Looking back on 2005

While the rest of the region looks back on 2005 as a year of natural disasters, Nepal’s disasters were entirely manmade. The Indian Ocean tsunami and the Kashmir earthquake devastated Asia but Nepal was thrown into turmoil within a month of the last new year with the royal takeover on 1 February. The rest of 2005 was a political seesaw as the political parties protested on the streets, the media struggled against efforts to control it, the Maoists launched their bloodiest attacks ever and then announced a truce for Dasain that has lasted till this week. Front pages of the Nepali Times in the past year summarise the tumultuous year.

Our new year resolution: to live in less interesting times.

And ahead to 2006:
- Editorial: Let’s not go there p2
- Guest Column: A ceaseless ceasefire p3
- State of the State: The year of the hawks p3
- Economic Sense: More of the same p5
- Star Gazing: Year of the eclipse p11
- Under My Hat: 2005 headline grabbers p16
The year of the hawks

Could this just be the storm before the calm?

A ceaseless cease fire

The year of the hawks

The goal is not just to stop this drift towards dictatorship but to steer the Maoists back to pluralism and non-violence

There are marquee rumours that the king is contemplating finishing off on 1 February 2006 what he started out on two years ago. Decision on 14 February the Maoists are expected to commemorate the tenth anniversary of their war with a big bang, possibly in Kathmandu. As we go into a new year, Nepal’s three political corners are making their own calculations.

The Maoists must know by now that the conflict has done in the last ten years is make the king more powerful, increase foreign interference, debilitate the nation, sideline moderates, introduce a culture of settling scores through violence and bring untold misery to the Nepali people.

The past four months has also proved that just because on two sides aren’t killing each other, it doesn’t mean there isn’t violence. In Guwali, Agrahamar, and across the country families with brothers and fathers in the Gulf or Malaysia are being forced by Maoists to pay a flat Rs 50,000 tax per year. This violence—no against class enemies but the very people the revolution was supposed to liberate.

Not extending the ceasefire will only benefit those in charge of this unfair and immoral military multinationalism of this country. Congress is forcing the Maoists to make up for the destruction of the past ten years and win back the same ground. The support of the Nepali people you will not be provoked into going back to war.

There are marquee rumours that the king is contemplating finishing off on 1 February 2006 what he started out on two years ago. Decision on 14 February the Maoists are expected to commemorate the tenth anniversary of their war with a big bang, possibly in Kathmandu. As we go into a new year, Nepal’s three political corners are making their own calculations.
Baffled

I have been reading Nepali Times and have a pretty good impression of your tenor in-depth independent analysis of news and events. But one thing that goes against your continuous pursuit of the idealistic viewpoint that somehow the palace and the parties will come together and find a peaceful solution to the Maoist problem. This may be the first item on the wishlist of every Nepali this new year but the reality is it is completely different. This is the same regime that wants to plog on the war on terror to legitimise its rule. The moment a credible peaceful solution to the war is destroyed appears focus would shift to the restoration of democracy. meaning the current regime would have to relinquish power and act as second fiddle to the elected government. So let’s face it. A negotiated solution is not in the interest of the active king, and the same applies to the whole society as it is in the hands of the man who thrives on chaos. We don’t have to go far to find its application in Nepal. Maybe after they crush a ‘state, destroy NEA and establish themselves as unshakeable arms merchants for both sides, they might forget their grip on power. By now it must be clear to all why every royal speech ends with “Pathapalatanihe tam sabal ko rachana guar”. There is really no one else.

Let be said as a post script to this letter that this is in support of the corrupt, immoral, useless and utterly disgusting so-called ‘political leaders’ of Nepal. Bijnor KC, email

Shiva Gaunle (‘To Kathmandu’, #278) quotes Conmrad Biblaj as saying “Feudalism cannot be abolished by attacking small security posts in the villages…” So, we say to all the people of Nepal, killing more people than they have already and implementing a totalitarian regime. Sounds like they are desperate. Whatever force they have managed to gather, ‘we’ will get it by the RNA machine once it gets going. If the Maoist plan is to put political pressure through the parties and armed pressure through the people’s army then they are pretty alive. First, the Maoists have a limited supply of arms coming in, especially in the aftermath of Indian crackdowns along the border. If there is a prolonged engagement, which is very likely, how will they sustain their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ to put political pressure through the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force. An armed struggle has taken them to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘democratic republic’. An armed struggle has taken them to their ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force. An armed struggle has taken them to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘democratic republic’. An armed struggle has taken them to their ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force?

Krishna Adhikari, Reading, UK

Every political force in this country should read ‘100 nonviolent ways’ (#278) if they haven’t already. It should be amply clear to the Maoists that armed struggle has turned them into a dead-end street. The king should be replaced by a non-violent path going to protect him forever. He must have the foresight and statesmanship to devalue power so it doesn’t have to be wrested from him. And the political parties can stay bands and go on. But because they are enforced with the threat of violence.

Jaya Gauchan, email

The Maoists may have cheated out a new strategy as Shiva Gaunle mentions in his report from Rukumkot but have they thought about what this will do to their pact with the parties? The ceasefire and the agreement with the parties gave the Maoists unprecedented public relations mileage within the country and with the international community. Unprecedented, the king has not responded to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force. An armed struggle has taken them to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘democratic republic’. An armed struggle has taken them to their ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force. An armed struggle has taken them to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘democratic republic’. An armed struggle has taken them to their ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force. An armed struggle has taken them to their ceasefire. But the answer to that should to be reinforce the Maoists ‘democratic republic’. An armed struggle has taken them to their ‘peaceful’ campaign for a support and credibility from their force? Second, dwindling supplies of arms coming in, by the ‘people’s army’ will get destroyed once the ‘people’s army’ has managed to establish themselves as a armed force.

Name withheld, email

Not Pirates

Great article by Vibh Raj Murya (‘Windows of opportunity for Nepali computing’, #278). But as an ex-software giant employee and a firm believer in technology for all, I think the entry of NepLinux will do little to ‘set off a debate in Nepal about licensing and pirated software’. What’s there to debate after all? We have well respected Pvt Ltd dealers who sell Windows XP for Rs 125 (I got a Rs 25 coupon with mine) or deliver new PCs with OS and tons of applications, all of which is fairly termed ‘New Road Software’ and free of charge. Can anything be called ‘pirated’, ie stolen when, a license business can bill Nepal sells it? Can one pick on software when the majority of Chinese hardware companies also contain so called ‘pirated’ firmware? Can a working family of four living in Nepal ever think of affording a educational Windows application if the price tag is $ 5 instead of the customary Rs 507? So the debate comes down to something simpler and one that has been waged for decades: should computing be affordable for all, or just those select few in society? Linux and the concept of Open Source software is the alternative but unfortunately, these models are decades behind the commercial undertakings as far as ease of use and device-independence. Educational discounts for software licenses offer 30-40 percent of the full retail price: for example which reduces the price tag of Microsoft Office to Rs 10,000, which is more than Pop makes in monthly salary. Sounds crazy but this scenario can be seen in all venues of life where people of limited means can benefit from new technologies. So if we are to debate ‘piracy’ let’s first examine just what is being stolen from whom and who needs what the most.

Jigme Galton, Kathmandu

Thank you for the article on Nepalese computing. Although it was more concerned about the technical details and operating system philosophies, it is clear that NepaLinux has a difficult road ahead and its penetration will not happen overnight. How well can Puraskar Pustakalya can target users in Nepal who have never used computers before. For the first time user of computers may be more amenable to NepaLinux and remain loyal. We must not forget the structure and dynamics of the Nepali computer market and NepaLinux must have a targeted and strategic plan to move ahead. I request all computer users to try and make it a success.

