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p8-9


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 Weekly Internet Poll # 278

Q. Is it right for the main political parties to boycott municipal and general elections?

Total votes: 5,012



Yes 50.4%

No 47.7%

Don't know 1.9%

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Q. What do you think 2006 has in store for Nepal?

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Prachanda's new path



GIRISH POKHREL

With less than two weeks to go before their ceasefire extension expires on 3 January, the Maoists say they are now training their sights on the capital.

In briefings to select journalists taken to their heartland in Rukum earlier this month, senior rebel commanders hinted they were following a two-track policy of using the political process and, if that path is blocked, step up guerrilla attacks in and around the capital to pressure the regime.

The Maoists have been holding large meetings this month throughout the midwest from where they launched the war 10 years ago. The aim is to explain the decisions taken at their central committee meeting and also the deal struck with the seven-party alliance. Their battle cry is: "To Kathmandu."

One of the videos shown at the rallies depicts Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) wiping tears as he watched an opera about fallen 'martyrs' titled *Yuddha Maidan Bata Pharkada* (Returning from the Battlefield). This grab (left) from the video is the most recent picture of Dahal and shows a dapper comrade with graying hair and moustache. The video was taken after the central committee in Chungbang on the Rolpa-Rukum border in October.

In a statement on Thursday, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai said their party would disrupt municipal polls scheduled for 8 February. In a separate statement in English aimed at donors, Prachanda said he had instructed his cadre to respect their Basic Operating Guidelines and 'cooperate as per the specific (local) situation'. The Maoists also call on donors to work in close consultation with them. Speaking to the press on Thursday evening, UN resident coordinator, Matthew Kahane, welcomed the move.

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Hapless new year

Full story p4

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HAPLESS NEW YEAR

Unlike other members of the royal regime, Tulsi Giri talks to the press only when he has something important to say. That is why there was much anticipation about The Doc's meet-the-press event earlier this week. There was talk he may be announcing a constructive response to the party-Maoist pact. But hardliners appeared to have prevailed and since the press had already been summoned, the Veep went ahead and delivered a tirade against the parties for boycotting the polls. He said that if the political parties had the right to demand a republic then the royalists had the right to demand a dynamic monarchy, or words to that effect.

In a way he's right. In politics, like in physics, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. But Giri isn't just another politician, he is Chief Ideologue and lays down the party line. The content and timing of his remarks are important hints of what the palace and army will do after 3 January when the Maoist ceasefire extension runs out.

The message is that the state is digging in its heels for prolonged conflict, preparing to hold municipal elections by hook or by crook and sideline the political parties by the time general elections can be held. That is the plan, and the regime is sticking to it. To understand where Tulsi Giri comes from here is another soundbite from his press meet this week: "A multiparty system is not synonymous with democracy."

One doesn't even have to read between the lines. This is the Burma model: talk tough and carry a big stick and keep on doing whatever it takes to remain in power no matter what anyone says.

In the midwestern mountains, the Maoists, too, are spoiling for a fight (see page 1). The leadership can't keep the warriors dangling for too long, and the time is up. So, unless something dramatic transpires in the next two weeks, we are headed back to war.

This doomsday prospect makes us once more counsel the three political forces to come to their senses and jointly reach out for the solution that has been within grasp for the past four months. Otherwise, 2006 will be off to a bloody start.



SUBHAS RAI

Janatas and juntas

The Nagarkot massacre was a reminder that reform in the military is long overdue

It is now nearly certain that Basudeb Thapa, the soldier who snuffed out 12 innocent lives in Nagarkot, didn't commit suicide. The length of an SLR's barrel rules it out. Another gun 'discovered' by the army from a buffalo wallow nearby was probably wielded by a fellow-soldier.

Reports of two parallel investigation commissions set up by the Royal Nepali Army (RNA) and the Home Ministry are unlikely to resolve the mystery. Whatever really happened, freak cases are easier to

explain than deviant behaviour triggered by inherent weaknesses of a group. So if the socio-political reasons for soldiers running amok aren't properly understood and addressed, tragedies like this will keep happening.

The RNA has always remained outside the ambit of public inquiry. The myth that it is not just an instrument of the state but an independent institution has been carefully nurtured by successive rulers. Despite changes in 1990 popularly elected

governments also continued to treat the RNA as a holy cow. Structurally, the army is still rooted in 18th century monarchical traditions and run like an extension of the royal household. Loyalty to the king and royal family rather than commitment to the constitution has been its mission statement all along.

Its recruitment procedures still predominantly follow the historical practice of selection through familial links. In influential families it is customary to bring lads from the hills to work as domestics with the promise that they will join the force when they grow up. A patron-protégé relationship therefore dominates. Even from the so-called martial races, what the RNA gets are rejects of the British and Indian recruitments.

Despite its proud origins during the nation's unification, the RNA is yet to emerge as a rule-bound modern fighting force. The value system of soldiery in Nepal is the traditional loyalty of a royalist army.

Nepali sipahis have excelled whenever there was no ambiguity about their role.

During the sack of Lucknow in 1857, in various theatres of the two world wars or in the course of peacekeeping missions all over the world Nepali soldiers have conducted themselves with exemplary professionalism and valour because their beliefs didn't clash with the duties assigned.

But the army's inherent weaknesses surfaced after its mobilisation to fight insurgency in November 2001. Despite reports of 'breaking the backbone' of Maoists, the sad reality is that the army has just not conducted any major counterinsurgency offensives. That cases like Nagarkot aren't more common is a tribute to the spiritual strength that binds the fabric of Nepali society. To emerge as a competent force capable of handling the complexities of a modern state, the RNA must urgently re-define itself as a Rastriya Nepali Army—a national army which is an instrument of the state and functions under the control of a legitimate civilian authority.

Since there seems to be an emerging consensus that the insurgency needs a political solution a future civilian leadership



Basudeb Thapa

must be prepared to cut military flab, knock off some top-heavy brass, restructure command and control and turn the RNA into a professional fighting force.

No two countries are exactly alike but lessons from Burma, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Philippines show this is the only way to go. A militarised polity fails to deliver and prevents countries from realising their full potential. Janatas and juntas never did get along.

It would be a mistake to ignore the Nagarkot tragedy as an isolated incident. It was a timely reminder of the risks involved in maintaining an insular royalist force at this point in our history. ●

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Formal Statements

1. Public Speeches
2. Letters of opposition or support
3. Signed public statements
4. Declarations of indictment and intention
5. Group or mass petitions

Communications with a Wider Audience

6. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
7. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
8. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
9. Newspapers and journals

Group Representations

10. Deputations
11. Mock awards
12. Group lobbying
13. Picketing
14. Mock elections

Symbolic Public Acts

15. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
16. Wearing of symbols
17. Prayer and worship
18. Delivering symbolic objects
19. Protest disrobings
20. Destruction of own property
21. Symbolic lights
22. Displays of portraits
23. Paint as protest
24. New signs and names
25. Symbolic sounds
26. Rude gestures

Pressures on Individuals

27. "Haunting" officials
28. Taunting officials
29. Vigils

Drama and Music

30. Satire skits and pranks
31. Street theatre and singing

Honouring the Dead

32. Political mourning
33. Mock funerals
34. Demonstrative funerals

Public Assemblies

35. Assemblies of protest or support
36. Protest meetings
37. Teach-ins

Withdrawal and Renunciation

38. Walk-outs
39. Silence
40. Renouncing honours
41. Turning one's back
42. Social boycott
43. Excommunication
44. Stay-at-home

Actions by Consumers

45. Consumer boycott
46. Policy of austerity
47. Rent withholding
48. Refusal to let or sell property
49. Lockout
50. Withdrawal of bank deposits
51. Refusal to pay fees, dues
52. Refusal to pay debt or interest
53. Severance of funds and credit

Symbolic Strikes

54. Lightning strike
55. Slowdown strike
56. Working-to-rule strike
57. Reporting "sick"
58. Strike by resignation
59. Limited strike
60. General strike
61. Economic shutdown

Rejection of Authority

62. Refusal of public support
63. Boycott of elections
64. Boycott of government-supported organizations
65. Refusal to accept appointed officials
66. Reluctant and slow compliance
67. Refusal to disperse

Action by Government Personnel

68. Selective refusal of assistance
69. Blocking of lines of command

- and information
70. Stalling and obstruction
71. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation
72. Quasi-legal delays
73. Noncooperation by constituent governmental units

Psychological Intervention

74. Self-exposure to the elements
75. Satyagrahic fast
76. Hunger strike
77. Nonviolent harassment

Physical Intervention

78. Sit-in
79. Stand-in
80. Ride-in
81. Wade-in
82. Pray-in
83. Nonviolent obstruction
84. Nonviolent occupation

Social Intervention

85. Overloading of facilities
86. Stall-in
87. Speak-in
88. Guerrilla theatre
89. Alternative social institutions
90. Alternative communication system
91. Dumping
92. Selective patronage
93. Alternative markets
94. Selective patronage

Political Intervention

95. Overloading of administrative systems
96. Disclosing identities of secret agents
97. Civil disobedience of "neutral laws"
98. Jail bharo
99. Work-on without collaboration
100. Parallel government

Excerpted from: *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Vol. 2: *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* by Gene Sharp
Porter Sargent Publishers, Boston, 1973
www.aeinstein.org

LETTERS

WRENCH

I was saddened after reading the Special Editorial on your online edition 'Don't play with fire' (#277). There were finally hints of a smile on the face of Nepalis, the country was moving in the right direction after the king's takeover. But the Nagarkot massacre made all hope drain away. The country is already in such a mess, why do the political parties want to make it worse? They want to use any excuse to go after the government. They are pouring oil into the fire when their role should be to put it out. Is this what they are going to do when and if they ever come back to power? They aren't giving the people too many reasons to support their anti-king agitation. And, as you point out, the army must also act swiftly to find out who the culprit(s) are and never repeat such a tragedy again. The government also has to assure the people that it will conduct a fair investigation and take strong action and compensate the families. Last but not least, please fix the country so we can find work at home and we don't have stay away.

