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Weekly Internet Poll # 281

Q. Were the Maoists right not to extend their unilateral ceasefire?

Total votes:4,406

Yes 48.3 %

No 47.7 %


Don't know 3.9%

Weekly Internet Poll # 282. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the municipal elections be put off?

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**CUTTING IT OFF:** Maoist fighters guard a roadblock on the East West Highway at Bansgadi on Monday for a public meeting.

RAMESWOR BOHARA

# 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 9 January the Maoists blocked an entire section of the East West Highway between Kohalpur 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 Sukkhad

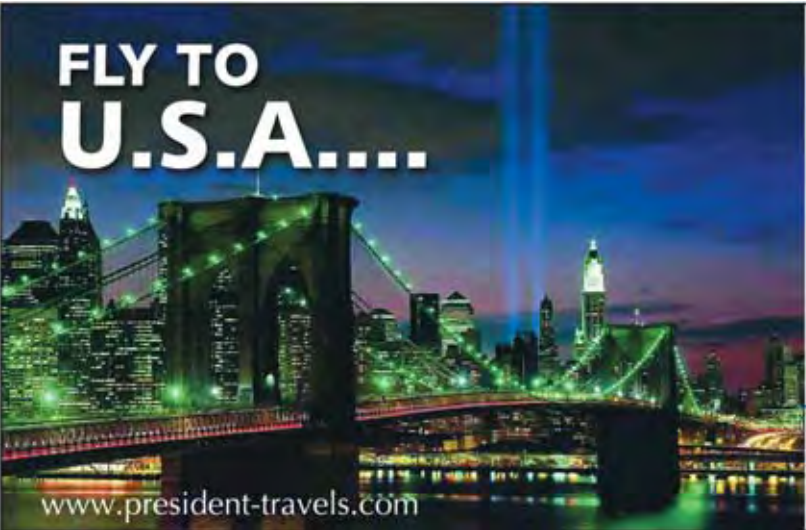
during which they overran at least one police post and ransacked the armoury.

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. ●

**Editorial p2**  
**The art of the possible**


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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Desk Editor: Marty Logan  
Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhushan Shilpakar  
Vicepresident Corporate Affairs: Sneh Sayami  
Advertising: Sambhu Guragain advertising@himalmedia.com  
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com  
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur  
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu Tel: 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013  
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



# Dirty games

## The political middle ground is a victim of its own hypocrisy

In Nepal the saying 'politics is a dirty game' has special significance, our political masters have habitually defied 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 senseless

support and would also have enabled the parties to keep their constituencies intact.

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-righteous pride. Such misguided arrogance renders humiliation a potent weapon that is repeatedly employed to diminish certain outcomes and augment others. Despite a repetitive (and predictable) pattern, our pundits demonstrate a suspended incapacity at placing populist interests ahead of individual ones. Case in point: after a dose of post-February First humiliation, our political gurus willingly participated in competitive radicalization. Despite having forecast a "grand design" our political visionaries did everything possible to see to the design's unimpeded implementation.

Instead of preserving and building upon what remained of moderate politics, the seven party alliance has perilously expanded its membership to an eighth outfit: the Maoists. And the rebels have gone to great lengths to portray their 12-point agreement as a unified platform of opposition against the palace.

This agreement is reminiscent of superfluous attempts at defending democracy when what was really being defended was partisan underperformance. The 12-point agreement merely formalised what was already a shared agenda. More importantly, the agenda laid the ground work as 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, undemocratic suppression of an emerging generation.

Ultimately, we've arrived at the pinnacle of polarisation 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.

As an evolutionary step, it is inherently more logical to first aim for a *functional* democracy as opposed to a full, 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 unflinching susceptibility 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 Atal Bihari Vajpayee and A K Advani. It would be the perfect time to permit internal, political pluralism, to allow new faces in old positions and to transform democratic lip-service into democratic practice. ●

behaviour has been revealed which speaks poorly of the collective intellectual capacity of Nepal's political elite.

Many pundits opposed the takeover because they equated this development with a power grab. Having correctly assessed part of the equation, they dismissed rational attempts at re-establishing equilibrium as 'royalist designs' and embarked on a journey of confrontation. Instead of employing counter-measures to desist 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 a united front to negotiate with the Maoists. This approach would have guaranteed unconditional, unambiguous international

## THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

Politics, they say, is the art of the possible. If that is true then there is still the possibility of averting a dangerous confrontation starting next week as the seven-party alliance mobilise supporters for a pro-democracy rally in the capital on 20 January and the Maoist prepare for their capital offensive.

This is essentially a struggle for political power, and at its core is the dispute over how much of it the monarchy, if at all, should have. Politics for the parties is the mechanism through which they attain power so they can serve the people. The Maoist revolution is also essentially a political movement to capture state power through the short cut of armed struggle. As long as all this is about political power it doesn't have to be intractable.

But it firstly needs the contestants not to wish for confrontation but compromise. Political players have to start looking for a meeting point rather than remain stuck in rigid positions. In short, it needs the political will for a resolution, not just for the people's sake but for their own future existence.

One year ago, the king showed he was not satisfied with the powers vested in the monarchy by the 1990 constitution. When he took over he turned himself into just another player on the political stage. The question is how much longer he is going to drag on this impasse to remain there. So, now it all depends on the ego of one man who seems to want all or nothing.

On the other hand, the political parties have to show they are not going to be unbendingly hung up on trappings and procedures, and instead proactively look for a way out. For this, they will have to demonstrate true transformation so they can reclaim their moral standing. That won't happen just by playing victim all the time. (Who could have missed the irony of the Nepal Peasants Workers Party rally on Tuesday where pro-democracy protesters carried portraits of Stalin, Mao and Lenin?)

The Maoist strategy is to ride the crest of the party protest into the capital to incite a people power uprising and take it to a point when soldiers will refuse orders to open fire on the people. That is how they all went: Shah Reza Pahlavi, Ferdinand Marcos, and Haile Selassie

There is still time for a royal rollback, but not much longer.



SAGAR SHRESTHA

# Fixing something that's broken

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

Come what may, the government is hell-bent on going through with municipal elections. Nepal's rural folk, representing nearly 85 percent of national electorate, have nothing to do with these polls.