Rajani Swar, email

Credit Where It’s Due

Typos are one thing but for such a snail to pass through the editorial desk tells me that someone needs to brush up on their business grammar. A ‘debtor’ is someone who owes you money and a creditor is somebody you owe money to which in this case of Cosmic Air is a bit of a relief at best (‘Pull up…Pull up…’, #278). I am sure that the creditors of Cosmic are not amused. Naresh Newar’s article reversed the books for Cosmic with one simple word. Now if only the poor CFO at one of four living in Nepal ever think of such magic to keep his airline flying.

Tadeo Sherpa, email
Thoughts escape

Moving to New Zealand last year, my personal reality warped beyond recognition. I functioned spookily enough, cleverly masked my unfurnishabledy with everything from push-button pedestrian crossings to obscure Kow stlang. If nothing else, growing up in a bi-cultural, transnational family in Kathmandu—with its own heady mix of ethnicities, histories, religions, languages, classes and realities—teaches you how to adjust and cope. However, I blogged for the first time, and I still find myself blushing my tongue when tempted by comparisons and fear boring people with the nurve-ending commentary on life here that runs through my head.

More complex still is coming up with suitable responses to the questions people ask about Nepal. Of course, I’d expected it to be obscure, a bit of a novelty, but nothing prepared me for the fact that for many people here, where I come from—and every other country like it—simply doesn’t exist. “Kathmandu” is an adventure brand. Asian means Chinese, Nepal could be somewhere in the Middle East and Everest is a mountain that a New Zealander climbed.

There are no comparisons, no points of reference. Every comment, explanation or anecdote I told only made me feel worse, knowing how completely misinterpreted it would be. How do you explain, in what is an essentially a middle-class, developed, easygoing island, another country that has a 45.2 percent literacy rate and over 40 percent of its 27 million people living under the poverty line in a landlocked area smaller than the South Island stone?

Statistics like these mean nothing in the ‘Paradise Valley’ but neither do my bumbling attempts to sketch a true sense of my life at home. Here the concept of having household workers equals being filthy rich. Poor’ means a broken down car, the unemployment benefit, beer bought with student loan money and clothes from The Warehouse.

Kathmandu, with its bowl of old carved wood and new plastic, its hordes of people at rush and the eerily empty streets during violence-tinged political strikes is far away. I find myself unable to even explain pollution here, where the famous bloom was air so bracingly clean that my lungs feel scrubbed raw.

Equally alien is the concept of a place with old social traditions still dictating arranged marriages, taboos, beliefs and superstitions around every conceivable issue and yet no drinking age, no smoke detectors and future elections that are “not applicable.”

A story about a bomb scare at my former workplace is too dramatic, implying an all-out war zone. My friend’s traditional parent’s are too repressive, my own too liberal—anyone else’s style restrictions.

Most days I ritually check the local news sites and then scour BBC and CNN for mentions, before logging on to the various forums and social networking sites to reassure myself of Nepal’s existence.

I have found it easier to revert to a simple, “Well. It’s certainly an adventure brand.” But there are limitations on Nepal’s use of the China card. It is already triggering a backlash in New Delhi, and it is unlikely that New Delhi will want to jeopardise its future relations with Beijing by scrutinising Beijing’s other links with China is much bigger. This section is more worried about how India can keep pace with China’s blistering economic growth and emulating its success in wooing foreign direct investment.
**Domestic quarrel**

Royal Nepal Airlines pilots flying domestic routes have given an ultimatum to management till 31 December to meet pay, progression and benefit demands. Salaries and allowances in the state-owned airline are much lower than in private airlines even within Nepal and the carrier has seen a hamstrung of pilots to the private sector.

Nepal's tea industry.

Nepali private airlines, on the other hand, have suffered an exodus of private carriers in India where there is a severe shortage of flight crew. Eight Nepali pilots currently fly with Air Deccan and others with Air Phuket in Thailand. Sources said Royal Nepal Airlines' domestic flights may come to a grinding halt in the new year if negotiations with management are not fruitful.

**New Pokhara bank**

Pokhara entrepreneurs have established the Himchuli Development Bank in the resort town. The bank was inaugurated last week by Nepal Baiswa Bank Deputy Governor Krishna Bahadur Manandhar. Customers can open an account at the new bank with as little as Rs 1,000 while the interest rate for a daily savings account is 5.5 percent.

**High five for Laxmi Bank**

Laxmi Bank recorded 150 percent growth in net profit in 2004-2005 compared to the previous year. It announced its 5th AGM in Birganj on Monday. The bank gave a high five for a record-breaking meeting since the bank obtained approval to operate as a full-fledged branch in Kathmandu. Other results announced included deposit and lending growth of 53 percent and 56 percent respectively during the same period. Total paid-up capital stood at Rs 609.84 million.

**NEW PRODUCTS**

HAIR STUDIO: the reputed beauty parlour in Bhat Bhateni capital stood at Rs 609.84 million.

**ECONOMIC SENSE**

Artha Beed

Indira Gandhi declared an emergency, the trains ran on time for a while and people celebrated. However, things went back to normal pretty soon. Same here.

Most economists would agree that autocracies can make reforms difficult, especially in this era of pressure for free market changes. When parliamentary democracy is suspended, the mood turns anti-establishment and everyone blames the government for everything that goes wrong. Similarly when vibrant opposition exists, self-regulation emerges. Governments in Japan, India, Philippines and Indonesia have challenging many pertinent economic issues.

Democracy ensures that the Lahauldon can't go on and on. A system without accountability breeds shady backroom power brokers who can provide or deny, favours at will. Someone must be providing protection for the proliferating stalls around Dharamsahal—just as someone must be steering the much, much bigger usurpation by cronies of state-owned utilities.

In the current system where many business people are holding important offices, it becomes even more important that such regulation is taken seriously. How can office holders ensure that they draw a line between the business they conduct and their responsibilities?

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**Prospects for Nepali tea really good**

Nepali Times: How do you rate Nepal's tea quality? Wolfgang Heilman: Nepal's tea is of really high quality, especially that from east Nepal, which has a better taste than Darjeeling tea. The prospects for exporting Nepali tea are really good.

Most tea-producing countries are focussing on instant and organic tea products. Should Nepal also look that way? I believe that instant tea production is possible in Nepal. You have 6 million kg of tea available for such production and on top of that, Nepal can afford to sell at a lower price than other countries. Most importantly, Nepal's tea quality is so high that even if you sell instant tea at market price you can still compete with others.

Can we compete with China and India? The main difference between China, India and European companies is the labour cost, which is very low in Nepal. So this is where the competition ends.

Where are the best markets for Nepal's tea? Europe especially. If you start producing organic tea, then there will be more opportunity. Europeans are becoming more interested in organic products.

You visited manufacturing plants in Nepal. What was your impression? Some of the machines have been running for many years and should be replaced. I was however impressed with a green tea factory that has expensive Japanese equipment. You have to keep in mind that the market for green tea is increasing a lot while that for black tea is declining.

But can Nepal afford to upgrade those machines? In principle, it is a huge investment. For the time being, all the machines are being supplied by India, even though they are very expensive.

Organisation, Senior Expert Services, has provided technical advice and training to a number of tea and coffee producing countries. Any concrete results? Our purpose is to transfer the knowledge of retired managers to the firms because after working for 30 years you are able to share that knowledge easily.

We helped Ethiopia build a coffee factory, which has been very successful at exporting. We also played a role in the decaffeination of tea, just starting in China and Guatemala's industry, which is building a factory on roasting and packaging.

**What should Nepal do to improve exports?**

Nepal should focus on two things. First, it needs good functioning industries free from bureaucracy and corruption. Second, you need good international marketing. Germany’s famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner has been taking the initiative to tell German people that Nepal is not only about the Himalaya but also about high-quality tea and agro-food products.

Nepal is well-known in Germany, so in principle, Germany should be a good market. The only thing this country should manage is its political situation and things will be easy.