N B Shrestha, Japan

● Two outstanding editorials 'Don't play with fire' and 'Monkey wrench' hit the nail on the head during these tragic times. This is journalism at its very best, and most courageous. But despite your exhortations, the palace is still working at driving a wedge between the parties and the Maoists. This won't work because things have moved too far. First, what better offer is the king going to make to the Maoists: better than what they got from the parties, even if the latter are not the government and don't control the army? Second, why would the Maoists risk losing the successful transition they have been so remarkably making towards respectability, with both the public and the international community? Third, and probably most significantly, why would they antagonise the Indians who are now decisively engaged? I'm afraid the three prominent politicians you mention, Kamal Thapa, Narayan Singh Pun and Keshar Bahadur Bista are being used yet again and will be ruthlessly discarded when they have served the king's purpose.

Rabi Chhetri, email

● The army chief Gen Pyar Jung Thapa must bear moral responsibility for the Nagarkot massacre and resign immediately or the king must ask for his resignation. If the current regime wishes to establish some credibility and moral standing, this is an opportunity to prove it.

D B Mahat, email

NAGARKOT

We Nagarkotis condemn the heinous and cowardly act of the lunatic gunman who killed unarmed, helpless, innocent devotees at the Kali Debi Temple last Wednesday. We are all

still in a state of shock and all we can do is express our deepest sorrow, sympathy and condolences to the bereaved families and a speedy recovery to those injured. We genuinely believe the 'provokers' were equally responsible as the 'provoked' in this incident and they also must be brought to book. We would like to thank the media for its straightforward, factual and untwisted reporting. Also the political parties for not politicising the incident, which could have otherwise caused further damage, the Royal Nepali Army and the government for accepting and shouldering their responsibility by their gesture to compensate the victims and the bereaved families. Nagarkot's tranquillity is back. Your favourite hill resort waits to welcome you once again. Wishing all our patrons and well-wishers a most peaceful and prosperous 2006.

Naldhum Tourism Development Committee, Nagarkot

● *Nepali Times* deserves thanks for its Special Editorial that has portrayed the present political equation among different forces in a dispassionate and

prove instrumental in moving towards that goal.

Ramesh Sharma, Boston

● News of the Nagarkot massacre was eerily reminiscent of the most unfortunate tragedy of the royal family massacre of 2001. This time a cursed soldier, fuelled with alcohol and hatred, thought of it as the ultimate revenge on innocent people. One has to be out of his mind to even contemplate anything this evil. This is a huge tragedy that could have been prevented by the Royal Nepali Army. Let's all hope and pray for sanity and peace.

Kushal Dhakhwa, email

BETRAYAL

Prem Jung Thapa's Guest Column 'Breakthrough or betrayal' (#277) is right on target. A deal brokered by two parties, one essentially a terrorist outfit, and the other so desperate that it is willing to go begging at any foreign interests' door in the hope of showing off a shred of respectability to the Nepali people, among whom it has very little currency if any, is for all practical purposes a bad joke. What is

this 12-point agreement, and at whose behest was it authorised? Should the entire nation lay prostrate in gratitude to the Maoists that they are no longer going to extort from us, take our property, kidnap our children, blow up our schools and kill our fellowmen—sometimes for something as fundamentally democratic as having a different point of view? Who gave them the right to go down this path of destruction to begin with? Do

the Maoists also have plans to bring back to life the people they have killed? And our enlightened political parties think that bringing these thugs and murderers to the political mainstream by throwing wool over our eyes to just prolong their own useless, narrow and destructive political agendas is a breakthrough? Does anyone smell a dead rat here? The political parties and the palace have to come to terms and recognise that they have to start thinking about Nepal and the Nepalis. And this doesn't mean a return to the kind of democracy we witnessed for 12 years—chakka jams, protests, disruptions of daily life and forcing elections after elections on the people till they got sick of it. The parties have to recognise that the country is bigger than their petty interests. Cutting a quick and dirty quid-pro-quo deal with a terror outfit, brokered in India, which has historically had little

or no interest in furthering Nepal's position in anything of value, just so we can wave the peace flag and claim success, is myopic and plain juvenile.

Bishwa Basnet, email

ONE TRACK

Kanak Mani Dixit writes well, but his articles are always one track and seem to tow readers in a particular direction ('Country at the crossroads', #275). It is not possible that the king is unpatriotic to the nation. An intellect like Mr Dixit must give a balanced view of the overall situation in Nepal, so that we understand it more clearly enabling us to make up our own minds. It is the duty of intellectuals to lay out these things clearly on the table for the common people to understand. While we don't want an absolute monarchy we don't want intellectuals to push Nepal into India's fold either. India may want a peaceful and prosperous Nepal but how it wants that to happen is the main question. It wants a peaceful Nepal under its defence umbrella, it wants a prosperous Nepal at par with Bihar so that we never forge ahead of them.

Paras Dewan, UK

AIDS IN DOTI

Thanks to Rita Thapa for her Nepali Pan column, 'Letter from Doti' (#276). Since I come from Doti I can identify with the situation she so accurately portrays. While I was working there as a reporter I was trying to write about the problems of HIV/AIDS. Around 70 percent of young and adult male population go to India for employment and many of them have unsafe sex there. Eventually, when they come home, they spread the infection to their wives and partners. Most of them are ignorant about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. There are many AIDS orphans being taken care of by their grandmothers. If nothing is done, we are headed the same way as Botswana.

Raj Kumar Khadka, San Francisco

STILL CRAZY

The Strictly Business column by Ashutosh Tiwari ('Crazy as a strategy') on taking unpredictable decisions as pioneered by Thomas Schelling was interesting. Business houses may opt for such abrupt moves because the top board of directors can always have a close door meeting to plan in secret.

But, when it comes to politics, I doubt if Tiwari's recommendation to Nepal's political parties will work because the UML and NC can't do anything without consensus and this means sudden decisions can't be secret. The UML for its part may be better placed to practice game theory with its republican agenda. But the NC is just using it as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the king and everyone knows it. So the NC can't take sudden turns in its policy because the top leadership doesn't want to lose its grip on intraparty power, unless Narhari Acharya is allowed to. The king, on the other hand, could still do the unpredictable because he runs the country like a CEO.

Gyan Pokharel, West Virginia, USA

INNUENDOS

In his last State of the State column ('Cliches in the corridors of power', #277) CK Lal claims there is 'a self-defined category of Nepalis whose members pride themselves for being in the know'. If a *Nepali Times* columnist, who one would think would be very much in the know in Nepal, has to make such a claim about others, one has to wonder: who are these special people? And what else do they know that the rest of us don't? Could Mr Lal back up his claim by naming some members of this self-defined category, and thereby furthering the causes of democracy, openness and freedom of speech? If not, perhaps Mr Lal should revise his method of tantalising readers with gossip and innuendos, and start wearing out shoe-leather to do some gritty fact-based reporting and writing.

Pooja Belbase, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Slow and steady

Neglect and conflict push Pyuthan farmers to self-help

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY in PYUTHAN

For a hill district that is this fertile, endowed with forests and water resources and already furnished with roads and electricity, there shouldn't have been a problem to raise living standards in Pyuthan.

However, this midwestern hill district stands as a classic example of the failure to fully harness the potential of the land thanks to years of neglect by Kathmandu and hurdles created by the conflict.

Pyuthan has been the incubator of the country's most renowned revolutionaries. Some of the top names in Nepal's political leadership are also from here, yet until a few years ago villages located an hour from the road did not have safe drinking water.

