstrated this when it prevented UN chief Annan from visiting areas in northern Sri Lanka held by the Tigers that had as been badly devastated as the rest of the country. This move helped bolster the argument made by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that the government is denying tsunami victims in the north an equal share of the aid.

In another realm, the country’s political leaders are under scrutiny over the way it manages aid and assists the victims. The focus is on how civil society groups and other NGOs get the people in the devastated regions to play pivotal roles in rebuilding.

“A top-down approach will not work. The politicians have to let the people participate in the process of rebuilding,” says Aritha Wickramanayake, a lawyer and founder of the Sri Lanka branch of Transparency International, the global anti-corruption watchdog. “Legislators who are working at the grassroots will have to be brought into the process,” he adds. “We will have to watch those trying to make political gains from relief.”

While Colombo has still to embrace such a people-centred approach, the prospect of ignoring it and returning to the old top-down system is being challenged since the tsunami. Spearheading such efforts is a broad spectrum of people drafting plans to build shelters and community centres at the grassroots level the government can’t match.

The Sri Lankan government still has to answer questions these initiatives prompt: Will it, in a show of endorsing the politics of accommodation, back such an abundance of goodwill in rebuilding the country? Or is this—a shift by Colombo to place humanitarian and development needs over narrow political gain—too much to expect?
The path to sustained peace

When the millennium opened, world leaders pledged to seek peace, the end of poverty and a cleaner environment. Since then, the world has seen countless acts of violence, terrorism, famine and environmental degradation. We can change direction.

Knowledge, scientific advance, travel and global communications give us many opportunities to find solutions for the world’s major problems. When a new disease called SARS hit China last year, the World Health Organisation coordinated the actions of dozens of governments and the crisis was quickly brought under control, at least for now.

When Bill Gates donated S1 billion to bring vaccines to poor children, he made it possible for leading tens of millions of young people from preventable diseases. When an agricultural research unit called the World Agriculture Centre discovered that a certain tree could help African farmers grow food, they introduced a new and valuable approach towards overcoming Africa’s chronic food crisis. Unfortunately, such examples of international cooperation are as rare as they are special. With our knowledge of science and technology, the horrendous living conditions of the world’s poorest people could be dramatically improved.

Millions of people could be spared from malaria, HIV/ AIDS, hunger, and life in slums. The problem is not that we lack good solutions. The problem is that we fail to cooperate globally to put those solutions into practice.

United Nations Secretary General Koofi Annan has summed up the Millennium Development Goals and asking me to lead a group of scholars and development experts in identifying practical steps to reach the goals by the target date in 2015. This effort, known as the UN Millennium Project, will issue its report to Secretary General Annan on 17 January 2006. Our study, Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals, will be available for free around the world at the UN Millennium Project website.

The year 2005 will offer many opportunities for citizens around the world to assist that their leaders keep their millennium promises. After our report is issued in January, Secretary General Koofi Annan will issue a report to the world in the spring, identifying the practical steps that should be taken this year. Around the same time, an important commission on Africa will issue a report to the United Nations’ Prime Minister Tony Blair. Then in July, the UK will host the annual summit of rich countries.

Blair has promised that he will make the fight against poverty and long-term climate change the priorities of the Summit. In September, the world’s leaders will reconvene at the UN to decide on their actions during the coming decade.

The rich and powerful nations offer their leaders the chance to change the world. The US claims that it helps the world fight poverty but instead spends its military budgets on expensive weapons. Germany and Japan say they have a leading role in the world’s poorest people. The world’s richest countries will ask themselves why they should vote for Germany and Japan in the Security Council if they can’t keep the peace.

Nothing would be wiser for the world’s affluent countries than to fulfill their pledges to the world’s poor, hungry and disease-ridden peoples. Therein lies the path to sustained peace. 2005 is the year when words can become a reality and that the world can begin to fulfill its hopes for our new millennium. Let us make our leaders aware that we aspire to share peace and prosperity. Let us pledge that the rich and powerful should take real actions to help the poor, the weak and the suffering. (Project Syndicate)

Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Porous Societies, Sealed Frontiers

It takes just a couple of hours on winding road starting from Jhapa to arrive at the Bangladesh border post of Chabahar, traversing India’s Chicken Neck. The ecology remains the same but the human landscape is unrecognizable from just half a century ago.