But isn't it difficult to establish a market in Europe? Absolutely not. We are a free and open market, as long as you follow quality and legal restrictions. We don’t like pesticides in tea and coffee. There’s also a market for low-cost tea products because there are also poor people in Germany who are interested in cheaper tea.
The king goes east, the army goes west

Jana Aastha, 26 December

Call it a coincidence or a calculated move, the king is starting his visit to the eastern region just when the Maoists’ extended unilateral ceasefire is set to end.

The trip, from 1-22 January, is aimed at bolstering the morale of the king and the royals and royals. Another coincidence is that on the same day last week when the Maoist leaders announced that the ceasefire would be ending, the army launched its biggest operation so far in the Maoist heartland of Rolpa by coordinating the RMA’s mid-western headquarters, which has been relocated to Surkhet from Nepalgunj.

Since 22 December, thousands of soldiers from Dang, Salyan, Rukum and even Kathmandu have been deployed. On the fifth day of the army’s advance towards Rolpa, there was a fierce battle between soldiers and Maoists in Dumlachaur of Gairigaun. At least one soldier and two rebels were confirmed dead. However, the battle looks like it was more serious than that, 15 soldiers have been admitted to the military hospital in Chhauni.

Repeatedly, the army did not have much difficulty overcoming the rebels near Hotel but the real fight began after about 3,000 soldiers reached Gairigaun on Monday. The rebels tried to pin them down by firing mortars from nearby hills. The army retaliated with long-range weapons and by evening the two sides were involved in close combat. Perhaps anticipating mere clashes, the army is keeping half-a-dozen helicopters on stand-by in Surkhet. This for this biggest-ever offensive against the Maoists, the army has deployed 20 battalions, one from each battalion in the country. The operation is being led by the chief of the army’s training directorate, Brig Gen Sanjiv Poudyal, who previously led the No 4 Brigade in Surkhet at the time also responsible for Ropla and Rukum districts. This is the army’s fourth offensive in Rolpa with this week’s being led by the chief of the army’s mid-western headquarters.

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In a bid to help the seven-party alliance end autocratic monarchy, the Maoists have selected new commanders for the Kathmandu Valley and made their third division responsible for major operations in the valley. Its commander is Bibhut and co-commander is Sanjiv. Previously, Bibhut was co-commander of the eastern division and Sanjiv was commander of the eastern command and was known to the Maoists as Bibhuti Koshi. Maoist sources say the two men will now lead the 13th and 15th battalions in Kathmandu and that they were chosen because they are unknown to security forces in the valley. The Maoists also now have a special command for the valley and surrounding areas. Last year, the central committee had assigned the capital to the eastern command. Maoist sources claim they have made ‘all necessary arrangements’ to enter Kathmandu, including ‘learning from past mistakes’. The idea this time seems to be to deploy in adjoining districts and bring them in when required.

Kicked out
Jana Bhabana, 26 December

The quarrel within the Nepali Students Union (NSU), sister organisation of the NC, has peaked. After NC Vice Chairman Sushil Koirala disbanded the NSU leadership and named his own man, Mohindra Sharma, as chairman, the dispute has spilled out into the streets. The NC working committee is planning to take action against that student groups protesting the new leadership. If that happens, leaders such as Cagun Thapa and Premdeep Poudyal will also be prosecuted. Both were accused by the NC working committee, led by Girija Prasad Koirala’s daughter Sujata Koirala, of being ‘royalists’. An investigation program organised a few days ago by the Reporter’s Club, Sujata Koirala clearly stated that all who chant slogans and missed black flags of protest against the party chairman were royals. Thapa and Poudyal are popular leaders within the NSU and have direct influence within the NC as well. The party’s Nishan Acharya, Ram Chamendra Poudyal and Anjum Naringshe have shown their solidarity with Thapa, but the Koirala family shows no signs of relenting. This fight is not new. The process of stagingEpochs and bringing in new leaders is starting to become a trend within the NSU.

Encroachment
Sanghita, 26 December

India’s encroachment into Nepali territory has been occurring for some time now, and this week there was another violation of the border in eastern Kailali. Indian security forces personnel recently ploughed land and encroached nine metres beyond the border pillar. Confronted with evidence, the Indian side responded by saying they were making roads for SSB security forces that patrolled the area. Locals complain that in the border area was ploughed, crops in sugarcane were destroyed. Locals complain that when the border area was ploughed, crops in sugarcane were destroyed. Locals complain that when the border area was ploughed, crops in sugarcane were destroyed.

Willful defaulter
Ghanshyam R Bichu, 26 December

The Indian government has asked Nepal to pay unpaid bills for military assistance it supplied to the Royal Nepali Army since 2003. Sources in New Delhi say the palaces has not responded to repeated requests. The equipment includes vehicles, helicopters, machineguns, motors, frass rifles, ambulances and bulletproof jackets worth Rs 5 billion and was provided on condition that Nepal pay 30 percent of the cost while the Indian government borne 70 percent. The unpaid bills amount to over $26 million, according to reports. But it appears that the government is
simply not interested in paying the bill. While New Delhi has not heard from the Nepali government, private Indian companies that sold the hardware are now preparing to drag the Indian government to court because they have not been paid. The firms include Ashok Leyland, Tata Motors, Hindustan Aeronautics and Bharat Electronics, among others. In contrast, the Nepali government has paid Rs 70 billion to the Chinese government for military assistance received a few months ago, according to Nepal Rastra Bank records. The equipment includes 18,000 grenades, arms and ammunition.

Royal airline
Samaya, 29 December
Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation put one of its Boeing 757s at the disposal of King Gyanendra’s recent 21-day tour but it looks like it will get paid only for 48 flying hours. Already on the verge of bankruptcy, the national flag carrier is sure to plunge deeper into crisis thanks to the state’s abuse of authority. According to RNAC officials, the 757 was chartered at the rate of Rs 770,000 per hour. During the 21-day tour, the king used the plane to attend the SAARC summit in Dhaka and then the information summit in Tunisia. He then travelled on to Burundi, South Africa, Tanzania and Egypt. The government is paying the airline only for the hours it was in the air, which totals Rs 37 million. If the plane had flown its scheduled flights during those weeks, RNAC would have earned more than Rs 93 million, according to a senior pilot. This doesn’t even count the ground handling charges, landing and parking fees at various African airports and the airline’s losses for rerouting and cancellation of booked passengers. So the king’s visit cost the airline and ultimately the Nepali people, Rs 56 million. And that is only the airline’s losses.
Nepal calling

AARTI BASNYAT

"Hello, may I speak to the business owner please?" This is Suran, "says a sales agent using one of the many pseudonyms she uses to talk to clients halfway across the world. Suran is among 200 young Nepali men and women at Serving Minds, one of the country’s biggest call centres.

Re-launched in 2003, Serving Minds was Nepal’s pioneering call centre and has become proof that Nepalis can compete with better-known businesses in other countries that serve clients in the globalised economy.

"We are more than a call centre," explains Serving Minds president, Ashish Kapoor. "We also serve all other needs of men and women at Serving Minds, one of the world’s outsourcing map finally put Nepal on the world’s outsourcing map.

Nepal has the demographics of a mini-metro in India but with a higher unemployment rate among graduates," says Kapoor. "The level of English literacy is also the same if not better, why not Nepal?" Though one hour stories of sales agents being put through rigorous accent training to make them sound more ‘American’, this is not the case at Serving Minds. The accent is hardly important but confidence is considered an essential asset, says the company’s human resources and administration manager, Chetna Shrestha. "Some of them acquire accents with the work they do, so it is not really a requirement," she says.

Staff are constantly evaluated to determine the promotions and benefits that each employee receives. But doesn’t produce a high-stress environment, with conditions in many BPOs in India and the Philippines now being described as ‘sweatshops’?

Kapoor responds with another question: "Which job is not stressful? And where do you not have to work hard to earn promotions? We have incentives and a work culture completely geared towards better performance."

