Roadblock to peace

As a showdown looms, state security is busier foiling political rallies than hunting Maoists

RAMESWOR BOHARA
in NEPALGANJ

Two weeks after the Maoists pulled out of their unilateral ceasefire what do we have?
- Six policemen killed in hit-and-run raids on pickets
- No attacks on army bases or patrols
- Systematic bombing of development infrastructure, especially district education offices and municipality buildings
- All attacks so far in western Nepal while King Gyanendra tours the east
- State security more intent on foiling political rallies than hunting Maoists.

The Maoists are building up violence ahead of the big bangs they hope to unleash in the first week of February. But they appear not to be in a very target-rich environment.

The army has used the ceasefire period after the Pili attack to strengthen perimeter defences of its bases. They are vulnerable only on patrol or in the open highway. Indeed, in western Nepal it increasingly looks like the army controls the skies while the Maoists control the highways.

On 3 January the Maoists blocked an entire section of the East West Highway between Kholapur and Chisapani and held a public meeting for an entire day right on the highway itself. The audacity of this move was unprecedented: it was done within 25 km of two major army bases and journalists were invited.

Guerrillas with assault rifles guarded roadblocks and frisked everyone going in. Maoist incharge Comrade Athak said this was part of the rebel strategy to “control the roads and move to the city”. Security sources told us later that they knew the meeting was taking place. But it was clear the army didn’t want to risk driving in convoys along a jungle road vulnerable to ambush and landmine attacks. Even the Maoists guarding the roadblocks didn’t look worried.

But then an army Lancer helicopter arrived and circled overhead. People attending the meeting fled in panic, the rebels took cover. The army’s display of air power did force the Maoists to cancel a scheduled march past by two of its brigades and a speech by an unnamed central committee member.

Looking at the Maoist bandobast it was clear the rebels were preparing for a major attack somewhere. Sure enough, on Wednesday night these same guerrillas were involved in simultaneous attacks on Dhangadi, Tikapur and Sukkhar during which they overran at least one police post and ransacked the armoury.

With three weeks before the municipal polls, which the Maoists have said they will disrupt and the political parties say they will boycott, it is clear that the security forces are overextended. They have to keep an eye on the political parties, they have to guard polling booths and they have to defend themselves from Maoist attacks.

So, the Maoist announcement of a six-day national shutdown 5-11 February to disrupt the polls looks like a blessing in disguise for the security forces. It will curtail the movement of party activists and they can concentrate on guarding the voting booths.
Dirty games

The political middle ground is a victim of its own hypocrisy

In Nepal the saying ‘politics is dirty game’ has special significance, our political masters have habitually defined logic to serve myopic designs even though these designs are strategically worthless.

Nearly a year after the February First royal takeover, a familiar pattern of senselessness behaviour has been revealed which speaks poorly of the collective intellectual capacity of Nepal’s political elite.

Many pundits supposed the takeover because they equated this development with a power grab. Having correctly assessed part of the equation, they dismissed national attempts at re-establishing equilibrium as ‘royalist designs’ marked on a journey of confrontation. Instead of employing counter-measures to defeat a strategy predicated on divisions, our pundits consciously re-enforced ideological polarisation, forwarded individualistic agendas and further decimated the moderate platforms they purportedly represent.

Had the intent been to avert extremist designs, the common forum should have been united front to negotiate with the Maoists. This approach would have guaranteed unconditioned, unambiguous international support and would also have ensured the survival of parliaments.

Moderates who claim with 20/20 hindsight that siding with the Maoists over the monarch is inherently more logical neglect the fact that carefully engineered outcomes and providence are not the same thing.

The main reason for polarisation is self-righteousness.empty口袋

The amendment renders humiliating a potent weapon that is repeatedly exposed to damaging outcomes and autocrats. Despite a repetitive (and predictable) pattern, our punditry demonstrates an incapacity at placing populist interests ahead of individual ones. Case in point: after a dose of post-February First humiliation, our political gurus willfully participated in crafting a document that would have sent an immoral message to the design’s unintended implementation.

Instead of preserving and building upon what remains of moderate politics, the seven party alliance has perilously expanded its membership to encompass radicals. And the rebels have gone to great lengths to portray their 12-point agenda as a unified platform of opposition against the palace.

This agreement is reminiscent of superfluous attempts at defending democracy when was really being defended was partisan bottomline.

The 12-point agreement merely formalised what was already a shared agenda. More importantly, the agreement’s framework remains a safety net for the Maoist leadership.

As ambiguous as the 12-point agreement may be, it serves a crucial purpose in the process of complete polarisation. For traditionally moderate parties like the NC, progression under a united leftist banner is not without peril. The champion of Nepal’s political middle ground is now a victim of its own hypocrisy: continued external opposition to an ‘undemocratic regime’ and internal, unwilling participation.

Ultimately, we’ve arrived at the same place as 2002, and the political blunder of all time rejection of polls. No space need be wasted debating why. After all, rejecting elections did wonders for the democratic image of all actors involved. Whether the outcome was intentional (at least for the mainstream parties) is debatable.

In the evolutionary step, it is inherently more logical to first aim for a functional democracy instead of a moral, liberal or absolute democracy. Even with the political haze that obscures our nation’s trajectory, it is evident that the foremost obstacle to democratic discourse is an arcane generation of leaders. The tradition of unfaithfulness to the people’s will to temptation and greed will persist for as long as outdated customs and their proponents enjoy positions of power.

Since Nepal’s political institutions are in the habit of following our southern neighbor’s lead, now would be a good time to take the example of individuals like Atil Bihari Vajpayee and A.K. Advani. It would be the perfect time to permit internal, political pluralism, and the politics of peace in old positions and to transform democratic lip-service into democratic practice.

Fixing something that’s broken

Unless the parties back a constituent assembly their opposition to municipal elections will have no meaning

One may wonder, if the government is hell-bent on going through with municipal elections. Nepal’s rural folks, representing nearly 85 percent of the total electorate, have nothing to do with these polls.

Mainstream parties that represent 95 percent of the votes in the last parliamentary elections have decided to boycott the municipal polls. This is essentially a null vote, with the government continuing to campaign all over the country to explain its false import. Even if the campaign is in a free and fair manner, the legitimacy of the elections will remain doubtful. The safety of candidates and their supporters are in doubt since the Maoists are committed to disrupting the polls.

If its procedural implications are daunting, the purpose of the polls is even more suspicious. Municipal elections won’t help restore the sovereignty of the people, and will aggravate rather than help resolve the ongoing conflict. The polls will force the constitutional forces—mainstream parties and the king—even further apart.

No matter how well the polls are conducted, its result is unlikely to legitimise the current monarchal democracy. Pragmatism demands that the elections be deferred to avoid a premature confrontation. But reason often is the first casualty in authoritarian orders. Royalists let it slip recently that the polls must be held because the prestige of the king was at stake. Nepal society seems destined to perpetuate the price of deadly determinism.

As long as the constitution functioned, the desirability of constituent assembly could be questioned on the basis of pointlessness: why fix something that isn’t broken? That dilemma ended with the dissolution of parliament in May 2005. Framers of the constitution hadn’t assumed that a premier would willingly surrender himself to the supreme commander-in-chief of the army.

The possibility of amending the constitution to remove its anomalies ended with the royal takeover of 4 October, 2002. This message was, and continues to be, a dig in the ribs for the Maoists. The possibility of post-February First amending the constitution to remove its anomalies ended with the royal takeover.

If there was any doubt about the king’s true intentions, he can be heard loud and clear on 1 February 2005. Without saying it in so many words, King Gyanendra announced that there is no use for the constitution other than its single provision: Article 127, the ‘Henry VIII clause’ which gave the king the power to legislate by proclamation.

At this point any politician worth his salt should have sought a fresh compact with the Maoists. Nepal’s political elite has habitually defied 20/20 hindsight that siding with the Maoists over the monarch is inherently more logical neglect the fact that carefully engineered outcomes and providence are not the same thing.