Mainstream parties that represent 95 percent of the votes cast in the last parliamentary elections have decided to

STATE OF THE STATE  
CK Lal



actively boycott it. Civil society is

campaigning all over the country to explain its fatal implications. Even if they are held 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 monarchical democracy. Pragmatism demands that the elections be deferred to avoid unnecessary 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. Nepali society seems destined to continue to pay 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 2002. 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. The message was: the sovereignty of the people is a sham. The mainstream parties should have immediately endorsed the main Maoist demand of elections for a constituent assembly. But they didn't.

If there was any doubt about the king's true intentions, it was dissipated by the takeover on 1 February 2005. Without saying it in so many words, King Gyanendra announced that he had 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 people. But once more the parites dithered for months before reaching the 12-

point understanding with the Maoists to end the insurgency and work independently for the formation of a constituent assembly.

Monarchists are sure that most mainstream parties are hostage to their own beliefs: it's quite easy to manipulate Messrs Pashupati, Girija, and Madhab with the spectre of Kerensky or Chiang Kai Shek. The Maoists know that unless parliamentary parties endorse their plans, they have no hope of seeing a new constitution materialise anytime soon. Unfortunately, political parties refuse to recognise that unless they actively canvas for a constituent assembly, their opposition to municipal elections alone will have little effect and no meaning.

They need to agitate for a new constitution rather than against a moribund old one. Perhaps that is what Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had in mind when he told a visiting delegation of Indian politicians that the country is sure to see substantive changes within a month. We're waiting. ●

## LETTERS

## HEAR NO PEACE

Re: your editorial 'Hear no peace, see no peace, speak no peace', #280. Although there has been an agreement between the Maoists and the parties to establish total democracy in Nepal the parties are still divided about what it means. Still, the seven political parties on chanting slogans against absolute monarchy are garnering increasing support from people. People in rural Nepal have no choice but to support the Maoists for fear of their lives. Urban dwellers are also forced to pay 'donations' and the people are sick of that. But the army has shown that when push comes to shove they are no better than the Maoists. It is now clear one year after King Gyanendra took over that his governments have failed to deliver. It is engaged in the politics of revenge. The existence of the tainted figures in the cabinet and the government's divide-and-rule policy have tarnished the image of the king's government. These sychophants are dragging the king into controversy with their demagoguery. People have flocked to King Gyanendra's much-publicised trips to different parts of the Nepal out of sheer desperation, the palace shouldn't mistake that for support for dictatorship. Next month's municipal elections will only invite bloodshed. The best way out of the present stalemate is reconciliation between the monarchy and the parties which will also enable the state to better deal with the rebels.

**Bikendra Shamsher Thapa, email**

## REBUILDING DEMOCRACY

Bihari Krishna Shrestha, reasserted his blurry position through his response (Letters, #280) to my critique of his Guest Column ('Rebuilding democracy', #277). Condemning the corrupt in the political parties is a praiseworthy task, but to defend the shameless and tainted faces

presently reigning is to condone them. Teaching political parties a lesson of good governance is all right, but concurring with the centralised mode of neo-panchayat governance built on top-down administrative mechanism smacks of double standards. Believing the king's defence of his February First power grab could be an innocent expectation, but sticking with it after witnessing considerable deviations in words and deeds for the past 11 months is chauvinism. Letting people elect their rulers and dismiss corrupt ones is the only way to build democracy.

**Krishna Adhikari, email**

● In his reply to Krishna Adhikari, Bihari Krishna Shrestha (Letters, #280) is unable to engage in meaningful debate and resorts to a diatribe against multiparty democracy. As a self-appointed mouthpiece of regression, Shrestha should ponder whether the unconstitutional regime that he defends has been able to achieve peace, good governance and economic development. Its attempt to resume the democratic process through municipal elections is a farce while it has repeatedly made a travesty of the rule of law. It is likely that the country will be dragged back into civil war after failing to seize a historic opportunity for peace. Shrestha's comments on community forestry are misleading: it is now known that the slogan of 'Hariyo ban, Nepalko dhan' was an eyewash by the Panchayat regime amidst massive state-sponsored corruption in the forestry sector. Supporters of regression cry wolf about 'foreign interference' while, in fact, the *coup d'etat* has exposed the country to greater geopolitical vulnerability. Can Shrestha, who blames the political parties solely for corruption, justify the ongoing diversion of scarce resources away from development

priorities (including his pet project: community forestry) to purchase weapons for domestic repression? Not to mention the courting of Indian and some domestic fundamentalists to incite communalist motives. Like the Panchayat, the current authoritarian regime is a disaster. However, each time pseudo-nationalists make an attempt to justify tyranny as the best form of government for Nepal, they are unwittingly moving this country a step closer toward full-fledged democracy.

**Shyamal Shrestha, email**



● Bihari Krishna Shrestha's columns are becoming acutely one dimensional. It does less for mutual rapprochement amongst warring sides and does more to incite partisan delinquency. It lacks the subtle nuances which can bind and add cohesiveness to a bleeding nation. This is not the way forward for an intellectual. Statements like 'but sadly, the very corrupt continue to rule the roost' can sometimes speak for itself and point towards less likely targets or towards those that are being defended. Words can boomerang. 'February First was a temporary move'.

What is the definition of 'temporary' in political discourse? In the Nepali scenario, who defines the notion of this so-called impermanent move? Whenever we address issues of such importance our discourse and our perception must be multi-dimensional. Blame games usually reek of self-centered hypocrisy. If we continue to reflect upon what 'they' did, the saga would stretch back to centuries of mismanagement and onerous infighting rather than a specific and concise timeframe that Mr Shrestha relentlessly repeats. He fails to see the bigger picture. There is a generation in this country that is stuck in the paradigm of a superficial reality, envisioning that political paradise can be attained through despotic means rather than an all encompassing vision capable of incorporating different players in the political or social spectrum.

**S Thapa, email**

## BAR MEN

If the honourable Chief Justice feels he has the authority to select the judges in the way he did ('Between Bar and Bench', #280). hasn't the Nepal Bar Association, as the only organisation left to watch that the country's laws are protected, the right to react in the way it did? There is no point therefore in the CJ getting 'irritated' about it. Point is, everybody should be conscientious to see that the discharge of his duty can't be faulted.