So we asked one of Serving Minds’ management trainees, Suran KC if he found it stressful, "There is a healthy competitive environment which makes us want to do better," he replied, "The pressure to improve performance is there but when you see your colleagues doing well you feel you can do better."

The BPO market in India is now a $5 billion a year annual industry with 2.5 million young college graduates employed in the sector. Boosting the purchasing power of millions of young people has actually transformed India’s economy with a boom in sales of consumer goods and a whole new small culture among Indian youth.

Kapoor thinks Nepal could easily cash in on the BPO boom just as India has. He adds, "I don’t understand why people say Nepal can’t compete in the global market. Our workplace here has been as competitive and competent as anywhere else in the world. It’s all about the ability to serve efficiently and scale up to meet customer needs. The question: ‘why Nepal?’ shouldn’t arise."
Another government squabble stalls study of melting Himalayan glaciers

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

H ot on the heels of the Conservation on International research fiasco in the Barun Valley in November comes another government turf tussle that is endangering an important research station on Nepal’s longest glacier.

A weather station on the Nzungumpa Glacier below Cho Oyu has been buried not by an avalanche but by Kathmandu’s bureaucracy, whose right hand seems unaware of what the left hand is doing. The unmanned station designed to measure the glacier’s retreat due to global warming is state of the art, but it is in a state of limbo as Kathmandu bureaucrats fight over control.

As usual, the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation and the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPWC) are involved. The two also clashed in the Barun episode, but this time another government agency that has appeared at odds with the ministry is the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM) that installed the weather station provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

The ministry says the glacier monitoring station was installed without its permission while the DHM says it did receive a nod. “We got verbal permission from DNPWC to go ahead,” says DHM Director General Madan Lal Shrestha, “we have learnt that the process is being followed up at the Forest Ministry and that it would be sorted out because we are mandated to install such weather stations.” There are already six other weather stations operating in the Makalu, Lantang, Simikot and Dhopgauche regions.

By the time the Forest Ministry learned of the plan, however, the weather station had already reached the Nzungumpa glacier and was being installed. “The hydrology department had no patience to wait until we received the go-ahead from the Forest Ministry—that is why the project is in trouble now,” a DNPWC official told us privately.

WWF’s Nepal Country Director Chandra Prakash Gurung believes the weather station is of immense importance in terms of examining the impact of global warming. “We provided the weather station to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology because it is the right government agency that has the authority and the necessary expertise,” he told us. “It has already installed a number of weather stations in different high altitude places in the country.”

DHM says it did receive a nod. “We got verbal permission in November but heard nothing. ‘Since the equipment had to be installed before winter sets in, we decided to go ahead while the permission was being processed,’ one official told us. The buck now stops at the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. Despite an appointment, Minister for Forest Sir Tam Buddha Rauti refused to speak to us on this issue saying it was ‘too technical’.”

### Why measure glacial retreat?

The earth’s poles and mountain regions are where the first indications of the effects of climate change are most clearly seen.

Higher concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere caused by fossil fuel burning is raising average annual temperatures by 0.06 Celsius a year in the Himalayas. These effects may not seem like much for people living on the borderlines of permafrost in the mountains and the poles the effects are seen within their lifetimes. For example, Sherpas in the Khumbu have noticed receding snowlines and in Manang farmers are growing vegetables they couldn’t before.

More ominously, glaciers in the eastern Himalayas are growing dangerous because snow melt and new lakes are popping up where none existed. Scientists say the frequency of glacial lake outbursts is increasing in Bhutan and Nepal because of snow melt and new lakes are popping up where none existed.

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Long-term computer simulations show that global warming will affect the flow of Himalayan rivers in this century itself. Spring flow will increase over the next 50 years, but after that there will be so little snow in the mountains that the rivers will run dry in the hot season. This will affect not only people living in the Himalayas but also hundreds of millions of people downstream.
Robbing the poor

Banks are using ‘anti-terror’ rules to suck up more of workers’ remittances

Studies have shown that remittances could rise by an average of 50 percent overall if costs were cut significantly.

The war on terror is only one part of that cost but it is a significant one. A time when charges should have been falling. The sheer scale of migration and remittances has been increasing fast and communication costs have been dramatically reduced by the internet and the collapse of international call charges. For example, in Nepal, remittances accounted for 17.2 percent of GDP in 2004, according to a recent World Bank report, Global Economic Prospects 2006. In the first four months of the current fiscal year the number of people leaving Nepal for jobs soared 51 percent over the same period last year.

The report shows attention to the high costs of remittances resulting from regulation and lack of competition, some of that attributable to anti-terror measures. The bank uses cautious language but it notes that the cost of post-9/11 regulations has been passed on to users and that ‘know your client’ requirements are a burden for workers who may have no bank account.

Regulations also have benefited large money-transfer organisations and banks at the expense of smaller, cheaper channels. The report notes: ‘Hundreds of money service businesses in the US have been closed by banks for fear that they may be targeted by authorities for servicing customers regarded as high risk.’

The report shows just how high costs can be. For a $200 remittance through a major money-transfer organisation, the cost ranges from 12 percent from Belgium to Singapore or Hong Kong, to 11 percent from Britain to India and 4.5 percent from Hong Kong to the Philippines. Banks mostly charge somewhat less but are more difficult to access. Smaller money-transfer firms are also cheaper—but they are the ones that have been squeezed hardest by regulation.

By far the cheapest remittance method is the hawala system, used in India and the Middle East and its Chinese and other equivalents—informal systems based on trust. Their charge for a $200 remittance is around two percent. Fraud is very rare but these systems are just the ones regarded with most suspicion by regulators who put their trust in form-filling and big institutions as the barrier to illicit transfers. Big transfers, say from Myanmar drug dealers to businesses run in Singapore or Hong Kong, go through the more formal routes. But regulators in developed countries find it easier to focus on the mysterious than on the obvious.

The Philippines, where migrant workers have political clout, has shown how addressing the issue could lead to a significant increase in remittances. But over-all, migrant workers are losing 28 percent of their earnings over the years, which reduces both an important source of income and a significant increase in remittances. But over-all, migrant workers are losing 28 percent of their earnings over the years, which reduces both an important source of income and their ability to support their families back home. The report calls for a reduction in charges and an increase in the amount of money transferred.
Baleswor Sharma, 73, of Banasni in Bihar grew up on the street as a child, never being able to see again. He suffers from cataract and has been blind for the last two years. He went to doctors in India but they made him run around in circles taking expensive tests. “They sneered about this eye hospital in Nepal so that is why I am here,” says the frail-looking man who travelled for a week to cross the border and reach Lahan. “They say if I can’t see after being operated, I will never see again.”

In the early 1980s, the UN’s World Health Organisation in Nepal (after a survey) decided that the tani was the region most in need of an eye hospital. In 1982, Sagarmatha Chauthauri Eye Hospital (SCEH) was set up in Lahan with the support of Germany’s Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) and Nepal National Eye Society (NDES).

It had only 2 beds then but today it is the second largest eye hospital in the world. It spreads across 74 hectares has 550 beds, five operating theatres with a total of 20 tables and its doctors perform 55,000 operations annually. SCEH also has established a reputation for affordable and high-quality service.

**Year of the eclipse 2006 will see four eclipses and spaceships to distant planets**

On the eve of the New Year, amateur astronomers worldwide are busy preparing observation calendars for 2006. However, such research will not take place in Nepal, where practical astronomy has not reached this level of development. We have our own traditional (astrological) calendar—the Patro, which gives positions of the planets, the Sun and the Moon.

In 2006, many space missions will be launched. On 11 January, NASA will send off the New Horizons Mission to Pluto, which is scheduled to reach the distant planet in 2015 and to explore the outer regions of the solar system as well. Four days later, NASA’s Stardust Mission will return to Earth with this world’s first sample of comet dust. Astronomers believe the dust, collected from a comet, will provide clues to the solar system’s history and structure.