The main reason for polarisation is self-righteousness.empty口袋

The amendment renders humiliating a potent weapon that is repeatedly exposed to damaging outcomes and autocrats. Despite a repetitive (and predictable) pattern, our punditry demonstrates an incapacity at placing populist interests ahead of individual ones. Case in point: after a dose of post-February First humiliation, our political gurus willfully participated in crafting a document that would have sent an immoral message to the design’s unintended implementation.

Instead of preserving and building upon what remains of moderate politics, the seven party alliance has perilously expanded its membership to encompass radicals. And the rebels have gone to great lengths to portray their 12-point agenda as a unified platform of opposition against the palace.

This agreement is reminiscent of superfluous attempts at defending democracy when was really being defended was partisan bottomline.

The 12-point agreement merely formalised what was already a shared agenda. More importantly, the agreement’s framework remains a safety net for the Maoist leadership.

As ambiguous as the 12-point agreement may be, it serves a crucial purpose in the process of complete polarisation. For traditionally moderate parties like the NC, progression under a united leftist banner is not without peril. The champion of Nepal’s political middle ground is now a victim of its own hypocrisy: continued external opposition to an ‘undemocratic regime’ and internal, unwilling participation.

Ultimately, we’ve arrived at the same place as 2002, and the political blunder of all time rejection of polls. No space need be wasted debating why. After all, rejecting elections did wonders for the democratic image of all actors involved. Whether the outcome was intentional (at least for the mainstream parties) is debatable.

In the evolutionary step, it is inherently more logical to first aim for a functional democracy instead of a moral, liberal or absolute democracy. Even with the political haze that obscures our nation’s trajectory, it is evident that the foremost obstacle to democratic discourse is an arcane generation of leaders. The tradition of unfaithfulness to the people’s will to temptation and greed will persist for as long as outdated customs and their proponents enjoy positions of power.

Since Nepal’s political institutions are in the habit of following our southern neighbor’s lead, now would be a good time to take the example of individuals like Atil Bihari Vajpayee and A.K. Advani. It would be the perfect time to permit internal, political pluralism, and the politics of peace in old positions and to transform democratic lip-service into democratic practice.
defend the shameless and tainted faces
Column ('Rebuilding democracy', #277). (Letters, #280) to my critique of his Guest
blurry position through his response
Bihari Krishna Shrestha, reasserted his
REBUILDING DEMOCRACY
state to better deal with the rebels.
the parties which will also enable the
reconciliation between the monarchy and
best way out of the present stalemate is
palace shouldn't mistake that for support
the Nepal out of sheer desperation, the
much-publicised trips to different parts of
People have flocked to King Gyanendra's
controversy with their demagoguery.
psychohants are dragging the king into
the king's government. These
rule policy have tarnished the image of
cabinet and the government's divide-and-
existence of the tainted figures in the
engaged in the politics of revenge. The
governments have failed to deliver. It is
after King Gyanendra took over that his
than the Maoists. It is now clear one year
Re: your editorial 'Hear no peace, see no
HEAR NO PEACE
Bikendra Shamsher Thapa, email
until the army has shown that when
words can boomerang. Words can boomerang.
likely targets or towards those that are
continue to rule the roost' can sometimes
nuances which can bind and add
warring sides and does more to incite
becoming acutely one dimensional. It does
slogan of '
The criticisms of Nepal's politics and society has exposed the country to greater
slogan of 'Hariyo ban, Nepalko dhan'
Bihari Krishna Shrestha's columns are
But the army has shown that when
words can boomerang. Words can boomerang.
likely targets or towards those that are
continue to rule the roost' can sometimes
nuances which can bind and add
warring sides and does more to incite
becoming acutely one dimensional. It does
slogan of '

Bihari Krishna Shrestha, email

HATS OFF
Kudos to Kunda Dixit for 'Indian
Sinhophobie' (#279). For the first time ever he has written something that makes
sense. I just hope he will get rid of his not-so-
funny hats and starts wearing something that makes sense and looks good on
him too.

Dhruva Khanal, New York.
Wish you could live in a palace?

Rana mansions are being reborn as boutique apartments

The Rana period has been vilified as a feudal period in Nepal’s history and one of its legacies has been the palaces the Sri Teens left behind. While palaces like Singha Darbar, Harihar Bhawan and Sri Mahal were converted into government offices others were demolished by Rana offspring. But there are quite a few Rana outhouses and residences of minor Ranas that stand to this day and many are now being restored as their owners find value in their architectural heritage.

If this trend catches on, crumbling old Victorian style Rana architecture may get a new lease on life. One such property is Kiran Bhawan in Sanepa which has been converted into a heritage hotel.

“This is a heritage property, you can’t just destroy what has been there for nearly a century,” says Mohindra Singh Judge, whose father bought the palace from Kiran Rana, son of Juddha Shamsher. While Judge’s entire family relocated to Bangalore, he chose to stay back and preserve Kiran Bhawan which was literally falling apart. With an investment of nearly Rs 6 million, Judge put his full energy into meticulously renovating every square inch of the mansion: lovingly restoring every door handle, fixtures, window latches just like in the original.

Building on a wealth of hotel marketing experience gained in Australia, Judge developed the idea of transforming the family house into short-stay apartments for guests. Now known as Kiran Bhawan Boutique Apartments, the project has already generated a buzz, especially in Kathmandu’s expat circle and international consultants based here.

The building still functions like a hotel, offering room service, a restaurant and a bar but what makes it different is that each apartment feels more like a home, with a private kitchen, living room and a large bathroom including a huge tub. The apartments opened in December and Judge hopes that his project will inspire more owners of former palaces to preserve their buildings. But maintaining a property that occupies two hectares and includes two 1,000-sq-ft ballrooms and banquet halls whose ceilings are decorated with 100-year-old paintings does not come cheap.

And while the market for such apartments is growing, owners of the former palaces don’t find it easy getting loans from banks who tell them restoration is not a viable business proposition. However, others say the results are worth the investment. “Kiran Bhawan is really an inspiring example of preserving centuries-old buildings,” says cultural heritage promoter Anil Chitrakar.

Turning Kathmandu’s mansions into apartments is not a new idea: after all Nepal’s first western style hotel, the Royal Hotel run by legendary Russian Boris Lissavitch, was itself a converted palace. The popular Bhojan Ghati restaurant, which restored half of a totally ruined former palace into a fully functioning restaurant a decade ago, is now adding apartments on the other side.

The International Club in Sanepa also banked on this idea and it is now known as Good Neighbours International Recreation Centre. The old palace building is now a 10-apartment complex with a sports centre, gym and health club.

“Many expatriates who come to Nepal briefly prefer apartments to hotels, which is why the idea is becoming popular,” says the Centre’s Pemak Sherpa. Some of them stay for as long as a year, he adds.

Expats guests at the Kiran Bhawan can rent for $1,000 a month or $50 a day and Judge doesn’t want to go into a price war being confident that his guests will recognise good value when they see it. He tells bargain-hunters to check into a nearby hotel instead.

“The fact is, we are also very selective about our renters,” says Judge, adding that most of his guests want peace and quiet and he often screens and interviews tenants before accepting them. Some are predicting that as demand for such temporary accommodation grows, owners like Judge will have the upper hand in renting to a segment of the market increasingly looking for ambience and history along with a place to get a good night’s rest.
SNV Nepal's silver jubilee

The Nepal Rural Development Organisation (SNV) celebrated its 25th year in the country recently, marking it with a seminar in which its partners shared experiences in development cooperation. SNV has been involved in infrastructure projects and community development in remote areas of the country. Since 2000, SNV is more involved in an advisory capacity and has concentrated in two regions: Karnali and Mechi. It is also involved in biodiversity conservation effort in the Tarai and Siwalik. SNV’s most acclaimed activity has been the Community Support Program which has built 125,000 biogas digesters in 66 districts around the country. SNV Nepal director, Matthias Meyerson, says his organisation’s strategy is to create space for development despite the conflict. Together with the International Alert, SNV is currently linking development with peace-building. Says Meyerson: “We understand conflict dynamics in the districts and our programs are sensitive to it.”