"I went to the district office 17 times just to beg for water pipes and each time I was ignored," says Dilaram Bhandari, 49, of Barjibang VDC. Finally, the British aid ministry DfID-funded Livelihoods Forestry Program (LFP) stepped in to implement the water project. "If the pipes hadn't come, we would have had to migrate to India long ago," adds villager Nar Bahadur Gurung.

Locals have given up on both the government and the Maoists to get development work done and are now doing it themselves with a little help from donors.

Despite the private-sector Jhimruk hydropower project being located here, 23 households of Kumals, one of Nepal's most underprivileged groups, continued to live in poverty. The men spent their days fishing or migrated to India to work. They had farms but no irrigation.

Ram Bahadur Kumal (pictured) had earned a dubious reputation for being a village drunk. He fished on the river all day and with the money from selling his fish was usually sloshed by nightfall.

The LFP worked with the Butwal Power Company that runs Jhimruk to launch an irrigation scheme. Together with a community group, Fulbari, a water pump was installed to deliver water to the fields.



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

And that is all it took to transform the lives of Kumals like Ram Bahadur. Farms that used to produce one rice crop a year now produce multiple crops and several types of off-season vegetables. The villagers have enough left over to sell at the local market. In less than two years, hearing of the progress in their village, 20 men have returned from India.

A village committee manages the pump and the irrigation scheme. Ram Bahadur, 29, and a father of two children, has stopped drinking and says proudly, "I am going to educate my children and see that they do not have to live the life I lead." ●

SCEPTICAL OF MAOISTS

For Pyuthan's poor the Maoist ideology has never held much attraction. Many openly say that the conflict has delayed development of their district.

"It's difficult getting lower-rank Maoist cadres to understand what we are trying to do. They are especially cautious about programs that help in social empowerment," explained one aid worker here.

Development workers in Pyuthan's interior face constant harassment at security checkpoints. Vehicle drivers have been warned to turn their lights off near army bases or risk being shot.

However, Maoist pressure has some positive aspects. Most projects, however small, must be completely transparent about spending and have become more result-oriented. The infamously extravagant lifestyles of development workers that earned project staff a bad reputation have been toned down. The Maoists are also asking development workers to work in remote areas where the need is greater. And because of the ceasefire, project staff can travel without fear.

In the Pyuthan district capital, however, administrators who felt safer after the ceasefire was extended earlier this month are nervous again because it is due to expire soon.



GIRISH POKHREL

"To Kathmandu"

The Maoists have a new strategy

SHIVA GAUNLE
in RUKUMKOT

People of Rukum who have endured 10 years of war don't know quite what to make of the Maoists anymore.

At a mass meeting in their stronghold of Bhawang on 10 December, the rebels announced the start of their 'people's democratic campaign'. Four days later in Rukumkot they asked people gathered to offer criticism of their conduct!

For a group that has for the past decade liquidated anyone who didn't agree with them, this was new. Needless to say no one got up to complain about anything. But privately, a teacher took aside a Kathmandu-based journalist and said: "They have been taking half of our salary, we have to devote half our time to them, how can we trust what they say?"

Despite turning over a new leaf with the 12-point agreement with the political parties in faraway Kathmandu, it looks like local rebel commanders will have to do more if they want to regain the people's trust. Nevertheless, regional leaders of the Maoists have been repeatedly promising that they will abide by the provisions of the agreement to establish a 'democratic republic'.

We followed the rebel leadership down to Salyan where there was another public meeting to explain the party's position. The comrades were keen to show they haven't given up the



NEW MENTALITY: Maoist commanders Biplab and Prabhakar and 5th Division Commisar Sunil, at a program in Rukumkot last week and guerrillas line up in a show of force (above).

military option. In fact, militia training is in full swing and a new strategy has been worked out to take the conflict to the capital.

"Feudalism can't be abolished by attacking small security posts in the villages, we will now aim at Kathmandu," said Netra Bikram Chand (Comrade Biplab) who is in charge of the 'Central Base Area' that includes Rukum, Rolpa, Salyan and Pyuthan.

The Maoists have also decided to increase the number of their military divisions from three to seven. One of the four deputy commanders under Prachanda is Janardan Sharma (Comrade Prabhakar) and it is clear the rebel rank and file regard the lanky man with a goatee with respect. He tells us his party's strategy has now shifted from a rural focus to being urban-centred after the plenum held two months ago decided to 'hit the bastion of feudalism'.

"Since the royal palace is not going to easily accept the establishment of a people's

democracy, we need to strengthen the military in order to bolster the people's power," Prabhakar told us.

Indeed, in a recent issue of the *Naya Dishabodh*, Prachanda is quoted as saying: "Our new strategy is to mobilise the party workers in the east to look westward and those in the west to look eastward...so that we can climb on the back of the giant and hit its head."

It is now clear that the Maoists have used the ceasefire period to develop the capacity to make headline-grabbing attacks in or around Kathmandu. However, the leaders say the threat on Kathmandu is a deterrence in case the army decides to crack down on the parties.

Before concluding, Comrade Biplab wanted to make sure one message got through: "The moment the king cracks down on the parties and civil society our army will march on Kathmandu." ●

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Soaltee board

Soaltee Hotel Limited CEO and Director Dinesh Bahadur Bista was elected new executive chairman of the company at its AGM Wednesday, the company reported. Other directors include Bhola Bikram Thapa, Dinesh Bahadur Bista, Ganga Bahadur KC and Rabi Bhakta Shrestha, nominated from Soaltee Enterprises Private Limited, Rajiv Sharma, from Intercontinental Hotels Group, Gautam Das Shrestha from Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation and Bijay Bahadur Shrestha, Nirnanjan Kumar Tibrewala and Shashi Raj Pandey, elected from the public. Soaltee Hotel Limited owns the Soaltee Crowne Plaza and is traded on the Nepal Stock Exchange.

Bank grows

Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited continued to grow in the past year despite the economic challenges facing the country, it announced at its AGM 19 December at the BICC. Net profit after tax grew 0.3 percent over last year to Rs 539.2 million. Earnings per share were Rs 143.93 compared to Rs 143.55 last year. The bank's return on shareholders' equity stood at 34.1 percent versus last year's 36 percent last year, primarily on account of the increase in the capital base, it reported.

Melamchi talks

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Monday it is continuing talks with donors on ways to resume the Melamchi Drinking Water Project. The project stalled after main donors Norway and Sweden pulled out following the king's February First move. ADB Country Director Sultan Hafez Rahman told journalists in Kathmandu that the bank is still committed to completing the project to furnish the Valley with drinking water, reported Kantipur online. He added that he is eagerly awaiting the verdict of the Supreme Court on the case concerning former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his cabinet colleague Prakash Man Singh. In August, both were found guilty of corruption and jailed over the project after a probe by the Royal Commission for Corruption Control, which was created after 1 February.

NEW PRODUCTS

PC PHOTO 'FRAME': Philips has released the 7FF1AW Digital Photo Display, designed as a showpiece for pictures stored on PCs. The Display's 5.4 x 3.6-inch (14 x 9cm) and 6.5-inch diagonal, high resolution LCD screen displays 88 percent more pixels per square inch than a 17-inch LCD monitor screen. According to Philips, its details and colours easily match the quality of traditional colour prints. Between 50 and 80 pictures from various storage devices or directly from digital cameras or PCs can be uploaded into the Digital Photo Display.



Home remedies for trade

Trimming Nepal's red tape must supplement WTO

Thanks to the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Trade in Hong Kong, the past week in the Nepali business press belonged to a diverse conversation about Nepal and international trade. As days progressed, two strands of that conversation became clearer.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



One belonged to NGO activists. They were determined to make their voices heard to slow down, for instance, a possible drop in the income of Nepal's rice farmers due to easier imports of cheaper foreign rice. The other voice was that of free-market adherents. They repeated that trade is good for Nepal and that anyone who advocates protectionism in any form for any reason is practicing a dying 'ism'.

To most concerned citizens, it's likely that both sides sounded sincere but unpersuasive. That's because, on one hand, with a booming remittance economy and declining contributions of agriculture (39 per cent) to GDP, whether cheaper rice from abroad will necessarily make all our farmers poorer stays a debatable issue. On the other hand, in today's public sphere it is not enough to merely chant the usual free market shibboleths about trade when its imperfections are all too plain for all to see.

Yes, trade is important. But despite all the hoopla, it accounts for only 10 per cent of our annual national income. And given that average growth rates of our

flagship export items such as carpets, garments, pashmina and major commodities have gone down markedly in recent years, the time has come to start shifting the slant of discussion to what changes in policies would lead to easier and more trade.

In that context, if one shifts gears from Hong Kong to Kathmandu these questions come up: if trade is so important, why aren't there many Nepali entrepreneurs engaged in it? More specifically, how difficult is it to engage in international trade in Nepal?