This tropical expanse of Himalayan piedmont and Teesta floodplain looks identical across the three frontiers: the Kamala-Bahu basin in Nepal to the left, the Mechi river at the India-Nepal border, and the Teesta and Mahananda which flow into Bangladesh. A generation past Siliguri. The banana and bamboo groves, the villages on plinths above the flood line, the drongos and kingfishers on the roadside wires, the whiff of drying hemp. All this could be in any and the kingfishers on the roadside wires, the whiff of drying hemp. All this could be in any

The path to sustained peace

How to make the world a better place

The drongos look the same all over.
Putting Phempö on the map
A delightful re-discovery of the Kadampa school of Buddhism

This beautifully produced landscape format book, released by the up-and-coming Vajra Publications, is an important contribution to our understanding of the Kadampa school of Buddhism. The two authors, an academic and an architect, take obvious delight in the topic and transmit this infectious pleasure through the book. Ulrike and Hans-Ulrich Roesler modestly refer to their Kadampa Sites of Phempö as a ‘booklet’ and a ‘survey’, but in truth their contribution is much greater. In the summers of 2000 and 2002, they travelled to Phempö, 30 km north of Lhasa, in search of early monasteries. Not only did they find many monasteries and document them, but the authors were surprised to learn that in other modern guidebooks, ‘information about their present condition is scarce’. Their book, dedicated to the ‘people of Phempö, past and present’, is an attempt to put Phempö on the map.

The Kadampa school has played a central role in the history of Buddhism, as well as its spread through Tibet. This tradition, later absorbed by the Gelukpa school, was based on the teachings of the Indian master Atisha, whose disciple was thought to be the founder of Kadampa practice in the early 11th century. The monastic foundations laid by the Kadampas certainly helped strengthen Buddhist learning in Central Tibet, and Kadampa teaching focussed on practice rather than on philosophy and scholarship. According to the Roeslers, Kadampa masters stressed ‘a solid, step by step Buddhist practice, ideally by leading a secluded life concentrated on learning’ (p.7).

On their tour, the authors were intrigued to learn that all of the centres of Kadampa learning, except for the monastery at Phuchung, are to this day inhabited by monks or nuns who focus on their spiritual practice. The architectural sketches and photos presented in this book illustrate that by the 11th and 12th centuries, the Phempö region was home to a great number of monasteries with a thriving and vibrant religious culture.

After an informative introduction, the main text of the book describes in brief a series of religious sites. Concise written overviews of monasteries alternate with colour plates (some of the reproductions are a little over-saturated), giving a sense of the history as well as the present condition of the site. The appendices to the survey deserve special mention. The catalogue, or register, of Shatsampa is presented in full, including a photo of the Tibetan text, its transliteration and translation. The final appendix, with which the book concludes, is comprised of well-drawn architectural plans of Nesur monastery based on measurements taken in 2002. I have only two quibbles with this otherwise delightful book, one practical and the other commercial. For those readers not schooled in written Tibetan, like myself, it would have been interesting to have the meanings of the place names and monasteries spelt out clearly in the glossary at the end of the book. My other question relates to marketing: it never becomes apparent who the intended audience is. Not detailed enough to satisfy scholars and a little unwieldy for casual tourists eager to minimise the load of their backpacks. I fear that the charming Kadampa Sites of Phempö may fall in between categories and have a restricted readership.

The joy in its creation is perhaps enough for the authors, however, who write: ‘the extremely interesting and most pleasant experience of visiting these places instilled the desire in us to record in this booklet what we witnessed’ (Preface).

Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist and Director of the Digital Himalaya Project http://www.digitalhimalaya.com

Kadampa Sites of Phempö: A Guide to Some Early Buddhist Monasteries in Central Tibet by Ulrike and Hans-Ulrich Roesler
Vajra Publications, Kathmandu 2004
87 pages
ISBN 9935-695-3-5
Rs 1,400

Issued in public interest by FNCCI Media supported by
Positive putting
Putting is a mind game

You think you can do it. You know what to do. You know how to do it. Yet so often you just cannot accomplish what should be routine and simple. In the Kurkwa Tea Open earlier this month, I had more birdies and eagles than I have ever had before in a tournament. The sum total was a remarkable 26 birdies and two eagles in the four days we played. This is quite an achievement even at the top of the golfing curve, if I may say so myself. Without making lots of putts I could never have achieved this.