Info highway opens

Road to ruin

It’s time economists told the truth about Nepal’s economic wreck

This book hit the road driving east and returned just as the unilateral ceasefire ended. For the insulated inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, such a drive, especially for pleasure, is becoming rare. The average take home pay of a 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000.而STOL crew have been on the warpath demanding pay at par with private carriers. The average take home pay of a 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000. For the insulated inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, such a drive, especially for pleasure, is becoming rare. The crew loyalty to Royal Nepal tested who faced mandatory retirement at 58 were ready to go over. The only thing that was missing was a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. They are new lines of suits and blazers in the market. They are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. They are. They are. They are.

NEW PRODUCTS

ORANGEBOOM BEER: The world’s largest beer manufacturer, Heineken, has introduced Orangeboom beer in Nepal. Heineken produces 200 different types of beers in 30 countries worldwide, including Stella Artois, Budweiser and Heineken. WAI WAI TENZI: The Chaundy Group has introduced chicken tandoori flavour Wai Wai Tenz in Nepal. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in the market. They are.

Crew loyalty to Royal Nepal tested

If it doesn’t shape up, Nepal’s national airline may soon lose all its pilots

KALA PRADHAN

According to a gap in the salary between pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines and private carriers as well as the lack of compensation for crew in India is threatening to ground the national airline. Earlier this month, headhunters from the Madras-based Blue Dart airline were in Kathmandu and interviewed 12 Boeing 757 pilots from state-owned Royal Nepal Airline. They will shortlist six pilots and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara induced Boeing 767s, at least half of a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over the line. The only thing stopping them was a Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 licence to 767.

This comes as Royal Nepal’s domestic service crew have been on the verge of demanding pay at par with private carriers. They called off a threatened strike on 31 December after a government promise to look into their grievances. A group of 757 pilots of Royal Nepal Airlines were not paid a 757 captain with Royal Nepal Airlines flying 50 hours a month is only Rs 50,000. A 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000. The gap is even more glaring for pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airline. They will shortlist six pilots and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara induced Boeing 767s, at least half of a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over the line. The only thing stopping them was a Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 licence to 767.

This comes as Royal Nepal’s domestic service crew have been on the verge of demanding pay at par with private carriers. They called off a threatened strike on 31 December after a government promise to look into their grievances. A group of 757 pilots of Royal Nepal Airlines were not paid a 757 captain with Royal Nepal Airlines flying 50 hours a month is only Rs 50,000. A 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000. The gap is even more glaring for pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airline. They will shortlist six pilots and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara induced Boeing 767s, at least half of a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over the line. The only thing stopping them was a Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 licence to 767.

This comes as Royal Nepal’s domestic service crew have been on the verge of demanding pay at par with private carriers. They called off a threatened strike on 31 December after a government promise to look into their grievances. A group of 757 pilots of Royal Nepal Airlines were not paid a 757 captain with Royal Nepal Airlines flying 50 hours a month is only Rs 50,000. A 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000. The gap is even more glaring for pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airline. They will shortlist six pilots and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara induced Boeing 767s, at least half of a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over the line. The only thing stopping them was a Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 licence to 767.

This comes as Royal Nepal’s domestic service crew have been on the verge of demanding pay at par with private carriers. They called off a threatened strike on 31 December after a government promise to look into their grievances. A group of 757 pilots of Royal Nepal Airlines were not paid a 757 captain with Royal Nepal Airlines flying 50 hours a month is only Rs 50,000. A 757 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to Rs 450,000. The gap is even more glaring for pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airline. They will shortlist six pilots and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara induced Boeing 767s, at least half of a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over the line. The only thing stopping them was a Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 licence to 767.
The Maoists are preparing for a final showdown to wrest power from the royal regime. According to their plan, ‘climbing on the shoulder of the army’ means to escort supply vehicles and to make daring ambush attacks on army bases around the capital. The aim seems to be to bring in 500,000 people into the Valley for their pro-democracy rally on 20 January. The combination of the Maoist military threat and the rallies on the streets are expected to be a big challenge for the regime. And if the Maoists simultaneously start raiding several district headquarters, the army will be overstretched to defend all the capitals or the districts? These are the challenges the government will face as the deadline for the banda approaches. It seems to be no effort by the government to try to counter its effects. The chairman of the council of ministers hasn’t yet finished his district tour. The ministers are too busy splitting parties to pay much attention to the threat from the Maoists. Artificial shortages of gas and other supplies are already evident and black markets are having a field day. The king’s adviser, Sharad Chandra Shah has just been discharged from B&B Hospital with an unspecified disease and vice-chairman Tulsi Giri has such severe back problems that he is not even attending his office. Meanwhile, the political parties are preparing to bring in 500,000 people into the Valley for their pro-democracy rally on 20 January. The combination of the Maoist military threat and the rallies on the streets are expected to be a big challenge for the regime. And if the Maoists simultaneously start raiding several district headquarters, the army will be overstretched to defend all the capitals or the districts? The only antidote to this is for the government to immediately start negotiations and to restore the people’s representatives. The international community has advised that there is no military solution to this crisis and the regime can’t defend itself just on guns and batons. The advantage for the Maoists is also that the security apparatus is preoccupied with providing security for the municipal elections and the government is distracted with conducting polls. The ultimate result of all this diplomatic could be an urban uprising which is what the Maoists want.
Nepal: Your reaction to the Maoist decision to end the ceasefire?
Ian Martin: Well, looking at it from the human rights point of view, this definitely can’t be considered positive. The four months period of the unilateral ceasefire was very peaceful except for a few sporadic incidents. But now as the ceasefire has been called off the death toll and violence might just escalate. Because the ceasefire has been called off both the state and the Maoists have once again gone to war. In such a situation both the sides should respect human rights and abide by the international law.

The Maoists have said it was their compulsion to call off the ceasefire. Do you agree?
I don’t have the mandate to make political comments. But what I want to recall here is that United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan had made repeated requests to the government to declare ceasefire. He had even asked the Maoists to extend the ceasefire. But since the ceasefire has been terminated, the UN is very upset. This is because neither did the government respond to the unilateral ceasefire called by the Maoists and neither did the Maoists extend it.

Has there been any improvement in the human rights situation since the establishment of your office?
We have the mandate to make visits to the jails where the political prisoners are kept. We can go to these prisons without prior notice. Accordingly we have visited many jails and taken stock of the condition of the prisoners who have been kept there. To make someone disappear is against the international humanitarian law. We have made both the state and the Maoists aware of that. In the meantime the government has even provided information on some persons who have been made to disappear.

What are prison conditions like?
We haven’t gone to each and every prison of the country, but we found some persons who had been illegally detained by the Royal Nepali Army inside the barracks. We are saying that the army shouldn’t illegally detain people like this. A political prisoner should be kept in the police custody with his legal status intact. But prisoners are still being detained in barracks.

Violation of human rights may be one reason for the escalation of violence in the country. In Nepal’s context both the warring sides are equally responsible in the instances of human rights violation. The Nepali government is signatory to the international treaties and convention on human rights. To act as per those agreements is its responsibility. Though the rebel Maoists haven’t signed in any of such international agreements and conventions, it doesn’t mean they can violate the international human rights law. They should definitely respect it.

What kind of role can the United Nation play in the conflict resolution of Nepal?
The United Nations has played a role in restoring peace in many war torn countries. In some places it has been successful and in some places it hasn’t. If the warring sides seek a UN role here, then we could be involved.

(Adapted from Nepalnews.com Translation Service)
“I was trying to stop the ground from moving by pushing on the earth but it didn’t work,” remembers Asha Ratna Dhakwa, 85, of the 1934 earthquake that devastated Kathmandu killing at least 10,000 people.