According to the International Finance Corporation's *Doing Business 2005*, an annual publication that compares business regulations in 155 countries, Nepal ranks 105 when it comes to the ease of trading across borders. A Nepali entrepreneur, on average, needs seven different documents, 12 different signatures and one and a half months to export goods. Likewise, to import goods, she needs 10 documents, 24 signatures and 38 days. Needless to say, the more developed an economy is, the lower these figures are for its trade-related transactions. Germany, for instance, requires only one signature, four documents and a mere six days each for both export and import.

But in Nepal's case, these relatively high figures imply three things. First, our traders spend a lot of time dealing with our government bureaucracies—filling out forms, securing permissions, collecting signatures and waiting and waiting for the

goods to be shipped out. This leaves them with less time to interact with foreign clients, figure out changing demands and sell goods and services in a timely manner at internationally competitive prices. Second, the more time they spend at government offices, the more likely it is that the more impatient among them are going to indulge in the supply side of corruption to speed up transactions. And third, these form-filling rituals, long entrenched as mechanisms of control rather than as tools of facilitation, indicate the low level



of trust that the government has in Nepal's private sector community. None of these help the country's case for more and easier trade in times ahead.

So yes, we can wax eloquent about the benefits of trade. We can also lobby to change international regulations on trade. But as long as we fail to do our homework to ask the Finance Minister to scratch out a number of unnecessary bureaucratic steps currently in place for trading, our economy will never get to enjoy the full potential of more of its citizens engaging in wider international trade. ●

Pull up...Pull up...

NARESH NEWAR

Like others before it, Cosmic Air has run into severe turbulence

Last year when Cosmic Air introduced Nepal's first jet service on domestic routes, it looked like the country's aviation business was finally taking off in a big way.

The airline had a steep rate of climb: expanding from a helicopter carrier to turboprop and then acquiring a fleet of four Fokker 100s, two SAAB 340s and two Dorniers. Cosmic also aggressively promoted budget fares, allowing Nepalis to start flying like never before. In mid-2005, Cosmic also started flights to Delhi, Dhaka, Calcutta and Banaras. Even Bangladeshis preferred Cosmic to their own cramped Biman.

But stall warnings are getting louder and the airline seems to be on the verge of collapse. Last month, a day after it announced first-ever mountain flights by jet, Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) stopped supplying fuel to the airline because arrears had crossed Rs 85 million.

Domestic flights were grounded for a week but resumed after the airline paid Rs 5 million and promised to pay cash every 15 days. There are other signs of things being seriously wrong: two of Cosmic's four jets are being cannibalised to keep the



KUNDA DIXIT

other two flying, some pilots and most staff haven't been paid for three months, the Dutch company AerCap that leased the Fokkers says Cosmic is behind on payments and even Royal Nepal Airlines has refused to rent its pushback trucks at the airport. Cosmic owes nearly Rs 10 million to CAAN for ground handling and fees, several ad agencies now refuse to work with the airline. Sources told us 12 out of 17 banks the airline approached have rejected its loan request.

Cosmic says the problems are temporary. "We're making economic sense and Cosmic Air is in a state of

consolidating its operation," general manager Lawrence Lieu, formerly Singapore Airlines manager in Kathmandu, told us. Lieu also denies other arrears and says the two grounded jets are waiting spare parts including an engine that is being overhauled in the US for \$1 million.

The crisis could force the airline to cut costs to stay afloat and the Cosmic could come out trimmer and more airworthy. "It is still a viable business proposition, it just needs to make sure it doesn't go down like Necon Air due to financial mismanagement," said one investor. The Necon saga is a sordid story of a perfectly

good airline that was run to the ground by owners who abandoned hundreds of share holders. Necon's two ATR-42s sat rotting on the tarmac for more than a year until last week a deal was struck with the lessor to take back one of the planes and dismantle the other one for parts.

Other aviation analysts say Cosmic's days are numbered. "It just doesn't have the money to pay its dues, it's going down," predicted one.

Despite the problems, Cosmic is making full utilisation of its two flying Fokkers. The flights to Biratnagar, Bhairawa and Nepalganj are full. But yield is not high and load factor on the international routes is not optimum.

Cosmic's debtors have no option but to give the airline another chance, the alternative is to write off what they are owed. Cosmic is NOC's biggest customer buying Rs 80 million worth of avgas every month. Cosmic must now clear its bills every 15 days. NOC itself is in the red and has to pay Indian Oil Corporation Rs 3 billion a week.

For Nepal's aviation industry, it could be the sad demise of yet another airline that had a bright future. ●

“We carry the king’s agenda”

Interview with Home Minister Kamal Thapa in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 December

हिमाल

What difference does the cabinet reshuffle make?
Changing people could result in enhanced effectiveness of the government. The working style could differ. However, the goal and the roadmap of 1 February are the same.

What is the government’s present priority?
Municipal elections. After that I have the feeling we will have the environment for general elections.

And holding talks with the Maoists and parties?
We will move ahead depending on how things unfold. If we have the right environment for talks on the maoist problem, our doors will remain open.

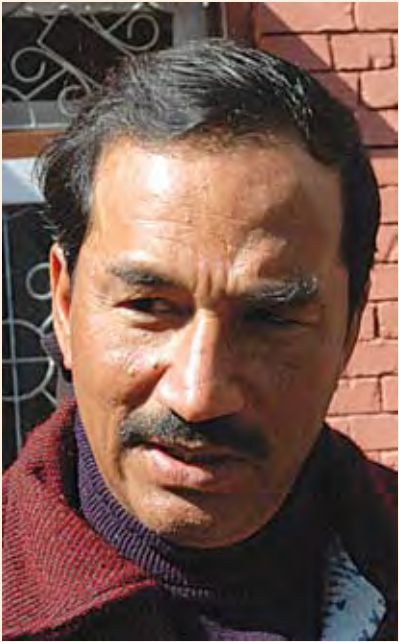
What does ‘right environment’ mean?
The Maoists will have to renounce violence, killings and terrorism and show a reliable commitment to join peaceful national mainstream politics. But the Maoists, who have been using talks as their strategy, have become weak in the last year. If the situation improves for us, they will be forced to come for talks. We can hold talks then.

Does that mean the government has changed its pre-condition that the rebels must give up arms before holding talks?
The issue of managing arms is something to be discussed during talks. The main point is that the Maoists should appear committed to achieving political goal through peaceful means.

But the Maoists have committed themselves to the understanding with the seven parties, haven’t they?
We need not focus on that so much because that is not our priority. Our goal is pretty clear: elections. Toward that end,

talks and communications are only secondary mediums.

Will the new ministers’ council have the same attitude towards the parties?
We will have very cordial relations within the limits of the constitution and the law. We are ready to meet and hold talks with them so that we can cooperate. That is because the parties have not been banned. There is no prohibition on any of their activities. But the main thing is they have to trust the king. He has no intention of establishing an autocratic regime in the country. He is committed to help a wounded democracy and constitutional process to recover and hand them back to the people. The parties are supposed to help if they can. If they feel that siding with the king would make them outcasts, they should remain engaged in their activities peacefully and within the constitution.



By getting party leaders to defect isn’t the king acting in bad faith?
The king has not envisaged a situation without parties. He does not intend to disregard and humiliate them. But there remains this truth—the king may have been dissatisfied with the past activities of the major political parties.

Don’t you feel odd joining a government without the agreement of your own party?
The first meeting of the RPP central committee after 1 February decided to positively accept the royal proclamation. It also decided that the party would move ahead to hold talks, try to reach agreements and cooperate. The RPP, as an institution, has not opposed these decisions. It was under the same policy that some of our friends in the party joined the government earlier. The DDCs already have RPP men. We joined the government in line with the party’s policy. But that does not mean we will be carrying our party’s agenda. We will be carrying the king’s agenda.

Nobody again

Ritu Raj in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 16-30 December

हिमाल

After the recent purge which turned ministers into ‘ex-ministers’ overnight there is a whole herd of new ministers living in the same *tole* as me. They will probably remain ministers for a maximum of another six months. After that they’ll also become ex-ministers. But as long as it lasts, they are powerful men. Even if you didn’t know the man from Adam, from today you better because he is the Hon’ble Minister. And everyone greets them, everyone felicitates them, everyone says hi.

For the next few weeks, the pages of the papers will be filled with congratulatory messages with pictures of the new ministers grinning away. The messages below will invariably read: ‘We so-and-so humbly thank His Majesty for the infinite generosity shown towards nominating so-and-so into the important position as Minister of Such-and-Such and congratulate Minister So-and-So for being made minister.’

What kind of people spend good money to put these prominent ads in the papers? Invariably they are the minister’s own extended clan, his community, his colleagues, his co-workers from previous jobs and an assorted number of people who in future will want him to make favourable decisions. So they are garlanded, feted, wrapped in *khadas* and given presents.