With two solar and two lunar eclipses on the way, astronomers are calling 2006 the year of the eclipse. On 29 March, a total eclipse of the Sun will be visible from within a narrow corridor that traverses the Earth from Brazil to Monongahela. A partial eclipse will be seen from Nepal. The next annual solar eclipse will occur on 22 September but will not be visible here. A burnishing eclipse will be seen on 14 March, again partially visible from Nepal. Another partial lunar eclipse will occur on 7 September as well. We shall talk more about these celestial events in the coming months.

In January, watch for the following:

**The Sun**

The Sun is in the constellation of Sagittarius (Dhanu) and crosses the border into Capricornus (Makar) on the 19. As the sun is ‘climbing’ northwards, can spring be far behind?

**The Moon**

The first quarter moon is on 6 January (18.59), the full moon on the 14 (09.47), last quarter on the 22 (15.12) and the new moon on 29 January (14.15). The Moon is at perigee (closest to Earth) on 1 January and at apogee (farthest from Earth) on 18 January.

**The Earth**

Earth is at perihelion (closest to the sun) on 4 January at 21.14, at a distance of 0.9833 AU (147 million km).

**Mercury**

Mercury rises at 05.36 at the start of the month and will be at superior conjunction on 27 January. That is the date when Earth and Mercury will be on opposite sides of the Sun.

**Venus**

The first evening of the year will find the crescent Moon to the left of brilliant, retrograding Venus. Look fast—Venus is in the evening sky for just one week. After an inferior conjunction with the Sun on 14 January, it quickly becomes a predawn morning star visible after the 20.

**Mars**

Mars, in the east at nightfall, is at its most brilliant now. NASA’s two robot explorers, Spirit and Opportunity, have successfully completed a year of exploration on the surface of the red planet.

**Jupiter**

Jupiter, in Libra (Tula), rises at 2.36 on 1 January. With a 100mm telescope, you will be able to see the planet’s equatorial cloud bands.

**Saturn**

Saturn, in Cancer (Karkat), is also at its brightest this month and reaches opposition on the 28. It rises by 7 and is out the rest of the right. NASA’s Cassini spacecraft has been exploring this distant world for a year, sending home incredible pictures of the planet and its moons.

**Meteor showers**

The Quadrantids meteor shower will peak on 3-4 January. Typically, 40 or so bright, blue and fast (40 km a second) meteors will radiate from the constellation Bootes, some blazing more than halfway across the sky. A small percentage of them leave persistent dust trails. This shower usually has a very sharp peak, lasting only about an hour.

MALLIKA ARYAL

in LAHAN

Early in the morning, hundreds of patients line up with family members at their sides to register. In the afternoon, their visions and blood pressures are checked, sugar level tested and the doctors determine if they need surgery. The majority of operations here are cataract surgeries, performed in simple operating theatres furnished with what looks like basic equipment. At the same time, the patient spends no more than 10 minutes in the theatre.

“It is a hospital for the poor, everyone is treated equally and we never turn anyone away,” says administrator Binodchandra Malato. A cataract surgery including medicine, lens and bed costs Rs 900. Patients can pay more for a better ward but the medical costs don’t change. There are no nurses at SCEH because family members take care of patients. Last year the hospital performed 2,550 surgeries that were subsidised or free. The hospital also has facilities of counselling for those who are incurably blind.

About 90 percent of patients come from northern India, most of them after the Chhat festival in November or in February. The hospital is easily accessible to 82 million people who live in neighboring Bihar. Where word of mouth has made it more well known than in parts of Nepal. On a busy day in peak season, ophthalmologists perform up to 250 surgeries. “People say that we are only providing service to non-Nepalis,” admits manager Kristina Hennig, “but we are also operating on a large number of Nepalis.”

SCEH doctors also travel across Nepal to hold cataract-screening camps and bring them to Lahan or a satellite hospital in Malangwa if they need surgery. The paediatric department examines children at the hospital and the camps. Unlike other hospitals, SCEH also has a lodge where family members of patients can stay and cook. Travel agents in Bihar now have fixed-rate cataract package tours for Indians to Lahan, which include accommodation, transportation and food and the surgery fee. This little known start will be very attractive to Indian patients.

What’s new at SCEH is the new glaucoma clinic. Melbourne, is raising the money which will be directly used to build the clinic and to hold various eye camps around the country. This new glaucoma clinic will be an addition to other services at Tilpanga, a renowned centre of excellence in eye surgery.

Walls, a glaucoma patient herself, says her personal understanding of the disease prompted her to establish the clinic in Sagarmatha Choudhary Eye Hospital in Nepal (after a survey) decided that the tani was the region most in need of an eye hospital. In 1982, Sagarmatha Chauthauri Eye Hospital (SCEH) was set up in Lahan with the support of Germany’s Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM) and Nepal National Eye Society (NDES).

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**Wanted: Nepalis**

It’s not just Indian patients that outnumber Nepalis in Lahan, it is also the doctors. Of the 10 ophthalmologists now working at SCEH, eight are from India. Like Debajit Ray, a young ophthalmologist from Kolkata. “Operating on so many people every day is challenging and unique and it is also what I appreciate most about the place,” says Ray. In fact, the biggest challenge is attracting Nepal ophthalmologists to train and getting them to stay in Lahan. “It is so difficult to get Nepal ophthalmologists who want to work for us for long term because we are literally in the middle of nowhere and many facilities that cite offers,” says Program Director Albrecht Hennig.

SCEH is now planning a 50-bed branch hospital in Bighanpur which should take some of the load off Lahan, encourage more Nepali doctors to work, and treat more Nepali patients.

**Australians, too**

Suman Thapa, a Nepal eye specialist, has got together with Australian Kanw Wals to treat glaucoma patients in Nepal. Glaucoma is a condition where the pressure within the eyeball exceeds the level that can be normally tolerated by the eye and can result in blindness. “It is the second largest cause of blindness in Nepal,” says Thapa.

With a small support team in Melbourne, Kanw has raised $50,000 to begin construction on a glaucoma clinic at Tilpanga in Kathmandu. Nepal Glaucoma Eye Clinic Association (NGEC), based in Melbourne, is raising the money which will be directly used to build the clinic and to hold various eye camps around the country. This new glaucoma clinic will be an addition to other services at Tilpanga, a renowned centre of excellence in eye surgery.

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**END OF A LONG DAY: Doctors at SCEH relax after a full day of operations**

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**MALLIKA ARYAL**
Elections are not enough

Democracies must not tolerate those who set out to destroy the system

There can be no liberal order without political democracy but today we are frequently reminded that political democracy alone does not guarantee a liberal order.

Free and fair elections may lead to the ascendancy of a president of Iran who wants to “wipe Israel off the map of the Middle East”. Or to a president of Venezuela whose intolerance of the business class involves legislation in the streets but legitimation by those whose initiative is crucial for the welfare of the people.

Less damaging, yet problematic, is the election in Poland of a minority government that ruthlessly pursues its members’ personal interests and breaks all promises of cooperation made before the polls.

In other words, elections are not enough if one wants to bring democracy to the world. Elections can lead to illiberal democracies and worse. They must be embedded in a more complex institutional framework, which I would describe as the liberal order.

The first feature of the liberal order is that democracies must not tolerate those who set out to destroy democracy. Some countries, like Germany, have laws that make it impossible to ban political parties whose programs are recognizably anti-democratic. In the past, the law has been used to curb parties of both the extreme left and the extreme right. This has clearly contributed to preventing any sign of a possible return to the totalitarian ways of the twentieth century.

However, it is not always evident when people and parties stand for election what they are going to do if they win. This is where rules that impose term limits on officeholders, such as the 22nd Amendment of the United States constitution, have their place. Elsewhere, notably in many of the Soviet Union’s other successor states and in Latin America, those in power have often simply changed the constitution, have their term limits, to their advantage. This is where the second pillar of a liberal order comes into play: the rule of law.