**Ishwari Pradhan, email**

## HATS OFF

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

**Dhruba Khanal, New York.**



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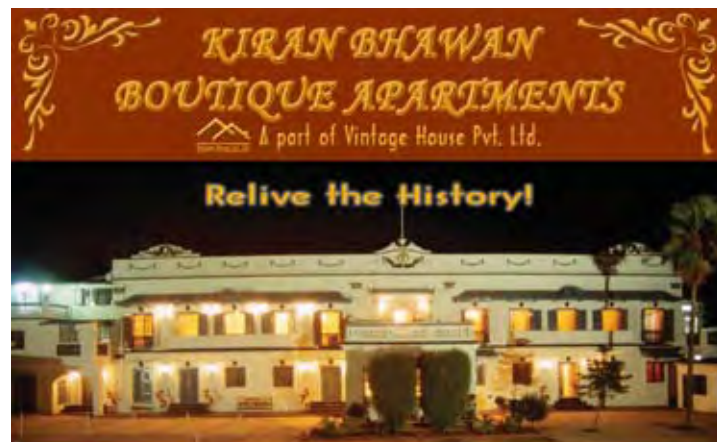
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# Wish you could live in a palace?

## Rana mansions are being reborn as boutique apartments



KIRAN PANDAY

**NARESH NEWAR**

**T**he 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

SJB Rana, son of Juddha Shamshere.

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 bank who tell them resotration 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



Lissanevitch, was itself a converted palace. The popular Bhojan Griha 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 Pema Sherpa. Some of them stay for as long as a year, he adds.

Expat 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. ●

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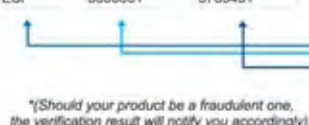
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### SNV Nepal’s silver jubilee

The Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> 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. In addition, it is also involved in a biodiversity conservation effort in the Tarai and Siwalik. SNV’s most acclaimed activity has been the Biogas Support Program which has built 125,000 biogas digesters in 66 districts around the country. SNV Nepal director, Matthias Moyersoan, says his organisation’s strategy is to create space for development despite the conflict. Together with International Alert, SNV is currently linking development with peace-building. Says Moyersoan: “We understand conflict dynamics in the districts and our programs are sensitive to it.”

### Info highway opens

Nepal’s first information technology (IT) highway, stretching almost the 1,200-km length of the East-West Highway, has opened. Officially dubbed the East West Telecom Information Super Highway, the optical fibre network ends Nepal’s dependence on communications satellites and will cut the rate for domestic and international phone calls by almost half, said Nepal Telecom Managing Director Sugat Kansakar at the inauguration Monday. It will also make phone connections affordable in rural areas yet to see a telephone, he added. The project was financed mainly by India, which budgeted Rs 745 million but saved Rs 100 million by delivering the IT highway a year ahead of schedule. Nepal Telecom invested Rs 400 million. The network also prepares the ground for telemedicine, e-banking and other e-commerce. A North South IT highway is also on the cards, to be built with Chinese assistance.

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**ORANGEBOOM BEER:** The world’s largest beer maker, InBEV, has introduced Orangeboom beer in Nepal. InBEV produces 200 different types of beers in 30 countries worldwide, including Stella Artois, Beck’s BRAHMA and Hoegaarden.

**WAI WAI TENZ:** The Chaudary Group has introduced chicken tandoori flavour Wai Wai Tenz in Nepal. Buyers are eligible to win a Mini Beyblade toy in exchange for 10 empty wrappers.



# Road to ruin

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

This Beed 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

ECONOMIC SENSE  
Artha Beed



for pleasure, is becoming rare. Even during the just ended ceasefire, traffic volume was lower than five years back and one’s aim was always clear—travel from one secure urban point to another. Checkpoints reflected the state of the nation, with confused looking security personnel who didn’t seem to know what they were searching for. For the Nepal Tourism Board, which wants to promote domestic tourism, here is a clear message: no one wants to travel, the security points and the delays make it a nightmare. And if the journey to the east is so difficult, what must a trip to the west be like.

Nepal’s strongest brand has always been the friendly smile, hospitality and warmth that Nepalis offered one another and visitors. The last 10 years of the ‘people’s war’ have wiped out the people’s smiles. Travellers and strangers are all regarded with

suspicion, Nepalis don’t trust fellow-Nepalis anymore. No more offering food or graciously receiving it. No more just talking for the sake of just talking.

Gone are the days of chatting about the wars that one’s kith and kin fought for the British or the Indian Army. Today everyone talks about the last attack, the coming week-long banda, extortion or encounter. We still possess the art of storytelling but the stories are not happy ones anymore. The youth have a single agenda: get out of the country. If they can afford it, the US is the place to go, otherwise any place with a McDonalds will do.

will shift from smaller villages to better protected areas in urban centres. Government services are in many places non-existent and even where they exist, only a few offices can actually deliver. The shutting down of ‘projects’ or reducing them to workshops in insulated hotel rooms has cut local spending. Construction remains the only visible growth industry, with migrants from ‘affected areas’ finding refuge and the lucky ones putting down roots in urban centres.

The economic cost of the insurgency is already incalculable and will only grow. We have yet to make an assessment of such losses, be they economic or the loss of key brand traits. The economic isolation of Kathmandu and the remittance bubble keeps our economy afloat but what we have lost can never be regained. We were an economy that could have grown eight percent annually, which means that in the past 10 years our GDP could have perhaps doubled.

But our approach of running the country from the nation-state of Kathmandu has made us myopic: we do not see what lies beyond the valley rim. The time has come for economists who write such impeccable funding proposals to tell the real story on the economy. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Local business people no longer dream of growth but try to ensure that current volumes do not fall and have resorted to making some extra bucks whenever the supply chain is disrupted. Credit has been extended so bad debts have mounted. Locals worry that the banks, like the security stations,