But no such thing when suddenly, just as dramatically as they were nominated and as certainly as night follows day, the ministers are sacked. Suddenly, the flag disappears from the flagposts on their front yards and

they become nobodies again.

Logically, everyone who felicitates a guy for being minister by putting ads in the papers should also be consoling him when he is sacked. But that doesn’t happen. Wonder why?

Betrayal

Political scientist Shastradatta Panta in *Rajdhani*, 19 December

राजधानी

The practice of stoking conflict in Nepal by remote control from foreign lands is not a new one. The NC took up arms against the government in 1961 at almost the same time that different outfits associated with the UML had resorted to killings and other terrorist activities. The storm of the political movement they are talking about now is the outcome of that same mental state. They simply do not understand what peace and development are all about. They do not want to realise that the ever-intensifying tussle will only push the country’s living standard further downhill. And they are insensitive towards nationalism. If they did they would not have remained tight-lipped about the plight of the Nepalis in Susta who have been troubled by Indian security personnel.

Perhaps the NC gets some sort of sadistic pleasure accepting the Maoists as more trustworthy than the monarchy and leaning towards foreign agencies instead of siding with the ministers’ council or security agencies. By distrusting the constitutional monarchy and siding with a foreign nation that has always had ill intentions towards Nepal, the parties have given birth to a situation that threatens the country’s nationality, unity and its sovereignty.

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समरा Samaya , 22 December

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We can’t interpret foreign concern as interference. We are ourselves to be blamed and held accountable for the rising international pressure on Nepal.”

-Former Nepali ambassador to India,
Bhesh Bahadur Thapa in *Dristi*, 20 December



“Talak, talak, talak.”

Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

Muslim women in Banke district are going to court against the husbands who have divorced them. All a husband has to do to divorce his wife here is say “talak” three times. This system also prohibits the wives from demanding their share of property. However, if a woman wants to get a divorce, she first has to get her husband’s permission and pay him certain amount of money. Sabu Bahana of Nepalganj recently filed a property suit against her husband in the District Court. Kaishrajaha Idris, 32, is preparing to follow suit after 15 years of being divorced. Sakara Banu Bahana and Saija Ali Bahana have already won property cases and claimed what was rightfully theirs. The majority of women who file such suits also want to return to their husbands. Batool Khale of Raniyarpur not only got half her property back but also reunited with her husband. Aayesha Pariban’s husband asked her to come

हिमाल

back after four years of separation, when he learnt that Pariban had gone to the courts. Until three years ago, no Muslim wives had filed cases against their husbands in the district’s courts. Today, there are 20 property cases and 10 divorce cases awaiting hearing at the Banke District Court. Mohamaddi Siddique, one of the pioneers of this trend, says, “We have to spread this movement all over the nation.” There are over 236 cases of women who have been given ‘talak’ by their husbands in Nepalganj, according to the Muslim Society Development and Awareness Centre, most of them in rural areas. Muslim leader Maulana Abdul Jabbar says that the ‘talak’ rule, which originates in the holy Koran, has been misinterpreted over the years. Adds Siddique, “the process of divorce should be according to law, not misinterpreted religious values”. At a recent program in Nepalganj, there was a significant presence of talak victims (pictured, above).

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International Alert is an independent peacebuilding organisation working in over twenty countries and territories around the world. We work with people affected by violent conflict as well as at government, EU and UN levels to shape both their policy and practice in building sustainable peace. Our regional work is based in the African Great Lakes, West Africa, the Caucasus, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Philippines. We also work on cross-cutting issues that affect peacebuilding, such as business, humanitarian aid and development, gender, security and post-conflict reconstruction.

We are now looking to fill the following post which will be based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Closing date: Monday, 9th January,
Interviews are scheduled to take place between the 16th and 21st January in Kathmandu

Please note that due to limited resources, only short-listed candidates will be contacted after the closing date. International Alert is an equal opportunities employer. All applicants will be judged strictly on the basis of merit.

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Each ride is a new journey, a different challenge and it almost doesn't matter what the destination is



PICS: ANOOP PANDEY, PRATEEK RAJBHANDARI

ANOOP PANDEY

Blistering down a narrow dirt trail on a mountain bike you realise how true this is. On the steeper sections we snake around rocks, fly over stray branches and freewheel at 40km/hr. We pass a porter carrying a sack of rice to his village, children wave from the side of the road, low bamboo branches whip our helmets. The tires hum and the brakes hiss as the trail widens into the outskirts of a village at the bottom of the mountain. We finally pull on the brakes and come to a stop in a cloud of dust.



The rule of mountain biking in Nepal is that every descent is followed by an ascent. And sure enough, there is another pass to climb. I take off my jacket and stuff it into my bag, take a large gulp of water and begin the hard climb to the next summit. The first few kilometers are negotiated on sheer adrenaline but I soon run out of that. Panting heavily in the thin air, my mouth parched, sweat rolls down my forehead and stings my eyes. Heading down, all I can see is my shadow rushing past rocks, bobbing in synch with my pedaling and panting.

Why do it? They ask. I ask myself that too and it must be that each ride is a new journey, a different challenge and it almost doesn't matter where the destination is. My most ambitious ride so far was the 120-km cross-country from Kathmandu to the Tibet border. The night before, I couldn't sleep because of nervousness. I'd done that highway by jeep, and remembered the steep switchbacks up to the mountain pass and the endless asphalt to the Friendship Bridge. Sleepless, I tossed and turned, toying with the idea of not going. What if I didn't make it? I could always call my friends in the morning and say I was sick. But I did go and that two-day trip was the

most exciting thing I had ever done.

Another journey, this time it's not endurance but skill as I negotiate a steep trail to a mountain-top temple. At the summit, I haul my aching body off my bike and stagger to the rocky steps of the shrine. The coolness of the grass and the breeze soothe me. The sense of accomplishment is indescribable. I gaze up at the sky, at this altitude a blinding blue with clouds cresting the adjoining ridges like a waterfall. Paddy fields cascade down the hill, checker-boarding the terrain into various shades of green. Across the northern horizon each peak of the central Himalaya seems to have a personality of its own: Ganesh appears busy, Langtang has a self-confident air, the twin peaks of Gauri Shankar look engrossed in each other and Dorje Lakpa leans languidly on his fellow mountains. A solitary eagle soars in the updraft, wings outstretched and steering with the imperceptible movements of his feathers. It is joined by another and they go around in lazy circles together, inspecting the slopes below.

This is why I do it. This is why I get up early on weekends, strap on my helmet and ride out.

High on the pass at Lakuri Bhanjyang, I am disconnected

MOUNTAINS+BIKES=THRILLS

It's no surprise that because of its terrain, Nepal offer some of the most exhilarating and challenging rides in the world to mountain bike. It's small enough to become familiar with, yet large enough to get lost in, making it ideal for thrill seekers, professionals, and those who simply want a day away from the madness of daily life. And because many parts of the country are still roadless Nepal offers all grades of biking.

Nepal is host to an array of international adventure races including the Action Asia Challenge and the Himalayan Mountain Bike races with pro-riders from Europe Asia and the USA testing the difficult terrain and competing for international glory.

But for the amateurs or those who just want a weekend out of the city, there is something for every level of rider. From driving up to the top of Nagarkot in your jeep with a bike and simply speeding back down, to the epic battle against altitude and below zero temperatures at Chomolungma Base Camp, there is something for everyone.

from the bustle of the city. The peace seeps into my body as I contemplate the lodge to stay for the night. The next morning, it is time to head back down. I relish the prospect of rushing down a slope that was so difficult to

climb. I glide down effortlessly.

From the valley below, I look back at the old temple where I started off: just a speck on the top of the mountain. "I was there," I tell myself and continue on my journey. ●



n bipeds!

KATHMANDU-KAKANI (50km)

Longer than the Nagarkot trail is Kakani on the Valley’s western rim. Starting at Balaju you cruise past Nagarjun forest where the humming of cicadas reaches a crescendo. You reach the Mainju Pass and then begins the long serpentine tarmac to Kakani. The pass is at 2700m and the view of Ganesh Himal wipes out the strain. After recharging your batteries you may either head a further 3km up to the radio tower or coast back down. Take lots of liquids and stack up on chocolates at the base.



KATHMANDU-BHAKTAPUR-NAGARKOT (38km)



An early morning breakfast of eggs and toast and off you go. Heading east to Bhaktapur before the traffic gets really bad. You weave past trucks and rampaging minibuses until you get to the base of hill. The 20km climb up to Nagarkot winds all the way to the summit and it may take up to one-and-a-half-hours depending on your stamina and endurance. Upon reaching the top you will be greeted by a view of the entire Central Himalaya. You may want to go down a different way and take the sandy trail to Changu Narayan or Sankhu. Autumn and early winter is the best time for this ride.