In a recent column I complained about my putting during the Surya Masters in early December. I took that as a challenge to improve and worked diligently for the past month. The results are quite apparent.

During last week’s event I was able to make quite a number of putts from inside 15 feet, something I was unable to do under pressure these past months. Yes, I still did have occasional three putts on a few greens, but overall, I was way above my usual average.

So what sparked off this sudden improvement?
After the Surya Nepal Masters, one of the first things I did was analyze and understand where I had gone wrong. This is a common practice all pros use to improve their game. I went through all my statistics of putting it usually record my putting stats after each round I play. I realized I was very uncomfortable putting from inside six feet, and this is where I was vulnerable. The result of this was that I was not giving myself a chance on sinking longer putts, as I would concentrate on just putting it close.

By being scared of leaving myself 4-6 feet. I was mentally just playing the shot 3 to 5 feet outside 10 feet without giving the ball a chance to go into the hole. In other words, I was literally chocking on these longer putts.

In putting, you need to have the right basics, and also the right attitude on the greens in order to drop puts. More than anything it is all about having the confidence and the willpower to sink it. Right before making the putting stroke a lot of unwanted nervousness creeps into the mind. The result? A hesitant stroke and a miss. I am not discarding the need of choosing the right line, the right pace and knowledge of the contours and slopes on the green. All these are equally important. However in professional golf it is more the ‘mind’ anything else.

Now, let me explain the details of the little success I have achieved in improving my putting. I practiced a lot of puts from six feet and tried to be more positive. This helped me considerably as I gained confidence to stroke the longer ones without fear. Honestly, I haven’t tried to change any of the mechanics. I just tried to be more positive, and with repeated practice, this habit was ingrained. The result was a better stroke on the ball.

Be more positive while you practice your puts or when you are playing the course. Unbelievably, you will see encouraging results. Use this knowledge to your advantage in the run up to the New Years Cup 2005 being held at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort on 22 January. Be a winner and you’ll soon be taking a golfing holiday for two to Malaysia! Catch highlights of the Surya Nepal Masters being shown on Ten Sports on Friday, 14 January at 1:45pm and on Saturday at 6:45pm.

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

Zen and the art of mountain biking
Kathmandu is the perfect place to take up off-road biking as a hobby

ANOP PANDAY

Nepal is the ideal terrain for mountain biking; it has mountains and narrow dirt trails that are euphemistically called ‘roads’.

When it started out in the US west coast as ‘off-road biking’ in the 1970s, mountain bikers probably didn’t realize they were inventing a sport fit for Nepali conditions. No wonder off-trail biking has taken off here in a big way attracting enthusiasts and professionals from around the world. Mountain biking along trekking trails across the Annapurnas and pedalling to Everest Base Camp are catching on as our own version of extreme hiking.

With shops selling bikes and accessories from internationally renowned bike manufacturers such as Gary Fiswer, Trek, Giant and Specialized, Kathmandu actually has some of the best gear in the world. But they can cost up to $2,000. The trick is not to go for an expensive one right away, start off with models in the Rs 20,000 range and if you find yourself really enjoying the great outdoors, you can always buy a better one.

The beauty about Kathmandu is that there is a wide selection of mountain bikes at the famous bicycle row along Jamel or at Dawn Till Dusk, situated at the Kathmandu Guest House parking lot in Thamel.

Now that you have a bike, what you need is to latch on to a group to ride with, preferably one which has some experience. Travel light: the lighter you ride the more energy you have for riding. The hills surrounding Kathmandu Valley are some of the most ideal mountain biking terrain in the world. No wonder, the Himalayan Mountain Bike Races are held here every autumn.

Himalayans are probably the world’s best player to start placing. Get off the Ring Road at Balkhu, travel past Chobar along the asphalt for 15 km towards Pharping. These are not off-road conditions but the uphills test your endurance and stamina. Once you get to the base of Hillman, take a breather. Have a cup of tea, get a glucose fix at the local shop under the pipal tree, acquaint yourself with the shop and its owner.