# Crew loyalty to Royal Nepal tested

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

#### KALA PRADHAN

A yawning gap between the salaries of pilots in state-owned Royal Nepal Airlines and private carriers as well as a growing demand 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 Royal Nepal Airlines. They will shortlist six captains and the loss of so many 757 pilots could hurt the airline’s international operations. After Air Sahara inducted Boeing 767s, at least half a dozen Royal Nepal 757 pilots were ready to go over. The only thing stopping them was Indian civil aviation rules that don’t allow easy conversion of a 757 license to 767. This comes as Royal Nepal’s domestic STOL crew have been on the warpath demanding pay at par with private carriers. They called off a threatened strike on 31 December after the management promised to look into their grievances. The average take home pay of a 757 captain with Royal Nepal Airlines flying 50 hours a month is only NRs 55,000. A 737 captain with India’s private Jet Airways earns anywhere up to IRs 450,000. The gap is even more glaring for pilots flying Royal Nepal’s Twin Otters on domestic routes who earn just NRs 50,000 while a STOL pilot of private airlines can take home NRs 200,000. Last year, senior Royal Nepal captains who faced mandatory retirement at 58

according to civil service rules went to a Thai charter carrier where they can fly till 60. ‘At this rate RNAC will soon loose all its pilots unless the Operations Department takes immediate steps to convince the management, the ministry and the board to restructure salaries and perks of cockpit crews,’ warns a confidential report prepared for the airline’s board by a committee. Royal Nepal Airline’s general manager, Mohan Khanal admits there is a salary gap but says his pilots have other medical, retirement and holiday benefits that are not counted. “It’s true our pilots are in hot demand but we are looking at their demands positively,” Khanal told us. Indeed, the problem of pilot salaries is just part of a larger malaise that has chronically afflicted the national carrier. From being a trendsetter in the South Asian region by buying two brand new 757s in 1985, the carrier was plagued by political interference and saw steady decline. The airline’s ‘golden years’ were in the late 1980s when it had a fleet of four jets, 11 Twin Otters, three Avros and two Pilatus Porters. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the airline became a cash cow for unscrupulous politicians and their cronies who siphoned off kickbacks on inappropriate aircraft leases instead of adding 767s according to the airline’s growth strategy. In cahoots with politicians, managers sold off two 727s and all spare parts for a pittance in 1992. Capt Vijay Lama who has been flying with Royal Nepal for 18 years says there is



KUNDA DIXIT

**GOOD OLD DAYS:** A Royal Nepal Airlines 757 taxis part two of its 727s when the airline had more than 20 planes in its fleet. It is now down to just six.

still hope if the airline is allowed to plan independently and be competitive. “We are lucky because I think His Majesty King Gyanendra is committed to making the airline strong again and Minister Yankila Sherpa is supportive and positive,” he told us. The report presented to the board lays out a list of immediate and medium-term measures to rescue the airline: urgently addressing the haemorrhage of pilots with

salary increases and fleet progression, investing in new crew training, expanding the fleet with at least two turboprops for domestic trunk routes and a third 757 plus a long-range widebody for the Japan route. It emphasises a creative new marketing strategy and details revenue sources like reviving mountain flights, operating more tourist sectors and adding frequency to traditional money spinners like the Delhi and Hong Kong routes. ●

# Maoists preparing for squeeze



RAMESHWOR BOHARA

Jana Aastha, 11 January

आस्था

The Maoists are preparing for a final showdown to coincide with their six-day banda from 5-11 February and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution. They are said to be preparing to blockade Kathmandu, ambush army convoys escorting supply vehicles and to make daring attacks on army bases around the capital. According to their plan to 'climb on the shoulder and hit the head' the rebels are expected to be active against political and military targets in and around the Valley. The aim seems to be to convince the residents of the capital that the royal regime has neither been able to restore peace nor ensure supplies. The other dangerous aspect of this plan is that it stems from their plenum declaration in Chunbang that they want to shorten the war and take it to a decisive conclusion with minimum civilian casualties. That is why they seem to want to repeat Prithibi Narayan Shah's feat of encircling the Valley and blockading it. Earlier Maoist blockades were more psywar oriented, whereas this time it is expected to be part of a concrete military strategy. However, as the deadline for the banda approaches, there 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 marketeers 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 are once, the army will be overstretched to defend he capital 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 the polls. The ultimate result of all this disaffection could be an urban uprising which is what the Maoists want.

## Maoist healthcare

Sanghu, 9 January

संगु

The rebels are training not only fighters but health and medical workers as well. Today, they have their own health facilities in model villages that provide a range of every-day medical care but the focus remains on treating injured rebels. During the early days of the 'people's war', the wounded often died or were captured by the security force while on their way to city hospitals. "Their security used to be our major challenge," explained Iswori Dahal, who runs the Maoists' central health department. Today, the rebels' health infrastructure includes many health workers in the several districts that they control. Maoist hospitals have OPD, surgery, maternal and infant care, in addition to laboratory facilities. Cooperative medical clinics have already been established. The rebels also run a mobile hospital mostly used to treat militants in the battlefield. Medical workers usually carry guns and a stethoscope side by side and several have been killed in action. Alok Giri and Iswori Thapa were killed during attacks in Beni and Okhaldhunga. Suprabha, who has long experience as a staff nurse in various hospitals, was lucky to survive and treated more than 300 injured rebels during the clash in Khara of Rukum. Others like Birjit have received medical training from the Maoists and have saved many lives, proving that not everyone has to be trained for years in a medical institute to serve as a health worker. The Maoists have also established a health directorate to train more 'people's health workers'.

ministers believe that the government can finish off the Maoists on the battlefield. Last Tuesday, Home Minister Kamal Thapa said: "Finally, the Maoists have returned to war." Such statements only prove that the government wants to leave the future in the hands of the army. The king pays little attention to concerns raised by the UN, European Union, US and India, confident that he can deflect the international community's calls to restore democratic governance. The political parties, even mainstream ones like the NC and UML have been gradually giving up on the palace and removing monarchy from their party charters. The government, on the other hand, has been doing everything to sustain regression by ensuring that municipal elections will take place even when the parties and foreign powers have said that they will not be democratic.

## Royalspeak

Gorkhapatra, 7 January

गोर्खापत्र

Ilam Resident 1: Your Majesty, we need employment. We need peace. We need roads. His Majesty: Where do you want the road to go? IR1: Till Jitpur. HM: Where is Jitpur? IR1: West from here. Ilam Resident 2: I am Krishna Bahadur Khatri and I was the one who wrote the statute of the Civilian Protection Force. I have submitted to the Royal Palace very important issues about the nation. Around 1500 people have gathered in this Bidyarthi Higher Secondary school. This school needs science faculty and the teachers here have been working as temporary employees for the last 10 years, they need to be made permanent staff. HM: I see.

Ilam Resident 3: Your Majesty, we lack telephone facilities here. HM: The problem is the lack of telephones? IR3: Yes, that is the case in Harkate. We are from Ilam, your Majesty. We badly need telephones and also drinking water. HM: That has been the problem throughout the kingdom. Gradually, these problems will be tackled. The problems of lack of drinking water and telephone are quite serious.