Walking in Nag Bahal in Patan you understand Dhakwa’s predicament. Narrow dark gallis with houses crowded together on both sides lead to chowks surrounded by old and new buildings, many at least four storeys tall. The bahals lead to even more narrow alleys. These serpentine streets are one reason municipal officials singled out Ward 16 for earthquake preparedness.

“We could have gone anywhere but we chose places from where the people are enthusiastic and want to take responsibility,” explains Amod Mani Dixit of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET).

With the Nepal Red Cross Society and Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Preparedness Initiative, NSET helps Ward 16 with earthquake preparedness. It includes raising awareness by distributing brochures door-to-door and community mobilisation. Around 60 people have been trained on rescue, relief and primary treatment. Of those, about 20 were selected for further training and to pass on that knowledge to other residents of their toles.

The Red Cross helped install first aid containers in four strategic spots in Ward 16. They contain stretchers, medical supplies and rescue equipment such as shovels, stoves, helmets, jackets, boots, torches and lanterns. “We also have 300 sets of blankets and tents ready for those who need it when disaster strikes,” says Dilip Joshi of Nepal Red Cross Society.

In addition, the awareness programs that are held regularly emphasise what people should do before a major disaster strikes. “Our aim is to save as many lives as possible and that can be achieved only through people who are trained in relief and rescue,” adds Joshi.

Across the river in Kathmandu, Ward 17 residents aren’t counting on the government to deliver relief when the Big One strikes. Instead, they have set up a program that mixes awareness, training, survival skills and helping neighbours.

“We have made Wards 17, 29 and 30 secure and I guess we could handle two more but there are 110 wards and over two million people in Kathmandu, what about them?” asks Singh shaking his head.

But at least Ward 16 in Patan and Ward 17 in Kathmandu have shown the way for the others to follow. One day soon, we will be glad we are prepared.
A\textsuperscript{3} Allah’s will

In Kashmir, a Nepali gets a glimpse of the aftermath of a future quake in his own country

ASIM SINGH MAHAT
in MUZAFFARABAD

I
tall started with Ali Hamza and his son-to-be wife tirelessly nagging me over the Kashmir earthquake issue. Thought I was never into community service, I felt obliged to go there and do my part working for a good cause.

With serious doubts on my mind, I set off on 28 December for Muzaffarabad, one of the cities hit hardest by the 8 October quake. I was expecting a city of ruins, a dead city. But when I arrived I was surprised to find Muzaffarabad functioning like any other small Pakistani city.

It was when I started searching for a place to stay that I got my first glimpse of reality—most of the moderate hotels had not survived the quake.

I was supposed to get in touch with Hasif, a Muzaffarabad-based aid worker who also had a strong religious inclination. He was not around and I did not want to disturb him so to kill time I took a stroll around the city. The situation seemed desperate as people waited for promised aid to materialise. Rs 175,000 pledged by the Pakistan government to those whose houses had been destroyed was to be distributed to only Rs 25,000 but even that amount had already been cut by the Pakistan government to materialise. Rs 175,000 pledged by the Pakistan government to those whose houses had been destroyed was to be distributed to only Rs 25,000 but even that amount had already been cut by the Pakistan government to materialise. Rs 175,000 pledged by the Pakistan government to those whose houses had been destroyed was to be distributed to only Rs 25,000 but even that amount had already been cut by the Pakistan government to materialise.

A storekeeper told me, “Bhai jaan, this government was supposed to compensate us but with that amount it will be impossible to rebuild our houses.” Finally Hasif showed up and he seemed to get more disgruntled with every passing day. “The UN cars don’t move without any escort—around 300 Pakistani soldiers have been assigned just to protect them where there is a shortage of manpower to help in reconstruction. Even if they do rebuild, it is only the army barracks while the public offices and schools lie in ruins,” he said.

He warned me that corrupt local authorities were raising funds for their own political campaigns that would take place later. “You will find them at checkpoints, be very cautious of them. Act foreigner, jumble up English and Urdu then they will let you pass,” he said.

Though downtown Muzaffarabad looked normal, a half hour walk to the outskirts proved that it was hard hit. Refugee camps of about 300 tents had been set up, where eight to 10 people crowded into a single dwelling. Drinking water and food was transported from the city but blankets were in short supply and the tents were scant protection against the cold winter wind.

Though winter had yet to arrive in full force, people were apprehensive about the coming months of snow and intense cold. It was estimated that at least 30 percent of those tent refugees would not survive.

As I walked away from that devastation, I could do nothing but question. What had happened? How could this happen?

An earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck Muzaffarabad at 9:52 in the morning of 8 October, killing over 80,000 people in Pakistan and India. The earthquake was felt in the plains of Kashmir, bringing down houses and roads. The tremor was felt up to 200 km away in India.

The earthquake was so strong that it caused a tsunami that hit the coast of Pakistan and India, killing over 100,000 people. The earthquake was also felt in Afghanistan, where over 50,000 people were killed.

As the aftershocks continued, the situation turned worse. People were left homeless and without food and water. The government was slow to respond, and the lack of aid continued to worsen the situation.

To make matters worse, a second earthquake of 7.7 magnitude hit the area on 13 October, causing even more destruction.

In the aftermath, the United Nations and other international organizations launched a massive relief effort, but the situation remained critical.

The earthquake was a reminder of the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters. The area is prone to earthquakes and tsunamis, and the government needs to improve its disaster preparedness efforts.

Another problem facing the survivors was that though the Pakistani army had started distributing cheques for Rs 25,000, people were unable to cash them. The banks would demand identity but for people who had lost everything in the quake this was impossible to produce. “We have faith in Allah, he has already saved us once and if so is his will, he will save us again,” said Altaf Hussain, 23, who lived in a tent with his three sisters and five brothers.

As I walked away from that devastation, I could do nothing but question. What had happened? How could this happen?

An earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale struck Muzaffarabad at 9:52 in the morning of 8 October, killing over 80,000 people in Pakistan and India. The earthquake was felt in the plains of Kashmir, bringing down houses and roads. The tremor was felt up to 200 km away in India.

The earthquake was so strong that it caused a tsunami that hit the coast of Pakistan and India, killing over 100,000 people. The earthquake was also felt in Afghanistan, where over 50,000 people were killed.

As the aftershocks continued, the situation turned worse. People were left homeless and without food and water. The government was slow to respond, and the lack of aid continued to worsen the situation.

To make matters worse, a second earthquake of 7.7 magnitude hit the area on 13 October, causing even more destruction.

In the aftermath, the United Nations and other international organizations launched a massive relief effort, but the situation remained critical.

The earthquake was a reminder of the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters. The area is prone to earthquakes and tsunamis, and the government needs to improve its disaster preparedness efforts.
Man’s inhumanity to woman

War has shattered many Nepali women’s lives but still they grow stronger

MARTY LOGAN

A decade of conflict has made many Nepali women more vulnerable yet also forced them to take on traditional male roles because the men in their lives are either absent or at risk, says a new report.

While some of those new roles could be pathways to greater women’s empowerment when peace returns, women hope they will not be supported by others.

“The negative effects of the conflict have more far-reaching effects than the positive ones,” says Arnu Rana Dhesa of Samanata, which conducted the 2004 survey and published the report, Changing Roles of Nepali Women due to the Ongoing Conflict and its Impact. “The negative effects led by growing poverty are totally devastating,” she added at a recent presentation in Kathmandu.

Samanata’s researchers surveyed Nepalis in nine districts in four development regions. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents were women, 83 percent had families who had become separated because of death, abduction, rape or murder, of themselves, their daughters or daughter-in-laws.