Take lots of water: this is your survival trick. A litre of water for each hour of continuous riding is recommended. The steep switchbacks up to Hillman’s ridge is only three km but it is real technical riding and will take up to half-an-hour to get to the top. Once at the top you can make the choice of continuing up for a while, resting or riding back down to take a half minute’s rest and pedalling all the way back up again. This is called training in intervals, a period of high intensity 20 minute riding followed by a 30 second respite. This will help in longer more serious rides like the day trip up the endless 10 km incline to Nagarkot. If you’re lucky you’ll be rewarded with a spectacular view. After Nagarkot you’re probably fit to try riding off-road on gawsey, sandy and rocky terrain. A perfect ride would be to the temple of Bishak Narayan and further on to Kot Danda and then on to more difficult sections of Lakhuri Bhanjangy via Singehri along the Valley’s southeastern rim. If you’ve been amased experience it is time to go further afield and ride up Sarangkot in Pokhara where the view is even better and the terrain even more challenging.

By now you must know how to deal with basic breakdowns: punctures, wheel tuning, brake adjusting and so on. Once you’ve started to ride, keep going. With experience you’ll find yourself enjoying the exertion and the rush of happy hormones that it unleashes.

SURYA NEPAL GOLF

Nepal Pashmina Industry

"Pashmina from NPI
I never leave with out it"
“Lata ko dekha ma gaundo tanderi.” (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goat can be a hero.)

HeroJig’s Adventures can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS
- Magh Bihu Jan 14, marking the first day of the month of Magh.
- Samayu Festival at Swayambhu on 15 January
- Amateur Nature and Wildlife Photography Exhibition at Nepal Tourism Board, Until 18 January. 5524202, 5549803
- Ajanta: The Unseen Jewels First major photo exhibition of Ajanta paintings photographed by Benny K Behl at Nepal Art Council, Babur Mahal. Until 19 January. 4412714
- Zen Paintings by Kuang Chi-Mo at the Buddha Gallery, Thamel. Until 26 January.
- Collective Reverberation Paintings by Manish Lal Shrestha at Gallery Nine, Lalitpur. Until 26 January. 4468964
- Lila Phewe Kumba Mela at Jomson. 92 29 January. 4630858, 3825849
- Life through the Lens Photographs by Kishor Kayastha at Indigo Gallery, till 31 January. 4413580, rdigofe@irnk.com

EVENTS
- Sanbir Mea Every Saturday at the Dhurana Bakery Cafet, 12AM-5PM.
- The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley at Hotel Vaja. 471545

MUSIC
- Unplugged Eve Full Circle at Moksh on 14 January, 6.30 PM. Tickets Rs. 200. 5528070
- Motocon Nite with Soul T on 14 January at New Orh’s Cafet, Thamel. 7PM-5AM. Tickets Rs 100. 4700788
- Shukrabar at Patan Museum on 21 January, 6PM. Tickets Rs 350.
- Classical vocals and instrumental music. 7PM onwards, every Friday at 1 Hotel Vaja. 471545
- All that jazz with Abhiya & The Steam Jazz at Fusion-The Bar, Dwaraka’s every Friday, 7PM. Rs 675 per person, includes BBQ dinner. 4479498
- Jatra Saturday nights with Loza. 6:30 PM onwards. 426662
- Experience with Prisja Gunung at the Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4412934
- Happening live in town at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7-45 PM onwards.

FOOD
- Italian Food Festival at Hotel Vak & Yeri. Until 22 January. 4405520
- Grand Odisa Festival at Hotel Regency, 6:30PM onwards. 4491234
- Special Lunch at the Shambhala Garden Cafex. Rs 450 per person including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. 4412999
- New delicacies Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Cafx, Jawaletah. 5521755
- La Seon Restaurant and Vinotherque, next to the Egyptian Embassy, Pulchok. 7051746
- Sizzling Weekend Treat with live music, dance and barbeque at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Corners Plaza. 4274999
- Genuine Thai cuisine at Royal Lotus, Soaltee. 5521331
- Delicious barbecue dinner Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- Farm House Cafex Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4372680
- Cafx Bahal, Newai and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4701632
- Barbecue-Ban Bhoj by Rajeev Sinha at Godavari Village Resort. 5566975
- Vegetarian Creations at Shala View Restaurant. 4480628
- Splash Spring BBQ Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- Executive Lunch at Toran Restaurant, Dwaraka’s. 4479488
- The Beer Garden at Jaiyanta, Godavari Village Resort. 5566975
- Dwaraka’s Thali Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4474948