KATHMANDU-PANAUTI-LAKHURI BHANJYANG (60km)

For those of you ready for a full day of riding, this circuit packs in asphalt, climb, dirt trails and steep descents. You can also ride to Banepa via the Arniko Highway and turn south to Panauti. Ride the jeep track past Kushadebi and Ryale villages until you start a 10 km incline that is gradual but continuous. Pace yourself and conserve your energy. Lakhuri Bhanjyhang is ridge so you will not be able to see it until you get there. At the top have some tea and biscuits and take a rest. The ride down to Lubhu in Kathmandu Valley is a roller coaster.

KATHMANDU-TATOPANI-KATHMANDU (240km 2 days)

For a weekend getaway Tatopani is an ideal destination. Plan ahead of time, all you need is spare clothing, some food and lots of water. Meet your friends at a common spot early in the morning, possibly around 7AM and start the roughly 129km journey to the Tibet border. The journey will take you past Dhulikhel, down into Dolalghat, along the Indrawati into Panchkhal, through Barabise and finally into Tatopani. The ride provides for thrilling high speed downhill racing and steep endless uphill. By midday you should reach Lamosangu where you can stop for lunch. The key to reaching Tatopani before dark is to pace yourself and use up all your energy in the comparatively easier sections. Be sure to take equipment while still traveling light. Let your bones relax in the hot spring and if you are still looking for a thrill go bungee jumping at The Last Resort.



HATTIBAN: Training in Intervals

Ever find yourself panting and gasping for air, your legs having begun producing lactic acid and you on the verge of giving up? Well training in intervals is the best way to increase strength and stamina. Start from the base of the jeep track leading up to Hattiban Resort. Negotiate the steep road and switchbacks until you reach the resort. Then take a 30 second rest and head back down. Once at the base take a minutes rest and head back up and follow the same routine until you’ve been up and down three times. It should take no more than 15 minutes to reach the top. Time yourself each of your intervals and record your progress.

THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

You’re looking for a bike that is not only strong but also designed to fit you. While trying out new bikes, get on it, ride it around the block, make sure it is not too high or too low. You and your bike will become very close as you start riding so you are looking for a long-term investment. There are shops in Kathmandu selling Gary Fisher, Trek, Giant and Specialised bikes worth 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 upgrade.



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The Lahure of Kot Kangra

The legendary fort where Gorkha expansion came to a halt and the Lahure tradition was born

The sheer cliffs of the hilltop fort of Kot Kangra resonates with the students of Nepali history. Buying a IRs 5 ticket from the Archaeological Survey of India counter lets one into the fort and breathe in a little of the history that shaped Nepal.

Here, the expansionist Gorkhali force from Kathmandu was blocked for the first time in its westward advance. Nearly 200 years ago, here at Kangra that the Gorkhali became Lahure (pronounced 'Lahuray'). Today, all Nepalis who migrate downhill and outward to find work are known as Lahures. The flow of Lahure *darbans* and *chowkidars* continues to this day, but earnings are down by a third due to oversupply from war-torn Nepal. More than a million Lahures now also toil in the Gulf and

Malaysia, sending back money that keeps the national economy afloat.

But in the beginning, being a Lahure was all about going to Lahore to serve as a mercenary: not

for the British colonials but for Ranjit Singh, the Khalsa warrior king.

The Gorkhali forces under general Kaji Amar Singh Thapa had been unstoppable thus far on their westward push. The kaji had his eye on the pearl of Kashmir, to make Kathmandu's empire-building ambitions complete. The citadel of Kangra state ruled by Sansar Chand lay in between. So, after crossing the Sutlej, Amar Singh laid siege. But the fort was nearly impregnable, and it is easy to see why for the visitor.

Three years of pillaging the surrounding territory was all that the Gorkhalis were able to manage before Amar Singh withdrew. But he was able to weaken the defenders enough that Kot Kangra became easy picking for Ranjit Singh, lying in wait in nearby Lahore and with imperial ambitions of his own. The Sikh raja walked in unchallenged on a carpet laid out by the Gorkhalis.

Ranjit Singh was impressed by the doughty Nepali warriors and asked those left behind by Amar Singh to join his campaigns. Thus it was that the migrant fighters of Nepal went to Ranjit Singh's capital, Lahore, and became Lahures in 1809.

Before long, the Punjab states were all subdued by the British, and the Gorkhalis were taken on by the colonials following the 1814-16 Anglo-Nepal war. The rest is also history—the Gurkhas under the British fought for the British in Waziristan. And later, in Malaya, Gallipoli, Tobruk and the Falklands. And most recently manning checkpoints in Bosnia or Basra.

At Indian Independence, the Gurkha battalions were divided up between the departing gora-sahibs and the brown-sahibs. The Indian Gorkhas fought (and died) for the Indian Army in Kashmir, the plains of Punjab, the Indian northeast and Kargil.

The departure of fighting men is a critical economic reality of the Nepali hills. This export of young men holding Nepali citizenship to fight other countries' wars reflect at once the deep poverty of the home country as well as the unfinished business of sovereignty-making. As long as wars were fought in distant lands, it did not matter much, but in these times of Southasian friendship it definitely makes for grave discomfort in Kathmandu when a regional conflict occurs. Indeed, if there is one reason not to wish an India-Pakistan war in Kathmandu, it is the fear for the lives of Nepali boys.

Since the times of the expansionist wars of the 19th century, and through the exploitations of the Rana and later the Panchayat era, the Nepali peasantry has had to make do for itself, *joho garnu*, in the Nepali language. The peasant's answer was to migrate, and that migration began in Kangra in 1809.

Political activists who in the Panchayat years had loudly demanded the cancellation of Gurkha/Gorkha recruitment promptly silenced themselves in the era of political freedom after 1990, realising the needs of the highland subsistence economy.

Nepalis do not inherently want to fight another country's wars. There will come a time, soon, when a return to peace, democracy and political stability in Nepal will lead to sustained and equitable economic growth. At such a time, the Nepalis will stop joining foreign armies. Only then may the legacy of Kot Kangra be reversed, though two centuries late. ●



PICS: ALBERT ZIMMERMANN

Baby's day out

Traditional Newari baby massage is re-invented in Switzerland



AARTI BASNYAT

In winter it used to be a common sight to see half-clad women and their newborns in the *kausis* of Kathmandu Valley enjoying the mild sun while a midwife administered an oil massage to the little one.

While the practice has become rare here, baby massage has become a rage in Europe. The woman responsible for taking this ancient Newari tradition and adapting it to the European lifestyle is Nasma Scheibler-Shrestha.

Nasma met her husband, Giovanni Scheibler, in Bhakaturpur while they were both working on the German-supported Bhakaturpur conservation program. While having her first child, Jamuna Maya, in

Switzerland, Nasma's parents came to take care of them. In the traditional Newari style, Nasma's mother wanted to give her granddaughter an oil massage but the nurses and doctors at the hospital were appalled.

"Why do you want to massage the child? There is nothing wrong with her," Nasma remembers one nurse saying. She found this strange thinking, "do babies in Europe only get massaged after they fall sick? Why not before?"

As the hospital continued to deny permission for the massage, Nasma consoled her mother, saying that they would do it once they got home. But then another nurse in the hospital approached Nasma proposing they do the massage in secret Indian baby massage and wanted to

see the Nepali version. The rest, as they say, is history.

Nasma opened her Professional School of Baby Massage in 1986 where she promoted her adapted Newari massage. Since then she has trained over 100 masseuse and innumerable parents in the practice. Baby massage is not only important to maintain traditions or to strengthen bonds between mother and child. According to paediatricians from Nasma's adopted town, Zurich, such closeness is also necessary for the baby's psychological and physical growth.

Nasma has adapted the massage to the psychological and physical needs of European parents. Instead of traditional mats, the massage is done on carpets and cushions and heating lamps are used in place of wooden fires. "It was necessary to bring western logic into the practice and to be able to explain the reasons for the massage as no one in Nepal really thinks about it."

Nasma believes the massage caught on so fast in Europe because there is a deep need for parents there to bond more with their children. "I found that in Europe, people are so stressed and they are never able to spend proper time with their children. The massage gives the mothers a special and quiet time to be with their baby and share a deep bond."

Although in Nepal, it would've been unheard of for the father to administer the massage, as European dads are now doing, Nasma believes that what is important is to take the positive aspects

of Nepali traditions and spread them throughout the world.

Adds Giovanni, "The fathers are always ignored after birth but with this technique, they are able to spend more time with their child and create a unique bond of their own".

After the success of their technique in Europe, where the massage book is in its seventh edition, the couple decided to hold a travelling exhibition of pictures depicting the art in Europe and Nepal as well as a 25-minute film called *Story within a Story* explaining the origin of the practise and Nasma's work to adapt it.