It cannot be said too often that democracy and the rule of law are not the same thing. There are lawless democracies and undemocratic “states of law” (Rodríguez). The constitution of liberty requires both and the rule of law is the more difficult of the two to establish and maintain, for it requires not just a constitution but, almost more importantly, an independent judiciary that is sensitive to violations of constitutional and other legitimate rules.

We know from history that it takes but one Enabling Law to return to the totalitarian ways of the twentieth century.

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We know from history that it takes but one Enabling Law to return to the totalitarian ways of the twentieth century.

The program of spreading the liberal order requires a much more sophisticated approach. Above all, it requires international agencies and groupings that remain alert to the risks of illiberal democracies.

Ralf Dahrendorf, author of numerous acclaimed books and a former European Commissioner from Germany, is a member of the British House of Lords.
I
he indoor basketball hall at Dasrath Stadium was unusually packed for the launch game of this year's Samsung National Basketball Championship organised by the Nepal Basketball Association (NeBA).

Spectators participation was intense as fans sang their team songs and booed referee decisions, music blared from speakers during the half-time break, dancers from Learning Realm International School performed traditional dances and music icon Nirnaya NSK made an appearance to sing live.

In fact it looked more like a rock concert than a basketball game but it was proof sports in Nepal has now become a spectator sport. Six years in the running, the NeBA's national tournament just keeps getting bigger and better. This year 16 male teams and six female teams are battling it out.

"The most amazing thing is the spontaneous participation of women's teams from all over the country," says Mahendra Shakya of NeBA. "we are really encouraged by the enthusiasm."

Opening day saw defending men's champs Himalayan White House College drubbing Public Youth Campus 52-28 while women's number 1 Rato Bangala Club edged Holy Garden 23-18.

The tournament is a club event open to all players but teams are limited to three national players per roster. It is also a chance for players from around the country to try to know each other and to play under international basketball federation rules. The tournament is becoming more of a national affair as the years pass with the introduction of men's teams from Chitwan, Rupandehi, Kaski, Parsa and Sunsari. Says Shakya: "This championship will help spread basketball to the other urban areas outside Kathmandu."

It now also includes a three day training camp for referees from around the country at a basketball clinic organised by the NeBA.

Krishna Maharjan, coach of Rato Bangala’s women’s team and a tournament official, says, "The tournament is a great way to develop the sport in Nepal, gain publicity and discover new talent. Nepali basketball needs events like these."

Samsung National Basketball Tournament
Finals: 3 January 2006

Leaving home

I
 was great to meet so many Nepalis on my recent visit who are genuinely concerned about the future of tennis in this country. Everywhere I went, in meetings, at clinics or just walking in Kathmandu’s familiar streets, I came across old friends and colleagues who wanted to talk tennis and were genuinely interested in batting around ideas for advancing this wonderful game.

Their interest being so clearly demonstrated, I believe now is the time for all of us to look forward and begin some serious brainstorming on practical ways to put the bounce back into Nepali tennis. We should also mull over some ways to involve our youth in this process, for they are the ones who will be leading our efforts in coming years.

I was impressed and encouraged particularly by the young people who participated in the clinics that I held in Kathmandu. (Pictures above are ones at the Nepali Times tennis clinic on 17 December—thanks everyone for coming!)

The young Nepalis were energetic, positive young people who were eager to learn. Some of them had that burning passion for the sport that could take them to impressive heights of accomplishment in competitive tennis. Others have an interest for the game that will allow them to enjoy it as they grow older.

I pledge to do my utmost in coming years to help them to get all they can from the game. I encourage all our upcoming stars and all Nepali tennis players, fans and officials to send their thoughts to me directly at this email address: lama@ad.uiuc.edu

Happy hitting!

Merry Christmas

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

Contemporary Paintings from Tibet at Siddhartha Art Gallery, till 11 January.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Clean Up Valley Week workshops at school, essay and poetry competition, 24-31 December. www.thequest.org.np

New Years 1 January.

Worship Program at Assumption Catholic Church, Dhopghat, 31 December and 1 January.

Kids Art Camp 2-15 January, 9-14 years age group at Park Gallery. 4419353

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

1974 AD live and loud at Moksh, 30 December. 5526212

Bari Lai a play directed by Birendra Hamal, 21-31 December. 4.30 PM. Gurukul 4469656.

Paleli 12 bid farewell to Aavaas, 30 December. 5.30 PM. Rs 500 at Nepalaya-R-sala. 5552839

Sur Saptak band at The Organic Village, Baluwater, 6PM, 31 December, student discount. 4414383

Cadenza Collective live every December, (Alto-funk and Latin) BPM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.

Pulse plays at Jatra on 31 December. Rs 300. 4256622

Eternity plays at Himalaite Café, 31 December. 4256738

Live Music every Friday 7PM at Rum Doodle. 4731107

JCS Quintet at Moksh every Tuesday. 5526212

Unplugged with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622

Live Music at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4221711

Live Jazz by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

Food and PARTIES

New Years at Dwarkin’s with welcome drink, live music, special menu and door prizes. 31 December.

New Year’s Eve at Garden Terrace, dinner, drinks and live music, 31 December, 8:30 PM onwards. 4273999

Shakin’ All Over, Moksh, 30 December. 4731107

Live music from Brazil at Hyatt Regency, 31 December. 8:30 PM onwards, Rs 1499. 4491234

Special Dinner and New Year’s Brunch with welcome drink, live music, at Summit Hotel. 4701107

New Years Eve at K-tool! Party Hats, Balloons, Turkey dinner and a free Irish Coffee, 31 December. 4700043

Catch 22 a rock band at Rum Doodle, 31 December. 4731107

Celebrate New Years with Rosemary Café, Baneshwor. 4781591

1905 Offers three course meals and Sunday brunch. 4225272

Great Dining options at Al Fresco, Bhakura, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne plaza. 4273999

Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu. 4225272

Plat du Jour at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4225272

The Chimney Restaurant at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4225272

The Clamshy Restaurant at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999

Wonderful Wednesdays at Fusion, happy hour 5-9PM.

The Sidewalk BBQ with Shades of Blue, Shangri-La. 4412999

Kathmandu at Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

Jazz Gourmet fine dining at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999

GETAWAYS

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Christmas and New Year offers. 4361500 Christmas and New Years getaway package with Dwarkin’s, 21 December – 5 January. 4479486

Bed and Breakfast at La Pazo. 5557168

Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

Conferences at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

“Lata ko eksha ma gaanda tazed” Lata’s brand of folk, even a woman with dusky fair & not-so-leanly skin can be a hero! - as translated by UNACO, the United Nation’s Ass. of Cartoonists

Nepali Weather

Still waiting for that westerly front that stood us up. December has been the second consecutive dry month this winter. Western Nepal got three blizzards and it looks like all the moistures headed our way precipitated out over there. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows high altitude cirrus riding the jet stream and headed our way but these are not moisture bearing. All they do is block the sunlight keeping the day temperature lower than usual. So for the Valley expect foggy patches into the new year with mild afternoons, chilly nights and morning frost.

About Town

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 devouting 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?

Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

Kathmandu Valley

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Nepal Weather

by Mausam Beed

Kathmandu Valley

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NEPAL WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

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JUMPING THE GUN: This display by the RNA of its recently acquired Chinese armoured vehicles at Ratna Park was billed as a Shiva Ratri rehearsal but that festival is still two months away.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

TEARS FOR THE DISAPPEARED: Family members of disappeared Nepalis wept at a program in Kathmandu on Wednesday organised by the Association of Families of People Disappeared by the State. They demanded the government immediately reveal where their relatives are.

RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

ROSY-CHEEKED FANS: Children enjoy Nepathya’s fundraising concert at Maiti Nepal shelter on Friday.