GATHERINGS
- Jungle Base Camp Lodge in Bardia, special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Shripatri Heights Cottage Birdwatching and tranquil atmosphere at the edge of Shripatri National Park. steve@escapenepal.com
- Dream Holiday Package tour to Malawi, Marco Polo Tours and Qatar Airways. 2012345, malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- Gateway package Night’s stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5590875
- AAA Organic Farm and Guest House Rs 950 with three meals. 6307734
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge Escape the Kathmandu chill. 4361600
- Temple Tiger One night package Rs520. 4266620
- Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort special packages available. 4259001
- Weekend Special at Park Village Resort, Godavari Heights. 4796660
- Jomsom Mountain Resort Two nights-three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, $199 for expatriates including sightseeing and food. 4466110, salesjmr@jmr.com

Terror has a new name—Bobbi Sikander. Extortion, drugs, murder and kidnapping are his game. His very name strikes fear for he rules by fear. He can finish your life while you are still alive. He recognises no geographical boundaries and respects no international laws. One man, Kantilal Shah refuses to yield to his demands and pays a terrible price. Kantilal Shah makes an impossible vow to defy all odds and bring Bobby Sikander back to India and justice. This is his Elaan. Directed by Vikram Bhatt, Elaan is a crime thriller shot in Nepal on location, and will be brought over in its entirety to a US cinema later this year.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY
Just last week, we said that on new year’s day, Kathmandu’s pollution level had set a new record. But that record was quickly broken the very next day when concentrations of particles below 10 microns at Patalisadak shot up to 633 micrograms per cubic metre, an increase of 24 percent. In fact on the first two days of 2005, the pollution level was above the national standard all over Kathmandu Valley, even in the village of Matyaigau. Protestors burning tyres on the streets are not making matters any better.

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LOTS OF FLAG WAVING: Rally to mark the 203rd birthday of King Prithivi Narayan Shah and National Unity Day on Tuesday at his statue outside Singha Darbar.

TUSKER RALLY: Elephants bearing portraits of royalty to mark National Unity Day in Narayangad on Tuesday.

EFFIGY BURNING: Students of Ratna Rajya Campus on Exhibition Road set fire to an effigy of Supplies Minister, Jhawar Pokhrel on Tuesday soon after the announcement of the fuel price hike.

REMEMBERING ROBIN: The memorial service at a monastery in Kapan on Monday to remember Robin Needham of CARE Nepal, who was washed away by waves in Phuket on 26 December. His wife, Lucy, offers flowers.

MAMMA MIA: Italian chef, Vito Frıo, at the Yak & Yeti’s Italian Food Festival dishes it out to lean and hungry guests on Monday. The festival is on till 22 January.

Bandipur sisters

Evangel and Miriam, (pictured below), are two of the most famous and respected foreigners in Bandipur. For the locals of this scenic hilltop town, the two are not just Japanese Catholic nuns but fellow Bandipureys.

Located halfway between Pokhara and Kathmandu, education is a serious issue for this town. Twenty years ago it supported the setting up of the Japanese Notre Dame School. When the Maoists closed it down with other missionary schools in Gorkha and Tansen four years ago, more than 600 students had to leave for boarding schools in Pokhara and Kathmandu.

“The people were heartbroken and we were sorry to go,” recalls Evangel who is affiliated with Japan’s School Sisters of Notre Dame that runs schools across the developing world. Both Miriam and Evangel left for Japan expecting never to return but when word came in 2003 that the school could reopen, the sisters rushed back.

It was like starting all over again, new students and teachers had to be found. But progress was quick and soon Notre Dame will be a high school. Miriam and Evangel say they hope they won’t have to leave again and the situation in Nepal will get better. But recently the school received another threat from the rebels to close down. This time, parents have taken matters into their own hands and are determined to keep the school open. Says Miriam. “The Maoists should know we are here only to give good education to the children especially those who can’t afford good schools.”

Naresh Sarwar