Yet in many cases women reported feeling less vulnerable than men and thus began shouldering their former responsibilities. “They might kill the men, I’m a woman they won’t kill me,” says Raniya whose story is told in the report. Her family was forced to move from its village in Khotang district to Biratnagar but must return once a year or their claim to their farms would be annulled by the Maoists. "Raniya now travels alone by bus to Khotang and then walks to the village and back in a day. She negotiates with the insurgents and her self-confidence has increased tremendously. She feels her ability to voice opinions has increased along with awareness about rights,” says the report.

Sixty percent of those interviewed said women had become more active in their communities, 70 percent that they were now borrowing money and two-thirds that women were playing larger roles in decision-making. Nearly two-thirds of men said they had a greater appreciation of the work that women were doing.

The report, which was supported by EED’s Enabling State Programme, concludes: “It is imperative to consolidate these gains to take forward the development process at a quicker pace. Women’s unity and networking in face of adversity should be built upon for initiating the peace process as well as in the reconstruction phase.”

Torturing ourselves

Both sides to the conflict have tortured citizens, but now the monitors are watching

UN human rights chief Louise Arbour warned last week that her office will be closely monitoring any future abuses ahead of this year’s meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights (see Arbour’s appeal, #280). At last year’s meeting the international community pushed the Nepali government to accept the UN human rights chief in Nepal which is headed by former Amnesty International chief, Ian Martin.

The UN committee on Torment’s November meeting was overshadowed by speculation about the ceasefire and the 12-point understanding between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance and it rebuked the government on a number of fronts.

In its concluding observations, the committee, whose members include Chile, China, Russia, Senegal and the United States, first praised the government for cooperating with the new UN rights office and setting up human rights cells in the RNA, IPP, and Police. It added that it was “alarmed by the high incidence of atrocities” committed by the Maoists”. It also criticised the “lack of fundamental guarantees of the rights of persons deprived of liberty under (TADO) including the right to challenge arrest, resulting in numerous alleged cases of incomunicado detention.”

From voices he heard and other clues he picked up while blindfolded, Bista believes that he was held at the RNA’s Bhimjivan Battalion in Maharajganj for the first seven days. Last Thursday, the Supreme Court ordered the RNA to explain why it had lied to the court about holding four detainees, one of whom, Bista said, was arrested two years ago by plainclothes security officers.

The RNA’s reply had informed the NHRC and the UN human rights office about their arrests but despite numerous requests, it has yet to respond to Bista’s allegations. #280

Latest report of the UN Committee on Torture: http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT_C_NPL_CO_1_CRP.3.doc

Marty Logan

UN human rights chief Louise Arbour warned last week that her office will be closely monitoring any future abuses ahead of this year’s meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights (see Arbour’s appeal, #280). At last year’s meeting the international community pushed the Nepali government to accept the UN human rights chief in Nepal which is headed by former Amnesty International chief, Ian Martin.

The UN committee on Torment’s November meeting was overshadowed by speculation about the ceasefire and the 12-point understanding between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance and it rebuked the government on a number of fronts.

In its concluding observations, the committee, whose members include Chile, China, Russia, Senegal and the United States, first praised the government for cooperating with the new UN rights office and setting up human rights cells in the RNA, IPP, and Police. It added that it was “alarmed by the high incidence of atrocities” committed by the Maoists”. It also criticised the “lack of fundamental guarantees of the rights of persons deprived of liberty under (TADO) including the right to challenge arrest, resulting in numerous alleged cases of incomunicado detention.”

From voices he heard and other clues he picked up while blindfolded, Bista believes that he was held at the RNA’s Bhimjivan Battalion in Maharajganj for the first seven days. Last Thursday, the Supreme Court ordered the RNA to explain why it had lied to the court about holding four detainees, one of whom, Bista said, was arrested two years ago by plainclothes security officers.

The RNA’s reply had informed the NHRC and the UN human rights office about their arrests but despite numerous requests, it has yet to respond to Bista’s allegations. #280

Latest report of the UN Committee on Torture: http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT_C_NPL_CO_1_CRP.3.doc

Marty Logan
Give us back our sons

We’ll lock Singha Darbar up, warn families of the disappeared

NARESH NEWAR

“He would be 25 today sitting in the middle of death three years ago. As news of the hunger strike spread other parents whose sons were disappeared joined the campaign. That finally pushed human rights groups to put pressure on the government, which revealed the status of 18 out of 32 disappeared persons. This resulted in the formation of the Raja Dwam Bappa Patanjali Pariwar Samaj (Society of Families of Persons Disappeared by the State). Last month, members of the Society locked up the NHRC for five hours to pressure it to urge the government to locate the disappeared. “NHRC only raises its voice against Maoist activities but hardly says anything about the human rights abuses of the state authorities,” says Bhandari. Despite a Supreme Court order, the government’s investigative committees on disappeared people under the Ministry of Home Affairs has probed only 36 out of roughly 800-1,100 people that local rights groups say have been disappeared by the state. The National Working Committee ofDisappearances, set up with help from the UN’s human rights office here, says it will finish confirming reports within a month and then start filing cases at the Supreme Court. “The numbers are hard to confirm because many families are afraid to report cases of either disappearances or those who have been released from detention,” says advocate Kopila Adhikari of the group, Advocacy Forum which has registered around 300 cases of disappearances from over 25 districts since 2001. So far only those living in or near cities, especially Kathmandu, have been able to register cases. Those living in villages are either not aware or don’t have the courage to share confidential information about their disappeared relatives.

Nepal hoped the list of countries in the number of disappearances to between 2000-4, according to UN Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. International and national groups say they have focused less on disappearances by the Maoists because the rebels openly execute those they abduct for spying on the government’s behalf or for defying their party. Nepal hoped the list of countries in the number of disappearances to between 2000-4, according to UN Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. International and national groups say they have focused less on disappearances by the Maoists because the rebels openly execute those they abduct for spying on the government’s behalf or for defying their party.

The families of the disappeared are running out of patience. “If the state fails to act soon, we are going to lock Singha Darbar up and we don’t care if we die,” says Bhandari whose husband also had to run away from home after the family received threats on behalf of the disappeared. Bhandari lives with her 17-year-old daughter in Balaju. She says she is not afraid of anything anymore. ●

The Little Buddha of Bara

A young Tamang boy reaches the highest sacred realms of life

A t first, I was skeptical about going to receive darshan from Ram Bahadur Bomzon, “The Little Buddha of Bara.” I didn’t want to be part of a human circus. I felt this young man was showing us the way each of us should practice our own dharma in search of greater good, devotion or sanctity—not racing off to see someone else practice theirs. Still, I was intrigued.

So, with friends, we drove over the Tribhuvan Rajpath amid the spectacular backdrop of the Central Himalaya. We first passed an RNA check point in Palung then below Daman drove by young well armed Maoists chopping down trees. A night-stop at the Accovado Motel in Hetauda, then early next morning we drove to Bara. As we woke, I recalled that exactly one year ago on 2 January I had watched the sun rise driving back to Bangkok after the cremation of our friend, Robin Needham, the former CARE Nepal Director. Now the sun was rising and the miracle of life full circle as we were off to see a young boy seeking inspiration and salvation in the jungles of Nepal.

A bit past Patlaiya, we knew we had arrived when we saw Buddhist prayer flags whispering and flying in the trees above. Signs in Nepali asked pilgrims to maintain their silence and take off leather shoes as they approached the sacred mandala where young Ram Bahadur Bomzon was sitting.

There was a profound air of peacefulness and quietude with only about 20 people standing, praying or peering into the enclosure. Rather than feeling like I was violating someone else’s personal space, I felt a sense of the divine nearby. The deep elemental awe we experience when words or language cannot do justice to the reality we are experiencing. Maybe it was simply a profound respect for the sight of that young boy, entreated with dust and dirt. His hair and fingernails grown out, his head slightly askew, sitting, as he has for nearly eight months, under that magnificent tree protected on both sides by wings of the trunk enclosing him in a tender embrace.