After touring eight European cities, Nasma thinks it is time to bring the exhibition home. "I feel like the tradition is being lost here. I don't see people massaging their babies in courtyards anymore. With the nuclear family becoming more popular in Nepal, people seem to have lost touch with the bonding that used to happen. The need to bring harmony within the family is being felt here as well. So by bringing this tradition back home, I believe we will be able to make people aware of the need for this important aspect of a baby's life." ●

The Baby Massage Exhibition
Patan Museum from
30 December -15 January
10AM -5PM
Free Entrance
The exhibition and workshops will also be held in Dhulikhel Hospital from 19 January.



THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE: Nasma demonstrating the finer points of a baby massage to Tschering and Barbara with their daughter, Tara-Lisa, in Zurich (top). A mid-wife administers the baby massage in traditional Newari style in Bhakaturpur (bottom, left).

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Windows of opportunity for

Commercial and free software philosophies vie for the Nepali language market

VIBEK RAJ MAURYA

As 2005 comes to a close, it is clear that this has been a landmark year for Nepali computing.

Microsoft in collaboration with Unlimited NuMedia released the Nepali Language Interface Pack for WindowsXP and Microsoft Office in November. And on Thursday Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP) unveiled the all-Nepali Linux.

For the first time non-English speaking Nepalis who were excluded can now use the computer not just for word processing but for database, spreadsheets, layout, internet and email also. And they have two alternatives to choose from: Windows XP or Linux.

The two platforms are based on different philosophies and consumers can choose the system that suits them best. But the presence of an open source and proprietary software is bound to set off a debate in Nepal about licensing and pirated software.

Windows is not free, its use, redistribution or modification is prohibited. It either requires permission or is restricted. Unlimited NuMedia is distributing the interface pack CD for Rs 250. But this only includes the Nepali Interface Installer for XP and Office and requires a pre-installed licensed copy of both softwares.

MPP's NepaLinux, on the other hand, comes with a bundle of operating system, office suite,

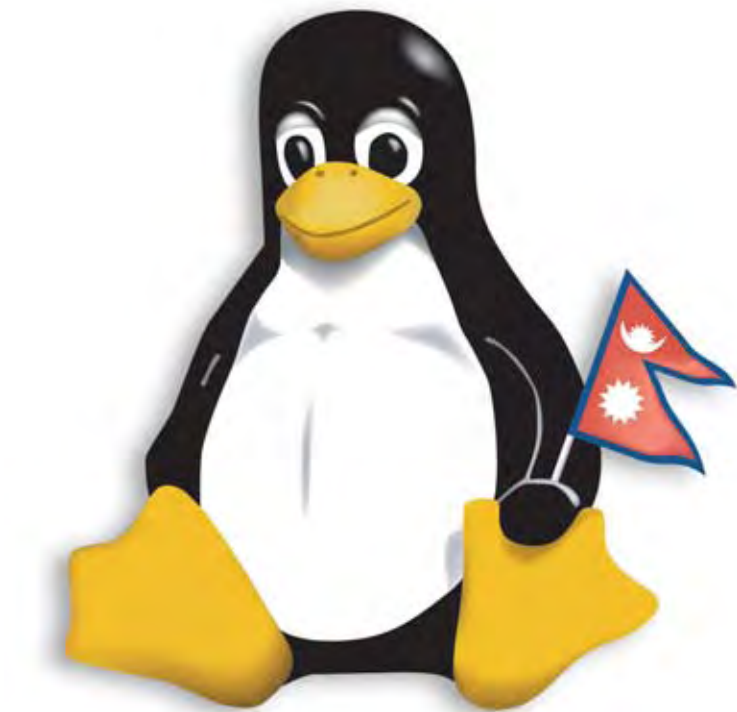


image editing tools and other utilities all for only Rs 190 and which can also be downloaded for free from www.nepalinux.org

"We were trying to teach the English language to Nepalis so they could use computers but we decided it's much easier to teach computers Nepali," says MPP's Outreach Officer, Kedar Sharma. NepaLinux allows users to copy or redistribute the product and since the source code is open, developers can freely customise and may further develop the available products.

For Nepali users without English gone are the days of writing emails in Roman Nepali because it now allows them to interact with their machine in

Nepali. ('Trash' is called 'Raddi Tokari'.)

Microsoft has the advantage of a wider range of hardware that can be used with its system. "Microsoft didn't come to Nepal themselves, we brought them here," explains Allen Tuladhar of Unlimited NuMedia, "Microsoft Windows XP has been released under 38 different languages and Nepali is one of them."

Tuladhar wants to sell 200,000 copies of interface pack CDs by the end of 2006. "It may sound ambitious but we think the market will expand because people who couldn't use English will now be using computers," he says. One factor that may indirectly favour Microsoft is that most Windows operating

systems used in Nepal are pirated and therefore users haven't been paying the actual price for them. An original Windows XP can cost up to Rs 20,000, but a pirated CD can be bought for Rs 125 to which users can add the Nepali interface.

But free open source software like Linux would be the solution for countries like Nepal where computer users can't afford the high price of original software. "If this is done wisely, open source software can create local jobs without being dependent on corporate giants," says Linux

developer, Basanta Shrestha.

MPP's Linux-based project is being carried out with support from Pan Localisation and the Canadian group, IDRC. MPP has translated 200,000 strings into Nepali for the NepaLinux interface. A functional Nepali spell checker and Thesaurus have also been bundled with OpenOffice.org.

The dictionary contains 24,000 words and will be expanded in later editions. Microsoft Office in Nepali meanwhile has included almost all the 59,000 words from the *Brihad Sabdakosh*. ●

Compare and contrast

>GUI

Both Linux and Windows provide a Graphic User Interface (GUI) which enables the machine to interpret commands through a mouse click. NepaLinux provides Gnome desktop environment which is flexible for customisation. While advanced users can customise things to their liking, it makes things harder on new users for whom every Linux computer they encounter may look and act differently.

>Installation

Unlike Windows, Linux can run from a CD as a full-fledged operating system. NepaLinux therefore doesn't need to be installed into the hard disk. Users can install it when they are comfortable with the Linux environment. Windows has to be first installed into the hard disk. Windows with Nepali interface pack further requires Windows XP with service pack 2 pre-installed. This may create problems if a pirated Windows XP is installed.

>What you get

NepaLinux uses up 2GB on installation and this includes OpenOffice.org 2.0, image editor GIMP, Scribus desktop publisher and other standard utilities and multimedia software. On Windows such specialised software need to be installed independently.

On the other hand a copy of Nepali Windows XP on a CD-ROM doesn't give you an operating system and no applications and you need to buy them independently. That is the bottom line. If you buy a copy of Linux on a CD-ROM it comes with many of free application software released under GNU/ GPL License.

>Supported Hardware Devices

More hardware works with Windows than with Linux because hardware vendors write drivers for Windows more often than they do for other operating systems like Linux.

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All the Adventures can be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

Strip #96 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Korean Photographic Exhibition** by Korean photographers at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 23 December.
- ❖ **Reflection of Bhaktapur City** paintings by Ashu Ram Khajiu at Park Gallery, Lajimpat till 26 December. 4419353
- ❖ **Contemporary Paintings from Tibet** at Siddhartha Art Gallery, till 11 January.



FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Mantra** from Darjeeling performs at Moksh Live, 23 December, 7.30 PM onwards, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Blood Donation** program, 24 December, 10.30 AM at Jyatha in front of Byayam Mandir. 9841232490
- ❖ **Christmas Mini Mela** at the New Era, Battisputali, games, garage sale, music and more, 24 December, 10AM-5PM.
- ❖ **Christmas Winter Carinval** at Agrawal Sewa Kendra, 24 December, 10AM-5PM.
- ❖ **Clean Up Valley Week** poster, essay and poetry competition for schools, 24-30 December. www.thequest.org.np
- ❖ **Christmas Worship Program** at Assumption Catholic Church, Dhobighat, 25, 31 December and 1 January.
- ❖ **Kids Art Camp** 2-15 January, 9-14 years age group at Park Gallery. 4419353

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

- ❖ **Bari Lai** a play directed by Birendra Hamal and organised by Aarohan Theatre Group, 21-31 December, 4.30 PM, Gurukul. 4466956.
- ❖ **Christmas Eve Carol Service** 24 December, 6.30 PM at The British School. 5525176
- ❖ **Christmas Day Service** 25 December 9.30 AM at TBS. 5525176
- ❖ **Live Music** every Friday 7PM at Rum Doodle. 4701107
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday(Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **JCS Quintet** at Moksh every Tuesday. 5526212
- ❖ **Live and Loud** Strings at Jatra, Friday nights. 4256622