KIRAN PANDAY

A yearning for learning

For a Magar woman from the eastern hills, Menuka has covered more territory than most more-privileged Nepali women. The first of 11 children in her family to pass SLC, she wanted to study nursing but was one of three girls from Terathum to receive a scholarship to study Forestry Science. She set off to Pokhara’s Forest Science Research Centre to graduate in 1995 and landed a job as temporary forest ranger in Ghanukita and later in Sankhuwasabha. But that was not the end of her trail. She next applied to work as a forestry technician for the Nepal Centre for Agro Forestry. She got the job and moved to Siraha and Saptari. There, Menuka not only worked with women in community forestry projects but also learned to speak Maithili fluently.

That success only whetted her appetite for learning and travel. Her next job in the Forestry Partnership Project of CARE Nepal took her to Banke-Bardia and then to Rukum. While others with contacts got scholarships and moved abroad, she enrolled in Patan Campus where she got a BA majoring in population studies. After donning another graduation gown, she again went west, this time to Kailali, where she worked for the next two years and met her husband-to-be.

At this point, many Nepali women would have settled down. But not Menuka. She decided to push on and did her Masters in Sociology at Tri Chandra Campus. After that, it was back to the field with a DfID-funded Livelihoods Forestry Program in Pyuthan.

What next? You guessed it—MPhil. What sets Menuka apart is her commitment and drive to push herself to the limit, not letting others set it for her. As a woman from an indigenous community, the odds were stacked against her but Menuka credits her father who encouraged her to study. “I had to balance my household chores,” she recalls, “it was difficult to find time but I worked hard.” It’s paid off. At 29, Menuka is paying for her brother’s education in Kathmandu urging him to concentrate on his books and not worry about money. That is because Menuka has something money can’t buy: a yearning to do something with her life and help her community and country.

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30 DECEMBER 2005 - 5 JANUARY 2006 #29

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That success only whetted her appetite for learning and travel. Her next job in the Forestry Partnership Project of CARE Nepal took her to Banke-Bardia and then to Rukum. While others with contacts got scholarships and moved abroad, she enrolled in Patan Campus where she got a BA majoring in population studies. After donning another graduation gown, she again went west, this time to Kailali, where she worked for the next two years and met her husband-to-be.

At this point, many Nepali women would have settled down. But not Menuka. She decided to push on and did her Masters in Sociology at Tri Chandra Campus. After that, it was back to the field with a DfID-funded Livelihoods Forestry Program in Pyuthan.

What next? You guessed it—MPhil. What sets Menuka apart is her commitment and drive to push herself to the limit, not letting others set it for her. As a woman from an indigenous community, the odds were stacked against her but Menuka credits her father who encouraged her to study. “I had to balance my household chores,” she recalls, “it was difficult to find time but I worked hard.” It’s paid off. At 29, Menuka is paying for her brother’s education in Kathmandu urging him to concentrate on his books and not worry about money. That is because Menuka has something money can’t buy: a yearning to do something with her life and help her community and country.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPEY

Celebrate
New Year’s Eve
Thai Style

LIVE MUSIC
• Authentic Thai Cuisine
• Experienced Chef from Thailand
• Relaxing and comfortable environment
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31 Dec 2005, 8 pm onwards
latin quarters, bahadurbandi road.
rs. 1600 per person (reservation advised)

RUDRA THAI RESTAURANT & BAR, Thamel, Kathmandu. Thai insta @kruai_thai

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30 DECEMBER 2005 - 5 JANUARY 2006 #29
2005 headlines

It is that time of year again when it is mandatory for every respectable newspaper worth its salt in a civilized country like ours to take a retrospective of the year gone by and say: “Glad that one’s over. Gimme another one.” This year we have taken the novel approach of inviting nominations for Best Headlines of the Year 2005 and have begun short-listing the well-deserved finalists. Readers will later be asked to vote on the basis of adults franchise for the best headlines, unless of course you decide to boycott the poll (naughty, naughty) in which case we have to think of something else to keep you busy over the holidays.

So, ladies and gentlemen, without further ado let’s run down the headline-grabbing finalists and a round of applause for these actual news stories in actual hardcopy newspapers that shall remain nameless for the duration of this column.

Disclaimer: None of these headlines are from this newspaper which takes absolutely no responsibility for the veracity, if any, of the information contained therein in case feathers are ruffled as readers go on a wild goose chase, or if alleged feelings are inadvertently hurt. Conditions apply.

These headlines are brought to you by Nepal Engineers’ Wives Society (NEWS).

Vegetable Farming Yields Fruit
Dhading—Farmers in Dhading have been astounded this week by the fact that their tomato fields have yielded a bumper harvest of oranges. “I think this proves once and for all that the tomato is actually a fruit,” stated one farmer.

Flesh Trade Mushrooming
Kalanki—As the living standard of the Valley’s middle class rises, so has demand on the flesh trade, according to Hoof and Mouth Pvt Ltd, meat packing wholesaler at Kalanki. The same, however, couldn’t be said of the mushroom industry which according to latest figures has not been mushrooming at all.

Koirala Smells Rat on Thapa Stance
Biratnagar—President of the Nepali Congress, Girija Koirala, has once more sniffed out robust activity in the vicinity of his ancestral home here, and has credited a keen olfactory sense bequeathed him by his forebears. “I can smell a rat even before it appears,” Koirala boasted, “and I know Surya Bahadur is up to no good.”

Cannabis Farming in Parsa reaches All-time High
Simara—Excuse me, if I can’t seem to type this all in straight, but it gives me great pleasure to report that ganja harvests this year in Parsa was good, yar. “Yup, this is good stuff and there’s lots more where that came from,” said a notoriously reliable source who was also stoned out of his mind and didn’t want his name disclosed. Roger, Foxtrot Tango Two, over ‘n’ out.

Headlines that made it to the Runner’s Up List:

- Man Renews Passport Before Expiry
- Wild Elephant Injures Farmer with Axe
- Two Trucks Collide, One Hurt

And Consolation Prizes to:

- Nepal Goes to India
- Nepal Goes to India Again
- Nepal Still in India

Editors who recognise their headlines are requested to come and collect their prizes with me personally. Anonymity guaranteed.
MALLIKA ARYAL

It’s that time again. The last days of the year, when many of us begin setting positive goals for the coming 365 days, things like taking up yoga, eating right, quitting smoking and reading at least one book a week. Others among us have been planning New Year’s Eve celebrations since Diwali and Tihar came to an end.

We at Nepali Times have also been bitten by the New Year’s bug and are discussing our various plans. Some of us are planning a wild party hopping, enjoying loud music and dancing the night away. Others will escape to warm tropical places and return with enviable tans. There are still others who plan to order in pizza and enjoy a movie marathon, while some of us are just glad to be away from the billboards, lights and loud music.

You’ll even find some people so sick of everyone turning the day into such an event that they are going to sit back in a reclining chair at home, in front of a kerosene heater, wearing mittens and ear plugs, to read a good book and drink lots of hot chocolate.

If some of you get new clothes for New Year, we at Nepali Times are getting new office at Hattiban. A whole year of planning and anticipation is over and the moving process has begun. Issue 280, the first of 2006, will be put together at our new sunny office. Our team is keenly looking forward to spending the cold winter working under the sun—with plenty of breaks for football matches and potluck lunches. But that is not all we are looking forward to. Throughout 2005 the pages of this newspaper have seen many gruesome and disturbing headlines about crackdowns, clampdowns and shutdowns.

So in 2006, we would like the world to unfold in such a way that we can write headlines like the following. Please do all you can to help.