## Euro Maoists

Ghatana ra Bichar, 11 January

घटना र बिचार

The Maoists have sent two senior emissaries to Europe to convince leaders there about their commitment to peaceful democratic politics. Central Committee member Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and Narayan Sharma are in London, sources say. They are also expected to meet European Union and British officials. The visit is taken as an indication that the Maoists are genuinely looking at returning to multiparty democracy.

## War mongers

Disanirdesh, 8 January

Innocent people once again face the threat of war after the government provoked the Maoists to resume fighting. Although the rebels are to be blamed for the breakdown of past ceasefires, the government is the culprit this time by not reciprocating their four-month unilateral ceasefire. It is clear that the palace is keen on finding a solution not through peaceful means but by the barrel of the army's guns. War-mongering



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA



Go without fear. If anything goes wrong, we will give you compensation  
Box: Elections

राजधानी Rajdhani, 8 January

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ I don't understand why the party workers and members start this drama whenever they are appointed as government ministers ”

- Rastriya Prajantantra Party President Pashupati SJB Rana in Nepal, 15 January, criticising his peers who were pushing for a convention with the aim of dividing the party



KIRAN PANDAY

Interview with the representative of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal, Ian Martin in Nepal on 8 January

Nepal: Your reaction to the Maoist decision to end the truce?

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 UN is very upset”

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 barrack prisons.

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/of 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)

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### Election to Local Municipality is going to be held on 26 Magha 2062 ( 8 February 2006 ) !

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# Getting ready for the Big One

Inner city communities in Kathmandu and Patan prepare for the earthquake that will surely come

KIRAN PANDAY

**AARTI BASNYAT**  
and **MALLIKA ARYAL**

“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 gullies 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.

“Should an earthquake take place, the government will take more than a week to respond but we are prepared to cover that

void with our own volunteers,” says Bibhuti Singh, coordinator of Ward 17 Disaster Management Committee. “We are not just trying to make the community safe but also preparing ourselves for rapid reaction and self reliance for a week,” adds Singh.

Not all wards in Patan and Kathmandu have been as enthusiastic. Some just couldn’t be bothered, others set up committees but didn’t have the commitment to follow through. But local organisations, such as the Rotary, youth clubs, schools, the municipality and ward police of ward 17 have also risen to the occasion. They meet regularly and over three years have trained 200 volunteers. “We need at least 200 volunteers for every 20,000 populations to make up for volunteers who perish in a future quake,” says Singh.

Though most of Ward 17’s buildings are liable to collapse when the quake hits, residents have been trained to move to safe spots: near a column, under a door or in corners, depending on the building’s structure. People here have a strong sense of community, not only are they well on the way to making their own ward secure, they are also helping neighbouring Wards 29 and 30 prepare as well.



**SHAKE IT ALL ABOUT:** Patan residents watch what happens to a model of a house during a temblor (above) and Dilip Joshi of the Nepal Red Cross shows a quake safety kit.

“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. ●

# All 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

It all started with Ali Hamza and his soon-to-be wife tirelessly nagging me over the Kashmir earthquake issue. Though 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 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 had already been cut to only Rs 25,000 but even that had not been distributed.

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 when 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.



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 Aftab Hussain, 23, who lived in a tent with his three sisters and five brothers.

As I walked away from that devastation, inadequate government response and official corruption, I wondered what the results would be



should such an incident occur in Kathmandu, where the houses are packed in like sardines. Nepal has been warned time and again about an impending killer quake but few of us have even started

preparing. Should the dreaded happen, would we be in the same situation...or worse? ●

Asim Singh Mahat just graduated from The University of Engineering and Technology in Lahore

## 72 years ago this week

It was a sunny winter afternoon with bright blue sky and a slight breeze from the west. Most families in Kathmandu were relaxing on their rooftop terraces or at work in the fields. It was 1.30 PM on 15 January 1934. Suddenly, birds took flight and dogs started howling. There was a deep underground rumble, the surface of Tundikhel started undulating like ocean waves. Temples crumbled, long fissures appeared on the roads and a great pall of dust rose up over the city. Mangal Bajar was in ruins (see picture).



Within a minute, 17,000 people were dead in Kathmandu, the adjoining hills and the plains of northern Bihar. Among the dead were two of King Tribhubhan's daughters and a daughter of Juddha Shumshere. Most houses were destroyed or damaged in the 8.0 magnitude earthquake. Aftershocks terrified survivors camped out in the freezing cold for the next month.

What is frightening to many is not the memory of that fateful day 70 years ago but what will happen the next time an earthquake of that magnitude hits Kathmandu. The Nepal Bihar faultline is said to snap every 75 years, making us due for the next disaster.

The Kashmir earthquake of 8 October that killed over 80,000 people in Pakistan and India showed us the kind of energy that is released in great Himalayan earthquakes. It left four million homeless and over 100,000 injured. With its 'seismic gap', western Nepal, where no major earthquake has happened for over 250 years, is ripe for one. Given Kathmandu's rampant growth and flimsy housing, experts predict the next big one will kill at least 100,000 people in Kathmandu Valley alone. Those who die may be the lucky ones.





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# 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 be able to discard others.

“The negative effects of the conflict have more far-reaching effects than the positive ones,” says Arzu Rana Deuba 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 moved from villages to district

headquarters or cities. More than half of those questioned said they left because they feared for their own or their family’s security, because they feared abduction or were searching for work. Most had enough to meet basic needs before the conflict but not after.

Families adjusted by spending less money on food and other basics, except schooling. Still, the survey found that 44 percent of children had dropped out of school. “Mostly children have become very quiet, they’re serious, silent and frightened,” says Rana Deuba.

Sixty-four percent of those asked said that they and their spouse or a couple that they knew had become separated because of the conflict. Fear of insurgents (33 percent), fear of conflict (32 percent) and fear of death (27 percent) were the main reasons given. Sixteen percent of women were either widows or had no idea where their husband were and were labelled ‘half-widows’.