The local committee that manages the site to protect the child and the local friends permitted us to go to the innermost core. We sat on the steps within the inner enclosure, some 15m. from the figure of the young boy. There, we peered more closely. We placed a khada and pashmina shawl to a nearby tree as an offering. I examined on our own the screen we stood in silent respect for this fellow human’s fundamental quest for moksha or simply a purer understanding of the nature of what it means to be alive in a world of desire. Juxtaposed vanity and greed, here was a young Tamang boy who sought with simple courage to reach the highest sacred realms of life in the raw, wild nature of Earth’s open jungle.

In the West, there is a belief that when revolution is in the air, false messiahs arise to lead people to more distant religious thoughts. We say ‘false’ because one never knows if they are really sacred individuals or merely faint hopes of a weary and disillusioned thought. We say ‘false’ messiahs arise to lead people to more distant religious thoughts. We say ‘false’ because one never knows if they are really sacred individuals or merely faint hopes of a weary and disillusioned people. Yet, there have always been prophets who arise during times of political trouble.

For us, who live in Nepal and have reason to doubt the integrity or sincerity of our national leaders, the simple and individual aspiration of a young boy like Ram Bahadur Bomzon reaches deep into our consciousness and psyche as a vision of sanctity. He continues to sit when we come or not. He has said that he hopes to sit for six years.

For me, the question is not whether he eats or not or if he is a reincarnation of a historical Buddha. Those are rational conceptions superimposed upon our observations. Instead, what I found so moving was the sacred space that he has created in his silent sitting. We seek sacred spaces in mandirs, in temples, in love, in friendship. Without a touch of the sacred all of our lives are lessened and diminished. As individuals, a society or culture, we all need to touch the divine within ourselves and among ourselves. Otherwise, we are liable to treat others as mere objects. It’s so easy to do. War and violence in fact allow us to do so on a large and tragic national scale.

That morning darshan in the jungle of Bara was a moment of salvation in the jungles of Nepal. It was the sacred space that he has created in his silent sitting. We place a khada and pashmina shawl to a nearby tree as an offering. Each on our own way, we stood in silent respect for this fellow human’s fundamental quest for moksha or simply a purer understanding of the nature of what it means to be alive. In a world of desire. Juxtaposed vanity and greed, here was a young Tamang boy who sought with simple courage to reach the highest sacred realms of life in the raw, wild nature of Earth’s open jungle. In the West, there is a belief that when revolution is in the air, false messiahs arise to lead people to more distant religious thoughts. We say ‘false’ because one never knows if they are really sacred individuals or merely faint hopes of a weary and disillusioned people. Yet, there have always been prophets who arise during times of political trouble.

For us, who live in Nepal and have reason to doubt the integrity or sincerity of our national leaders, the simple and individual aspiration of a young boy like Ram Bahadur Bomzon reaches deep into our consciousness and psyche as a vision of sanctity. He continues to sit when we come or not. He has said that he hopes to sit for six years.

For me, the question is not whether he eats or not or if he is a reincarnation of a historical Buddha. Those are rational conceptions superimposed upon our observations. Instead, what I found so moving was the sacred space that he has created in his silent sitting. We seek sacred spaces in mandirs, in temples, in love, in friendship. Without a touch of the sacred all of our lives are lessened and diminished. As individuals, a society or culture, we all need to touch the divine within ourselves and among ourselves. Otherwise, we are liable to treat others as mere objects. It’s so easy to do. War and violence in fact allow us to do so on a large and tragic national scale.

That morning darshan in the jungle of Bara was a moment of grace, a few hours of tranquility in a jarring world of noise, ego and self-promotion. One needn’t go to Bara to find peace. However, it is humbling to be near a child seeking with all of his soul to reach the divine. Such humility is a line reminder of our own limits, frailty and mortality. ●

Keith D Leslie cultivates bamboo and live with his children Joshua, Ezra and Leah Puja Rose outside Kathmandu.
Hard truths about bird flu

Turkey gives us a glimpse of how the pandemic may start

Is being famous on the internet the same as being famous in the real world?

**HENRY I MILLER**

in NEW YORK

The issues surrounding the possibility of a pandemic of the H5N1 strain of avian flu are extraordinarily complex, encompassing medicine, epidemiology, virology and even politics and ethics. Moreover, there is tremendous uncertainty about exactly how H5N1, which now primarily affects birds, might mutate into a form that is transmissible between humans and how infectious and lethal it might be.

Good surveillance is needed in order to obtain early warning that a strain of H5N1 transmissible between humans has been detected so that nations around the world can rapidly initiate a variety of public health measures, including a program to produce large amounts of vaccine against that strain.

Intensive animal husbandry procedures that place billions of poultry and swine in close proximity to humans, combined with unsanitary conditions, poverty and grossly inadequate public health infrastructure of all kinds, make it unlikely that a pandemic can be prevented or contained at the source. It is noteworthy that China’s chaotic effort to vaccinate 14 billion chickens has been compromised by counterfeit vaccines and the absence of protective gear for vaccination teams, which might actually spread disease by carrying fecal material on their shoes from one farm to another.

In theory, it is possible to contain a flu pandemic in its early stages by performing prophylactic using anti-flu drugs and quarantine aggressively to isolate relatively small outbreaks of a human-to-human transmissible strain of H5N1. According to John Hopkins University virologist Donald S. Burke, “it may be possible to identify a human outbreak at the earliest stage, while there are fewer than 100 cases, and deploy a WHO stockpile of antiviral drugs to rapidly quench it. This tipping point strategy is highly cost-effective.”

However, a strategy can be “cost-effective” only if it is feasible. Although ring prophylaxis might work in Minneapolis, Toronto, or Zurich, in the parts of the world where flu pandemics begin, places like Vietnam, Indonesia, and China, the probability of success approaches zero.

The response in Turkey—where as many as 50 possible cases have appeared in the eastern part of the country—is instructive. Officials in that region warned the government on 16 December of a surge in bird deaths but it took 12 days for an investigation to begin. When a 14-year-old boy became Turkey’s first avian flu mortality last week (soon followed by two siblings), a government spokesman criticised doctors for mentioning the disease because they were “damaging Turkey’s reputation.” This is ominously reminiscent of China’s initial response to SARS in 2003. For now, it seems that all of the human H5N1 infections have been contained from contact with infected poultry. But the situation in Turkey is what the outbreak of a human to human pandemic could look like at its earliest stages: the rapid spread of confirmed cases (and deaths) from an initial site to nearby villages and cities. We would expect to see a large number of illnesses among both employees and patients in hospitals where the victims are treated and soon someone (perhaps even a carrier who is not consequently identified) will start to die. Indeed, for Ito it seems, “is probably mostly online fame smoothing the way to offline fame.”

**Blogging one’s way to fame**

Is being famous on the internet the same as being famous in the real world?

People.com was born, using a website where people could measure their online fame. People.com was born, using a website where people could measure their online fame. People.com was born, using a website where people could measure their online fame. People.com was born, using a website where people could measure their online fame. People.com was born, using a website where people could measure their online fame.

**JEREMY WAGSTAFF**

On the radio. I was on tv. He was in a magazine, I was on a podcast. “Veldhuijzen van Zanten explains.

So the pair typed their names into Google, as does everyone these days, to see who had the higher number of search results. “My name gives you about 1,500 hits. His 1,200. So I was more famous.” Veldhuijzen van Zanten recalls. This gave him an idea for a website where people could measure their online fame.

Spears, Houston, Depp, Beckham. Blair. It’s likely you’ve heard of most of these people and could give them their right first names. But how about Ito, Scoble, Doctorow, Kotlik, RuB? Heard of any of them?

This is the thing. Those second five are members of the techomni, the blogging people who are famous online. Not as famous as Britney, Whitney, Johnny, David, or Tony, but famous. Ito, for example, is a Japanese who gets as many hits on Google as his prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi. Compare the two names in Factiva, a database of mostly offline media co-owned by Dow Jones, and there’s no contest.