FOOD AND PARTIES

- ❖ **Christmas and New Years** party at the GAA with live music, Djs, free snacks and welcome drinks, 23 December, 5PM.
- ❖ **Kilroy's Christmas Madness** dinner with a free glass of Mulled wine 23 December- 3 January at Kilroys. 4250440
- ❖ **Celebrate Christmas Eve** with flaring cocktails, music and party from dawn till dusk at the Black Pearl. 4431404
- ❖ **Christmas at Dwarika's** eve celebration Rs 1600 per person, Christmas lunch Rs 1200 per person. 4479448
- ❖ **Exclusive French Fusion Fare** for the festive season at Chez Caroline. 4263070
- ❖ **New Years at Dwarika's** with welcome drink, live music, special menu and door prizes, 31 December.
- ❖ **Christmas Menu** at 1905 Kantipath, Rs 1250. 4225272
- ❖ **Celebrate Christmas and New Years** at Rosemary Cafe, New Baneswor. 4781591
- ❖ **Jatra Christmas Menu** wine and music, 24 December. 4256622
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Come Meet Santa** at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara, Rs 4999 per person on twin Share. (061) 521995
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, festival offers. 4361500
- ❖ **Christmas and New Years** getaway package with Dwarika's, 20 December – 5 January. 4479488
- ❖ **Bed and Breakfast** at La'soon. 5537166
- ❖ **Junglewalks**, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245
- ❖ **Celebrate Christmas** with Bowling Boulevard party packages lanes available for booking. 4422572

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Flamboyant filmmaker, Carl Denham, sails off to remote Skull Island to film his latest epic with leading lady, Ann Darrow and script writer Jack Driscall. Natives kidnap Ann to use as a sacrifice for 'Kong'. But instead of devouring Ann, Kong saves her from the wild creatures. Ultimately, it is the attention of a beautiful human woman that soothes Kong long enough for him to be subdued by the explorers and shipped back to New York, where his bleak future involves being put on display in front of humans... but how long can even the mightiest shackles of man hold back an ape 25 feet tall?

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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



As this satellite picture on taken on Thursday morning shows, the season's first westerly front has arrived over western Nepal. It is riding a weak jet stream and passing through a corridor between two powerful systems over the subcontinent. As westerlies go, it doesn't carry much moisture but will bring a dusting of snow down to 3,500m in the high valleys. There will be light drizzles in the lower altitudes over the Christmas weekend. Farmers are looking forward to more than drizzles, and are keeping their fingers crossed. Conclusion: be prepared for cloudy intervals over the weekend and perhaps even some rain.

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LIGHTING THE WAY: A riot policeman deployed for the banda on 16 December lights a lamp at the vigil for 30 Nepalis who died in the conflict in the month of Mangsir at Maitighar Shanti Mandala.



TOP OF THE WORLD: David Breshears, producer of the 1996 box office IMAX hit, *Everest*, being felicitated by Tek Bahadur Dangi of the Nepal Tourism Board for his contribution to Nepal's tourist industry. The film resulted in a boom in trekking in Nepal.



WIDOW MAKERS: Arohan theatre group performing Birendra Hamal's *Bari Lai* play at the Gurukul stage. The story deals with an attack in a village in Dang during Tij four years ago in which many men were killed.



BEAUTIES AND THE BEASTS: The new WWF goodwill ambassador and Miss Nepal 2005, Sugarika KC, poses with last year's ambassador Payal Shakya at an investiture on Tuesday.



YOUNG HITTERS: Participants pose for pictures after the completion of Sujay Lama's Tennis clinic, sponsored by *Nepali Times*.

Kong comes to Kathmandu

After the worldwide success of the *Lord of the Rings*, movie buffs and Peter Jackson fans did not expect the celebrated director to give up larger-than-life blockbusters and move on to low budget independent films. With *King Kong*, the master in the art of special effects proves them right and demonstrates that his success with the Tolkein trilogy was not a fluke.

King Kong, a 187-minute remake of Merian C Cooper's 1933 classic, retools the original iconic components with computer generated special effects—one of the biggest cinematic achievements of this century. The movie successfully reproduces Depression-era New York, the voyage of the SS *Venture*, the Jurrassic Parkish ecology of Skull Island, biplane strafing of the Empire State Building and the giant 25-foot silverback himself. The movie's budget was \$ 200 million and Jackson seems to have spent most of it on special effects like T-Rexs and other dinosaurs along with some of the creepiest looking bugs in Hollywood's history.

The narrative in the early scenes seems go on forever before we catch a glimpse of the island. But once our crew lands, the action is non-stop, including gunfights, random executions and human sacrifices. Then Kong



appears, snatches actress Ann Darrow played by Naomi Watts and carries her into the wild. During the crew's search for her, the dinosaurs stampede, raptors attack and giant insects swarm. But the action doesn't end there. More dinosaurs arrive, followed by giant bats, more gun battles and then three T-Rexs take on King Kong, with Darrow caught in the crossfire, kicking and screaming as she tries to untangle herself from the vines. The ensuing chase leads us back to New York.

The real star of the film is King Kong because the other characters really do not matter. With his lifelike expressions and infamous cry, Kong is a testament to the power of technology. The actors don't give the ape much competition for the spotlight. The star of movies like *25 Grams*, Watts' performance here is

mediocre. Her use of the word 'beautiful' to describe the sunset on Skull Island and again the view from atop the Empire State Building is sappy. During the first half of the movie it almost seems like Jack Black can act but he goes from good to bad to worse as time progresses.

King Kong pays homage to its original production and reunites the movie with an old cast member, the Empire State Building. This is *Beauty and the Beast* and *Jurassic Park* mixed up with 9/11 and stirred. It will draw some fans but it is the special effects and not the story that will pull most people into theatres. They might be disappointed: the stunning special effects stretched over three hours will probably keep you at the edge of your seat but Peter Jackson needs a better editor and scriptwriter next time. ●

Mallika Aryal



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Security beefed up again

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I know you haven't, but if you ask me, it is quite reassuring when flying from Point A to Point B via Points D, E, and F that my fellow passengers are not carrying lethal military hardware like tweezers and reusable Swiss Army tooth picks. It is heartening to note the seriousness with which our security forces take the security of the traveling public.

Imagine what would happen if they let their guards down and allowed airline passengers to take deadly weapons like nail clippers on board aircrafts. ("Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the flight deck. We've just intercepted a passenger who has taken off his socks to clip his toe-nails



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

and have to divert back to Kathmandu. There is absolutely no reason to panic until we say so. The passenger has been disarmed by the Air Marshall and is locked up in the rear lavatory. We just need to

land and deodorise the cabin and allow passengers in the economy section to regain consciousness.")

Potential hijackers and terrorists now have to pass through beefed-up security checks before they get to board a plane at Tribhuban Antinational Airport these days. First in this impregnable gauntlet is the sandbagged bunker on the Ring Road where soldiers in armoured personnel carriers make sure that no one is carrying semi-lethal military hardware like Q-tips.

Then there is a member of the Bombastic Squad who has been trained to treat every passenger as a potential human bomb. He won the Most Cantankerous Trophy and the Mr Grump Award at the Nepal Police Academy Annual Ball three years in a row.

Now that you are inside the Departure Lounge comes the really exciting part. I am glad to say that the number of fullbody checks has been increased for maximum passenger comfort. And we're not talking about being scanned over impersonally by metal detectors.

No, at Kathmandu airport what you now get is a multiple frisk-cum-massage. First is the two-in-one unisex masseur after the x-ray who kneads your right solar plexus gently while his other hand gropes your private sectors. You then turn the other cheek, as it were, and he mashes your gluteus maximus carefully, paying special attention to the wallet in your back pocket. This prepares you for the follow-up session where there is more manhandling and finally a rubber stamp certifying that you are finally ready to be air borne.

But wait, we're not done yet. Just before boarding is a ramp strategically located six inches above the tarmac and therefore not technically in Nepali airspace where as a final send off Big Brother gives you a front-and-back ayurvedic rub down.

By the time you get to your seat, you are feeling like a mashed potato and there is nothing to do but sit back, relax and enjoy the flight. That is, until the terrorist next to you digs out his toe-nail clipper and slips off his socks. ●



Wishing you all Peace and Prosperity in 2006

from the Empowerment and Learning
Development Centre

Dear Friends and Partners

We would like to take this opportunity to to thank all of you for your continued support throughout 2005. Although 2005 was an unpredictable year in many respects, we are happy to have been able to share in your efforts towards a brighter future for Nepal. Our 2006 report will be posted on-line shortly, but until then we would like to particularly thank supporters:

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as well as all of you who have sent participants on our regular training programmes. May we wish you all peace, happiness, success and prosperity in the coming 12 months.

With Sincere Best Wishes on behalf of the ELD Team.

Neil Kendrick
Country Director

Training Schedule Jan / Feb 2006

Developing Project Proposals / Proposal Writing (9 - 13 Jan)
Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (16 - 20 Jan)
Reporting Skills & Professional Writing (13 - 17 Feb)
Presentation Skills & Public Speaking (21 - 23 Feb)
Contact Mr. Chudamani Adhikari for details

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