‘King Gyanendra, parties and Maoists hold talks’
‘Peace breaks out’
‘Nepal U-19 win ICC World Cup’
‘Nepal voted the best travel destination’
‘Miss Nepal crowned Miss World 2006’
‘Traffic flows smoothly, no accidents reported’
‘New species of fish discovered in Bagmati River’

New Year Festivities at Soaltee Crowne Plaza

Food & fanfare

Buddha Bar: 100% off food and New Year’s Eve celebration at Buddha Bar, Balmaha, Chine Garden. Lucky cheers and toast of glasses to the year. A perfect occasion to repeat with family and friends for delicious and blissful celebration.

Venue: Buddha Bar, Balmaha, Chine Garden
Date: 31st Dec, 2005
Time: 9:00 PM onwards
Rate: Rs 2,000/

Date: 1st Jan, 2006
Lunch: Rs 1,700/ Minimum spend plus extra
Dinner: Rs 1,900/minimum spend plus extra

PAX VOBISCUM

The Nepali Times guide to where to go, what to drink and how to write new headlines for the New Year

PRATEEK RAJBHANDARI
Where do you want to be on New Year’s Eve?

A 10-party alliance is gearing up to welcome the new year on Saturday, 31 December. The New Year may not live up to the high expectations we are placing on it with the wild parties slated for the weekend. But, hey, maybe that is precisely why all you midnight children need to hit the dance floor. Here is the exhaustive (we were exhausted preparing it) list of places to go. If you aren’t the partying type, there are tasty dinner deals and if you are a true party hopper, with the finances to back up your claim, we suggest you mix and match according to your preferences.

Night in Gokarna
Kajra Nite at Le Meridian
An exclusive party organised by the Le Meridian on 31 December. This theme party is based on the streets of Mumbai and will even have young boys trying to hustle the guests into buying knick-knacks. The party will include free food being cooked before your eyes, though the drinks will have to be purchased at the cash bar. There will be a dance troupe performing and later DJ Raju will be taking over in typical Indian fashion by playing only Hindi remixes. Book your tickets before they are all gone. 8PM onwards, Rs 5,000 per couple. Attractive door prizes.

No Hangover
Soaltee Crown Plaza
Most people really want to party hop but because of long distances and the dangers of drinking and driving, they restrain themselves. This year, Soaltee Crown Plaza has solved all your problems by organising four different events.

- Food and Fantlore–Al Fresco, Bukhara and China Garden, Soaltee’s three restaurants, come together to offer you incredible food along with a lucky draw and incredible prizes. 7.30 PM onwards, Minimum cost Rs 2,000. 31 December - 1 January Rs 700 for lunch and Rs 1,000 for dinner.

- New Year’s Eve at Garden Terrace–if more than food is on your menu this is definitely the place to dance and listen to good music. With a live band and DJ Jimmy, you will welcome 2006 in full party style. 8.30 PM onwards, Rs 2,499 per person.

- Children’s New Year’s Eve–why should parents be the only ones who have fun? Let the kids welcome the New Year with cartoons on a large screen, a special buffet, games. 8.30 PM onwards, Rs 600 per child.

- Shakin’ All Over–this party is all about dancing, led by belly dancers from the dance troupe ‘Latino’ at the Matlar. The package also includes a bottle of sparkling wine and a huge buffet dinner. 8.30 PM onwards, Rs 4,989 per person.

High Energy
Himalaya Hotel
You will definitely need a surplus of the renewables if you plan to party the night away at Himalaya’s Chalet and Rato Batthik. With free imported drinks, snacks and a sumptuous dinner. To work off the calories there will be live music by Buzz and DJ Asha will take over the dance floor. 7PM onwards, Rs 1,099 per person and Rs 3,499 per couple.

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New Year’s Eve?

to be in full
saturday night

W

Year’s Eve
Saturday night to be in full swing. Dwarika’s offers the entire package. The party starts with a drink at the Fusion bar next to an open fire, with live classical music by Anil Shahi. Next, enjoy a 5-star dinner in the Toran restaurant. Then Ciney & Par-e-jat will get you swirling on the dance floor. Rs 3,000 per person.

Stay Over
Godavari Village Resort
Want to escape the city’s chaos? Godavari offers the perfect retreat. The package includes a night stay with an opulent gala dinner and breakfast, door prizes and a complimentary glass of wine. A live band with Deepak Bajracharya will sing you into the New Year. Rs 5,555 per person.

Hangover Cures
Here are a few tips to avoid that painful banging in your head on 1 January:

1. Do not drink alcohol, try fruit juices or other non-alcoholic drinks. (mocktails like Virgin Mary)
2. If you do, avoid the temptation to go from tipsy to tipsy turvy. Down a glass of water or fruit juice after every drink to help prevent your hangover.
3. Eat a proper meal before you start drinking or while imbibing. Also, avoid drinking on an empty stomach.
4. Refrain from serving drinks. (mocktails like Virgin Mary)

Aila
Newari firewater is distilled from rice and is an important part of all festive affairs. Aila is poured as a long stream into a small clay dish called pyala from a bronze/brass vessel called aanti. Most connoisseurs of this Nepali spirit (and there are many) prefer aila to scotch. It has a lingering aroma and a smooth, balanced after-taste. Some of our favourite cocktails served here because of the heady punch it produces and its after-taste. The traditional Nepali hangover cure is a small shot of aila. If you’re planning a long weekend we suggest you apply all the former steps before you try this one.

Khukri Rum
Considered Nepal’s finest, the Khukri XXX Rum has a lingering aroma and a smooth, balanced finish with a hint of oak. Produced since 1959, Khukri XXX is comparable to other world-class brands and is used in most of the rum-based cocktails served here because of the heady punch it produces and its after-taste. The best local brandy in the market comes from the two Thakali villages of Tukche and Marpha in Mustang. Distilled from the tastiest apples, apricots, carrots and naked barley, Tukche and Marpha are both name brands even though you buy them in beer bottles.

Khukri cocktails are Rum Punch, Cuba Libre and Khukri Knock Out, available at most watering holes in Thamel. Jatra in Thamel and Krishnaarpan t Dwarika’s Hotel. Dhokaima also serves an interesting Aila Mary made with tomato juice. Jatra, in Thamel, has the most innovative aila mix ever produced. For Rs 140 you get a 60 ml shot of flavoured aila with Yarchagumba, which will definitely get your motor running.

Marpha Brandy
_unset to escape the city’s chaos?

The Surya Palace Hotel’s second treat for the capital is the Just Divine Nite’6 at Latin Quarter. Jack Daniels Just Divine Nites are already popular in December, 6.30 PM onwards, 1905-2006.

Dwarika’s Hotel
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After the British film festival in Nepal organised by the British Council there is now a Nepali film festival in Britain organised by the group, London Chhalphal.

The 'Kindom in Motion' film festival 13-14 January will raise understanding about Nepal’s conflict and the situation facing Bhutanese refugees here, according to the organisers. They hope the knowledge will result in greater international pressure on parties involved to work towards lasting peace. 'Kingdom in Motion' will also raise donations for internally displaced people in Nepal. The featured films include:

Mukundo
This is a tragic story of a young working class Kathmandu family and the influence of culture, religion, desire and shamanistic ritual on their lives.

Schools in the Crossfire
The Maoists have increasingly targeted schools. Pupils and teachers find themselves caught between the government, which accuses them of being Maoist sympathisers and the insurgents, who accuse them of spying for the state.

Numafung
Set in eastern Nepal, the film depicts the life of Numafung and her experience with Limbu rituals, death, family life, marriage and happiness.

Spirit Does Not Come Anymore
This film explores the Tibetan belief in invoking spirits to cure family ills and disease. It narrates the conflict between a father and his son who wants to break away from family traditions.

On the Road with the Red God
This month-long celebration of colour, sacrifice and devotional worship is held every 12 years and was filmed in 2003.

Kumari, the Living Goddess of Nepal
A documentary on the stories of three former Kumars, including their ‘lost childhoods’ and lives after they are retired.

Kingdom in Motion
13-14 January, 2006
International Student House
Great Portland Street
Regents Park, London
http://www.london-chhalphal.org