“There was clear perception of increased vulnerability to poverty insecurity, violence,” notes the report which says women are living in constant fear 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 Ramila 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. ‘Ramila 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 Dfid’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 reconciliation and reconstruction phase.’ ●



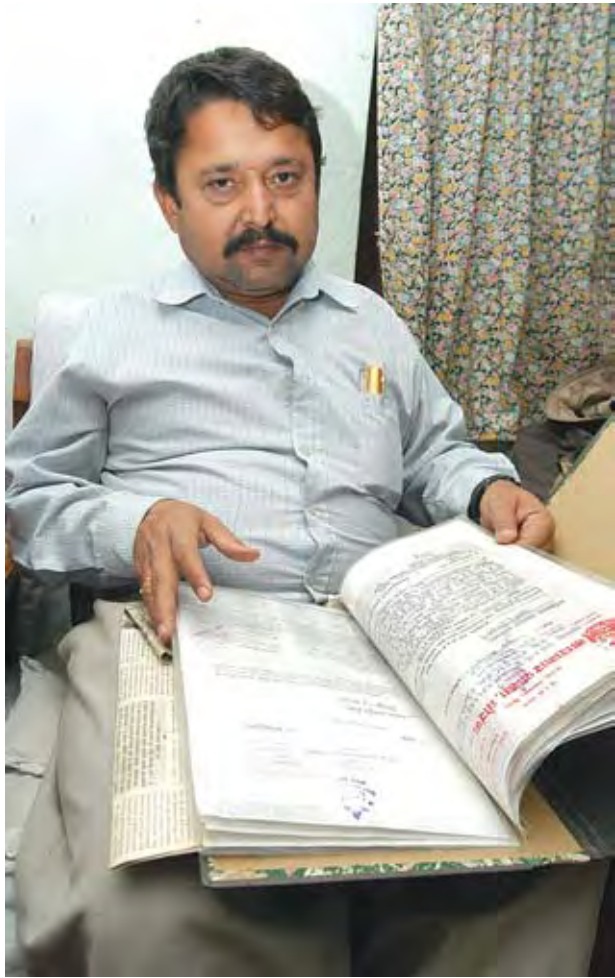
*Changing Roles of Nepali Women due to the Ongoing Conflict and its Impact*  
Samanata: Institute for Social & Gender Equality  
2005  
ISBN No. 99946-805-1-X  
89 pp (plus annexes)



KIRAN PANDAY

# Torturing ourselves

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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Pradesha Bahadur Bista says he knew that he was suspected of being a Maoist in his home district of Bara. He was an active member of the CPN (Masal) and openly supported the rebels at rallies. “But I never carried a gun or gave them money,” he says.

One day about five years ago he went to the police in Jitpur, discussed his rumoured links to the Maoists and

signed a paper that he believed cleared his name. Soon after, two men on a motorcycle came to his house in Kathmandu one morning. They asked him to identify himself and then made a call on a mobile phone. A van appeared.

“They told me they wanted to ask some questions and they would send me back after a while,” recalls Bista, 47, a small man with greying hair and a thick moustache. A hood was placed over his head as the van drove around Kathmandu for half an hour and then stopped. “Two of them took me inside and flung me to the ground. They stretched out my legs and lifted them straight into the air,” says Bista, leaning back to demonstrate. “Two sat on my chest. Two or three others then started beating the soles of my feet and all over my body.”

They started accusing him of a bombing in Kalanki and of bringing Maoists here from Jitpur, asked him to name the others and beat him again. Bista lost consciousness and passed out four times as the questioning and beatings continued all day. His head was repeatedly shoved under the water of a nearby pond.

This treatment continued for 15 days, and after being blindfolded with his hands tied behind his back for 100 days, Bista and eight other prisoners were taken to the airport and flown to the tarai and placed at a detention centre in Biratnagar. On 29 November 2005, Bista was released when Advocacy Forum petitioned the Supreme Court. He had spent more than two years in detention.

“It’s difficult to say how many people are being detained illegally,” says Mandira Sharma at Advocacy Forum, which makes daily visits to 16 prisons in eight districts. “There are people who have been in prison more than three years under preventive detention.”

The recently revised Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Control and Punishment Ordinance (TADO) states that suspects can be held in preventive custody

for one year.

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 office in Nepal which is headed by former Amnesty International chief, Ian Martin.

The UN Committee on Torture’s November meeting was overshadowed here 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, APF, 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 incommunicado detention’.

From voices he heard and other clues he picked up while blindfolded, Bista believes that he was held at the RNA’s Bhirabhnath Battalion in Maharajganj for the first 100 days. Last Thursday, the Supreme Court ordered the RNA to explain why it had lied to the court about holding four detainees, one at Bhirabhnath, who were arrested two years ago by plainclothes security officers.

The RNA says it 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. ●

Latest report of the UN Committee on Torture: [http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/CAT\\_C\\_NPL\\_CO\\_1\\_CRP.3.doc](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 beside me. I so long to hold my son,” says 42-year-old Shanta Bhandari. For the last three years she has devoted her life to searching for her only son, Bipin, who disappeared when a group of police came to their house in Balaju and dragged him to their van accusing him of working for the Maoists.

It was during the 2002 emergency when police were given sweeping powers to arrest anyone under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) introduced by Sher Bahadur Deuba’s government. Bipin became one of its first victims.

He belonged to the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Students’ Union (Revolutionary) and soon after he was taken in, Bhandari pleaded with the police chief at Hanuman Dhoka to reveal her son’s whereabouts. He promised to call her back within a week. Nearly three years have elapsed, she never heard from them.

“I know he is alive somewhere,” says Bhandari hoping against all odds like the mothers of three other students who were arrested with Bipin. The mothers went everywhere, from human rights activists to the NHRC, the ICRC, the UN, the Supreme Court and even the Royal Palace. But there was no word of their disappeared sons.

Frustrated by the silence, the mothers decided to fast unto 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 132 disappeared persons. This resulted in the formation of the Rajya Dwara Bepatta Pariyeko 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 committee 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 of Disappearances, 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 550 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 topped the list of countries in the number of disappearances between 2003-4, 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 Singa Durbar 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

At 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 Tribhuban Rajpath amidst 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 Avocado 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 anew with 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 floating 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, encrusted 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 their childhood friend permitted us to go to 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. 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 often unmitigated venality 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 have 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 whether 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 revolution 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 fine reminder of our own limits, frailty and mortality. ●

Keith D Leslie cultivates bamboo and live with his children Joshua, Ezra and Leah Prajna Rose outside Kathmandu.