Doing a search across all dates, the Japanese prime minister gets more than 750 times as many mentions as Ito. Clearly there’s a disconnect between the big names online and those offline. But what does this tell us? First off, we probably shouldn’t get too worked up about some names. Britney Spears is still the most famous person online as she is, probably, offline. But something is changing. The internet, it seems, is much more effective than the offline world at propelling people to limited fame; to being famous in certain circles. The explosion of blogs has speeded up this process. Now anyone with expertise in a subject, from knitting to online gaming, can gain respect and influence by writing about it online. This is different from how one might gain influence or fame offline.

“The ability to cause people to get attention online is probably the main definition of fame,” says Ito. “In the real world, it probably means more about the ability to influence the flow of money.” Offline, in other words, fame and money usually go hand in hand (when was the last time you met a famous poor person?). Online, it’s more about what you say. “The way you become famous on the Internet,” Ito reckons, “is probably mostly done by being interesting.” As the internet becomes more ubiquitous via wireless connections and mobile phones, cyberspace as an idea will start to die. Then the gap between prominence online and offline will start to close. Indeed, for Ito it is already the case: in his work on government committees in Japan he has already found his online fame smoothing the way with bureaucrats and old-world mojigas.

Meanwhile, in his social life Ito can’t remember visiting a city anywhere on his travels where bloggers and other followers of his online writing hadn’t already set up a dinner or other gathering for him, using his appearance as a chance to meet and chat. All this is arranged ahead of time via readers on his website. He just turns up.
Reason to hope

I

I am certain that if I was able to touch just one child and give encouragement and support, I have made a difference. After my trip, I have reasons to hope.

Tennis clinics at Rato Bangla School, Little Angels School and Naabh Deepthi School Over 60 kids took part. They were of all levels and some of them have the potential to be very good. All of them shared true passion for the game and with some organised training and lure of more tournaments, the level will surely improve.

GAME POINT

Sujay Lama

Tennis aficionados truly care

Each day, I talked to coaches, tennis parents/players, recreational players and fans as well as past and present members of All Nepal Tennis Association. Each one of them shared concern about the stagnant state of the game and the course it was taking.

Media is our friend

In a day’s notice, eight sports journalists were able to come and hear my concerns. Using the media to make positive changes is important in this day and age. An 18-minute interview on Channel Nepal was a bonus to share some of my thoughts.

Mr. President, the ball is on your court

I thank ANLTA president S K Singh for inviting me to hear my story as well as have a constructive dialogue. This shows character and strength. I was candid in my assessment of the current status of tennis in Nepal and President Singh needs to lay his plan and vision for the game and with some organised training and lure of more tournaments, the level will surely improve.

4th Annual Jayakar Cup

I was honoured to inaugurate this junior tournament and say a few words to the participants. It had five age categories from under-10’s to under-18’s.

F

Four years ago, Brazil took home the cup for a record fifth time and the team has high hopes to make it six this year. But their road will not be an easy one, paved as it is with powerful foes like home team Germany, Italy, Argentina and England.

Germany 2006 may be the last major tournament appearances of many of the world’s great footballers. But this World Cup will not be about the Ronaldos, the Zitaines, the Louis Fygos or the David Beckhams of the present, this year the world will get a glimpse of the future of world football.

The tournament kicks off on 9 June when hosts Germany confront Costa Rica, Below are some of the young players to watch out for during those late nights camped in front of the tv.

Goalkeeper

Iker Casillas-SPAIN

The Real Madrid stopper has long been viewed as one of the best in Europe. Athletic and strong, Casillas has saved both this club and the national team on many occasions and if Spain is to finally make a real impact in the World Cup, no doubt they will have to rely on this man to help them in their quest.

Midfielders

Ronaldinho-BRAZIL

What else can be said about FC Barcelona’s talismanic sensation? Already named the top player at national and international levels, his talent is unquestionable. Along with the other two Rs (Ronaldo and Rivaldo) he inspired Brazil to World Cup victory in 2002 and his evident improvement since then makes him likely to lead his nation to success again.

Defenders

Cicinho-BRAZIL

Recently snapped up by Real Madrid of Spain, Cicinho is a player in the same mould as Cafu and Roberto Carlos. But unlike his compatriot Roberto Carlos, the speedy defender focuses more on defense and his build-up play.

Samuel Kuffour-Ghana

A mainstay of the Bayern Munich defense for several seasons before returning to Serie A with AS Roma this year, Kuffour will be one of Ghana’s most experienced assets as they embark on their World Cup debut. His knowledge of German stadiums will give him a head start on his opponents.

Park Ji Sung-SOUTH KOREA

Relatively unheard of until Japan/Korea 2002 where his home nation shocked all by reaching the semi-finals, since then Park has figured prominently in PSV Eindhoven’s remarkable run in the UEFA Champions League in 2004-2005 before earning himself a move to English giants Manchester United, where he has already become a fan favourite with his bustling attacking runs and creativity.

Michael Ballack-GERMANY

Ballack will look to shine once again after being a major part of Germany’s run to the final in 2002. Now on home territory, he will be inspired and looking to prove why he is considered one of the world’s best players. A strong tackler, creative and with a good eye for goal, he will be a major factor in how the home nation performs.

Wayne Rooney-ENGLAND

Rooney will be hoping to make up for the abrupt end to his Euro 2004 tournament because of injury. Until then he was England’s player of the tournament and still only 20 years of age. Primarily a striker, he has already proved that wherever he play he can create something from nothing and there is little doubt that he will be one of the star performers in Germany.

Times 13 - 19 JANUARY 2006 #281

SPORTS

The more you give, the more you receive

I

I have reasons to hope.

The faces of the orphans crammed into cribs at Bal Mandir. Over 60 kids took part. They were of all levels and some of them have the potential to be very good. All of them shared true passion for the game and with some organised training and lure of more tournaments, the level will surely improve.

Mr. President, the ball is on your court

I thank ANLTA president S K Singh for inviting me to hear my story as well as have a constructive dialogue. This shows character and strength. I was candid in my assessment of the current status of tennis in Nepal and President Singh needs to lay his plan and vision for the game and with some organised training and lure of more tournaments, the level will surely improve.

4th Annual Jayakar Cup

I was honoured to inaugurate this junior tournament and say a few words to the participants. It had five age categories from under-10’s to under-18’s.

F

Four years ago, Brazil took home the cup for a record fifth time and the team has high hopes to make it six this year. But their road will not be an easy one, paved as it is with powerful foes like home team Germany, Italy, Argentina and England.

Germany 2006 may be the last major tournament appearances of many of the world’s great footballers. But this World Cup will not be about the Ronaldos, the Zitaines, the Louis Fygos or the David Beckhams of the present, this year the world will get a glimpse of the future of world football.

The tournament kicks off on 9 June when hosts Germany confront Costa Rica, Below are some of the young players to watch out for during those late nights camped in front of the tv.

Goalkeeper

Iker Casillas-SPAIN

The Real Madrid stopper has long been viewed as one of the best in Europe. Athletic and strong, Casillas has saved both this club and the national team on many occasions and if Spain is to finally make a real impact in the World Cup, no doubt they will have to rely on this man to help them in their quest.

Midfielders

Ronaldinho-BRAZIL

What else can be said about FC Barcelona’s talismanic sensation? Already named the top player at national and international levels, his talent is unquestionable. Along with the other two Rs (Ronaldo and Rivaldo) he inspired Brazil to World Cup victory in 2002 and his evident improvement since then makes him likely to lead his nation to success again.

Defenders

Cicinho-BRAZIL

Recently snapped up by Real Madrid of Spain, Cicinho is a player in the same mould as Cafu and Roberto Carlos. But unlike his compatriot Roberto Carlos, the speedy defender focuses more on defense and his build-up play.

Samuel Kuffour-Ghana

A mainstay of the Bayern Munich defense for several seasons before returning to Serie A with AS Roma this year, Kuffour will be one of Ghana’s most experienced assets as they embark on their World Cup debut. His knowledge of German stadiums will give him a head start on his opponents.

Park Ji Sung-SOUTH KOREA

Relatively unheard of until Japan/Korea 2002 where his home nation shocked all by reaching the semi-finals, since then Park has figured prominently in PSV Eindhoven’s remarkable run in the UEFA Champions League in 2004-2005 before earning himself a move to English giants Manchester United, where he has already become a fan favourite with his bustling attacking runs and creativity.

Michael Ballack-GERMANY

Ballack will look to shine once again after being a major part of Germany’s run to the final in 2002. Now on home territory, he will be inspired and looking to prove why he is considered one of the world’s best players. A strong tackler, creative and with a good eye for goal, he will be a major factor in how the home nation performs.

Wayne Rooney-ENGLAND

Rooney will be hoping to make up for the abrupt end to his Euro 2004 tournament because of injury. Until then he was England’s player of the tournament and still only 20 years of age. Primarily a striker, he has already proved that wherever he play he can create something from nothing and there is little doubt that he will be one of the star performers in Germany.
ABOUT TOWN

**EXHIBITIONS**
- Combination 3 paintings and sculptures, 2PM 28 January
- Nepal Art Council
- Metamorphosis a photo exhibition by Sandeep Subedi, Srl Gopal Kalapreemi and Sri Sunil Sigdel. 5.30 PM 13 January

**EVENTS**
- Yuva Chaflal discussion series “What can be done to prostitution?” Guest speakers Pratik Gadalia and Rabin Shrestha. 13 January 3-5 PM, Martin Chautari
- Labour Migration of Nepalese Youth: A Workforce to be Addressed”, 14 January 1 - 4 PM Collectived Campaign for Peace Anam Nagar,
- Maghe Sankranti and real croissants baked in house daily. Omelettes made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath.

**MUSIC**
- The Syrian Bride
- Jatra Friday
- Jatra Saturday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Cadenza & Friends live Unplugged
- The Cloud Walkers at Row Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- Abhaya and the Steam Injuns Live at Mohk Live. 14 January

**DINING**
- Buffet Breakfast at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and deserts. 4491234
- Maki Newa Bhutu
- Breakfast at Fusion, Dwarika’s, happy hour 5-9PM.
- Buffet Breakfast at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and smoothies made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath.

**NEPALESE WEATHER**

**MAUSAM BEED**

This two-and-a-half month drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEPAL ART COUNCIL**

**YUVA CHAFLAL**

Drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEPAL ART COUNCIL**

**YUVA CHAFLAL**

Drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEPAL ART COUNCIL**

**YUVA CHAFLAL**

Drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEPAL ART COUNCIL**

**YUVA CHAFLAL**

Drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEPAL ART COUNCIL**

**YUVA CHAFLAL**

Drought is creating unusual weather. Kathmandu Valley and adjoining districts have had record high variations in daily temperatures. Monday minimum was 0.5 degrees and the maximum at 25 degrees. That same day in Simra, the maximum temperature was only 13 degrees due to fog. Indeed, the fog stretches right across the indo-gangetic plains up to an altitude of 1,000m. The good news is that the layer is getting thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s thinner and shifting eastward. This winter’s

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WOULD HE HAVE DONE?: A Royal Nepali Army honour guard during a ceremony to mark the 285th birth anniversary of King Prithibi Narayan Shah on Wednesday outside Singha Darbar.

WHAT WOULD HE HAVE DONE?: A Royal Nepali Army honour guard during a ceremony to mark the 285th birth anniversary of King Prithibi Narayan Shah on Wednesday outside Singha Darbar.

WORKING UP A THIRST: RPP leader Pashupati SJB Rana takes a sip during his party convention on Monday when the party expelled seven members including Kamal Thapa. The next day Thapa expelled Rana and invited Tulsi Giri to join.

GO VOTE: Artists perform at Bhadrakali on Tuesday for an advertisement encouraging the public to vote in the local elections soon to be aired on Nepal Television.

HYDROMART: A trade fair to promote investors in the hydropower sector at a press conference on Monday. The event will last until 26 January and is being sponsored by GTZ, Winrock and CNI.

MOMOS GALORE: Customers wait expectantly for their orders at a traditional sidewalk momo stall in Khichapokhari this week.
The Rousing Nepal

All World Leaders Felicitated At One Go

RSS

As part of His Majesty’s Government’s efforts to streamline its activities, the Ministry of Foreigner’s Affairs has decided to stop issuing individual congratulatory messages to heads of states of countries with which Nepal has full diplomatic relations on their National Days.

Instead, HMG will henceforth send out just one group email once a year to all world leaders wishing them personal health and happiness and the people of the respective countries continuing progress and prosperity on the auspicious occasion of their national day.

“It will save us time and money to do it all in one go,” said our mole at Shital Nibas on condition that we reveal his full name and designation: he is none other than Balaram Nepal, Section Officer in the Department of Congratulations and Felicitations.

The collective congratulatory message for 2006 sent out on Wednesday to kings, queens, presidents, prime ministers, potentates, sheikhs, pretenders to thrones, tyrants, tinpot dictators, generals in charge of ruling juntas and despots says in part: ‘His Majesty’s Government has just sent you a BlueMountain e-card. Please open it on your National Day by clicking on www.BlueMountain.com/hmg.gov.np. Thank you.’

Nepal Can Be Greater Again

RSS-VHP

The nation marked the 285th birthday of King Prithibi Narayan Shah the Great on Wednesday with a rally calling for an even greater Nepal and a return to the glorious tradition of interfering in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries by invading and capturing their territory.

“There is no reason why Nepal can’t be as great as or even greater than, when His Late Majesty King Pritibhi united the country,” said the chairman of the 128-member Prithibi Jayanti Celebration Main Standing Committee at a commemoration program, “Let this be a warning to any foreign diplomats who meddles in our internal affairs. If you continue interfering, we’ll attack and occupy your country just like we did in the good old days.”

RPP Splits Yet Again

FROM OUR DOMESTIC DESK

The Rastriya Prajintra Party (RPP) split again on Friday into its 47th faction with every Central Committee member now heading his own splinter group.

After an emergency meeting of the disgruntled group, Pashupati SJB Rana told reporters he was now heading a new rump RPP of which he is the only member. At a parallel press conference elsewhere in the city another disgruntled RPP stalwart, Deepak Bohara, said he was splitting off from the royalist party that broke off from the not-so-royal faction of a splinter group of the Roshan Karki bloc that itself was carved out of the ex-royalist Surya Bahadur Thapa-led remnant of the original pro-royalist RPP before it splintered into the Rajeswor Debkota and Rabindranath Sharma semi-royalist factions.

Meanwhile the ultra-royalist RPP faction under the leadership of Kamal Thapa denied his branch of the party had used government helicopters to fly in party heavyweights from remote areas. “It’s not true,” he told the press, “we just rented the helicopters. And we’ll take action against the airline for carrying overweight passengers and endangering their lives.”

Airline Still Missing

BY A FLY-BY-NIGHT REPORTER

A private Nepali airline, missing since December 22, has still not been traced despite an extensive search operation, the Civil Aviation Authoritarians of Nepal has said.

The airline, Phantom Air Nepal, which had started operating international routes from Kathmandu with a Boeing 767 took off on a routine sortie to Bangkok three weeks ago with 150 passengers and 12 crew and hasn’t been seen or heard from since.

“It’s weird, one moment the airline was here, the next moment it was gone,” said a puzzled CAAN official, “we have stepped up our search and hope to locate the airline within the current fiscal year.”

Hundreds of worried passengers thronged the airport where they were joined by executives of Nepal Oil Corporation and Nepal Food Corporation demanding settlement of unpaid bills by another private carrier, Bellvopy Airlines.