NEPALI PAN  
Keith D Leslie



NICK DAWSON

# Hard truths about bird flu



**HENRY I MILLER**  
in NEW YORK

**T**he 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 when 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 flu 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 ring prophylaxis—using anti-flu drugs and quarantine aggressively to

## Turkey gives us a glimpse of how the pandemic may start

isolate relatively small outbreaks of a human-to-human transmissible strain of H5N1. According to Johns 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 contracted 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 ill) would spread it to Ankara, Istanbul, Tbilisi, Damascus, Baghdad and beyond.

The anti-flu drugs Tamiflu and Relenza are extremely expensive and in short supply. History suggests that if we were to make these drugs available to poor countries for ring prophylaxis, they would often be administered improperly—such as in sub-optimal doses—in a way that would promote viral resistance and only intensify a pandemic. Or perhaps they would be sold on the black market to enrich corrupt government officials.

If the pandemic were to begin relatively soon—say within a year or two—there would be little that could be done to attenuate significantly the first wave of infections. But, if we're ready to rush the pandemic strain into an emergency program to manufacture vaccine, we could possibly blunt the second wave. ●

*Project Syndicate*

Henry Miller is a physician and fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Competitive Enterprise Institute. His next book, *The Frankenfood Myth: How Protest and Politics Threaten the Biotech Revolution*, will be published later this year.

# Blogging one's way to fame

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

**JEREMY WAGSTAFF**

**P**reople.com. (no, that's not a spelling error) was set up by Dutch entrepreneur Boris Veldhuijzen van Zanten, who would get into regular arguments with a friend over who was more famous. "He was on the radio, I was on tv. He was in a magazine, I was on a panel," 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: Preople.com was born, using Google and a secret recipe of other variables. (I'll now pause while you run a search on your own name. Don't be ashamed: Everybody does it.)

All very cute but does it mean anything? Just because a lot of websites mention your name, does that make you famous? Not really. But it does highlight an interesting phenomenon: Being well-known online isn't exactly the same thing as being well-

known offline. The best test is this:

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, Kottke, Rubel? Heard of any of them?

This is the thing. Those second five are members of the technorati, the blogging A-list of people who are famous online. Not as famous as Britney, Whitney, Johnny, David and Tony, but famous. Joi 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 online fame. 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 die. 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 moguls.

Meanwhile, in his social life Ito can't remember visiting a city anywhere on his travels where bloggers and other followers of his online writings 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. ● *wsj*



# Reason to hope

The more you give, the more you receive

It is never easy to say bye to your loved ones. I had an eventful two-week stay in Kathmandu and all that is left with me as I head back to my home away from home are memories.

The faces of the orphans crammed into cribs at Bal Mandir. Some of them just four days old, longing to be held by some one. Then there were all of you who attended my tennis clinics. You were so excited and thirsting for instruction, motivation and inspiration. I will miss the happy sounds of my nieces and daughter waking me up each day. I felt that as long as we focus on the youngsters there is hope for Nepal at all levels. And that includes the development and growth of tennis.

At a press conference in Kathmandu a journalist asked me: "Do you think you can make a difference in the Nepali tennis scene?" I am certain that if I was able to touch just one child and give encouragement and strength, I have made a difference. After my trip, I have reasons to hope.

GAME POINT  
Sujay Lama



**Tennis clinics at Rato Bangla School, Little Angels School and Nabha Deepti 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.

**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.



**Tennis aficionados truly care**  
Each day, I talked to coaches, tennis players/parents, 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 journalist 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 out for every one to see. It was clear that he cared and had a plan but was frustrated and dejected with certain obstacles. This must not stop him from his role of providing leadership and communicating with all who care about the future of tennis in Nepal. I made four suggestions which could act as bridge for all parties to work together.

- Communicate immediately with the tennis community (letters, emails, bulletins boards, media etc.)
- Host a gathering of tennis enthusiasts to get back their trust and feed back.
- Identify true leaders to delegate duties.
- Fight to keep the property of ANLTA at Sat Dobato away from the hands of the National Sports Council.

lama@ad.uiuc.edu



# The Cup

Millions globally are rearranging schedules for the football fiesta

ANOOP PANDEY

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 Zidanes, the Louis Figos 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

Ilker 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.

## 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 Kuffou-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.

## 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.

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.

## Striker

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.



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#105 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

**THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG**

by JIGME GATON

In response to the #1 Reader Request: "Tell us what this Cartoon is all about?!" the answer is the same as for the Seinfeld Show on Star TV: Nothing. BUT, here are some important tips to enhance your reading experience:

**THIS WEEK'S STRIP SPONSORED BY BAMBOO PAN SHOP OF LALITPUR**

Important weekly advice from a cartoon character

Blatant endorsements often appear promoting the cartoonist's cronies & charitable orgs

Weekly quotes from famous Kuirees (dead or alive)

Hint to the next comic (rarely happens, as cartoonists are crap at planning)

Jiskeko.

**KE GARNE? WHATEVER.**

But be a heroji and go read the newspaper.

"My work is being destroyed almost as soon as it is printed. One day it is being read; the next day someone's wrapping fish in it."

-- Al Capp, Creator of the Li'l Abner Cartoon

Next change: Our Heroji negotiates a peace agreement w/ all involved as well as ending world poverty.

Characters & Scenes appear from anywhere (Nepali dolls, clip-art, photos of friends or famous Nepali landmarks, etc...)

Lovely Nepali quote that is the inspiration for this comic strip.

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the UN's Association of Cartoonists - NEPAL

## ABOUT TOWN

### EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Combination 3** paintings and sculptures, 2PM 28 January Nepal Art Council
- ❖ **Metamorphosis** a photo exhibition by Saroj Bajracharya, Sri Gopal Kalapremi and Sri Sunil Sigdel. 5.30 PM 13 January, Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4438716



### EVENTS

- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal** discussion series "What can be done to prostitution?" Guest speakers Prajwal Gadtaula 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 Collective Campaign for Peace Anam Nagar,
- ❖ **Maghe Sankranti** at Dharahara, live performances by Ritusrawan and Sukarma.
- ❖ **The Syrian Bride** a film by Eran Riklis 5.30 PM Nepal Tourism Board

### MUSIC

- ❖ **The Cloud Walkers** at Rox 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 Moksh Live. 14 January 7.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **JCS Quintet** at Moksh every Tuesday. 5526212
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions 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
- ❖ **Cadenza & Friends** live The sounds of Nep-Jazz. 26 January 6.30 pm Raddison Hotel Rs 800
- ❖ **Uncork the Good Times** Ciney and Par-e-jat playing Popular Sounds of 70's Cocktails, BBQs by the poolside every Friday 7 PM onwards Rs 750 net Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448

### DINING

- ❖ **Buffet Breakfast** at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and deserts. 4491234
- ❖ **Maki Nawa Bhutu** for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4439784
- ❖ **Mexican and Italian** food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue. Every Wednesday Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Breakfast** at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily. Omelettes made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath.

### GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Bed and Breakfast** at La'soon restaurant and vinothèque. 5537166
- ❖ **Junglewalks**, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. [junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245
- ❖ **Conferences** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

## Quest Entertainment

Zinda is about life and how a happy one can easily change. Bala (Sanjay Dutt) and Nisha (Celina Jaitley) live a happy life in Bangkok until one day something strange happens to Bala. He awakens to find himself locked in a room not knowing how he got there with only a television set to keep him company. Not knowing what his future lies Bala spends a long 14 years alone in the room. There he learns what it is to be 'alive' and his happiness drains away as he becomes insane.

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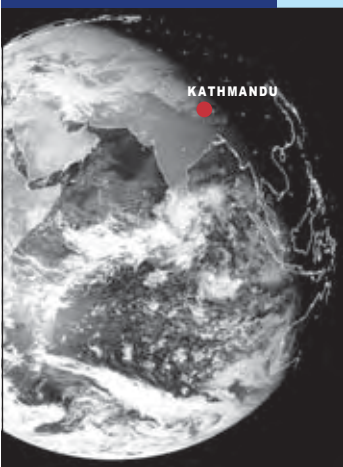
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अनुशासन र नैतिकताविहीन व्यक्ति र समाज अन्ततोगत्वा पतन भएर जान्छन् । त्यसैले राष्ट्रिय जीवनका हरेक आयामहरूमा उदाहरणीय अनुशासन र नैतिकता कायम गर्नुपर्छ । र त्यसको सुरुवात आफैबाट गरौं ।

श्री ५ को सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

## NEPALI WEATHER

by 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 at 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 persistent high pressure zone over the Tibetan Plateau has blocked and deflected successive westerly fronts before they could reach Central Nepal. Expect chilly mornings, more sunny days and dry winds.

## KATHMANDU VALLEY



21-2



22-0



23-0



23-1



21-2



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KIRAN PANDAY

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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.



NEPALNEWS.COM

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.



KUMAR SHRESTHA

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

# Bobin’s mantra

An identity crisis during his university years in Japan pushed Bobin Bajracharya to take his interest in music more seriously. Growing up in Patan, he was accustomed to the sounds of traditional instruments played during festivals. But like many in his generation it was western music that drew Bobin instead. In 1996 he compiled *Heroes of Dreams* but the album was never released.

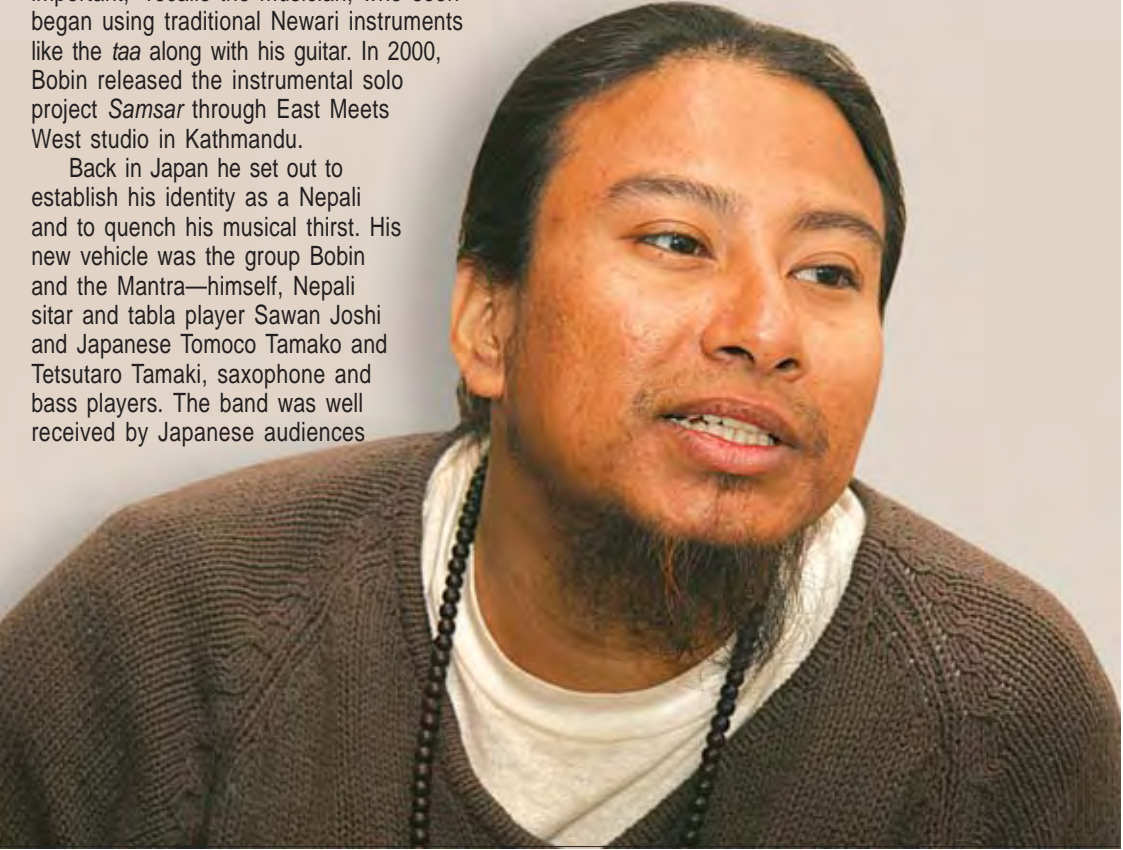
Bobin left to study international cooperation at Shumei University, where he discovered his true calling. “We always tend to seek the far-off god but in Japan I realised why my roots were important,” recalls the musician, who soon began using traditional Newari instruments like the *taa* along with his guitar. In 2000, Bobin released the instrumental solo project *Samsar* through East Meets West studio in Kathmandu.

Back in Japan he set out to establish his identity as a Nepali and to quench his musical thirst. His new vehicle was the group Bobin and the Mantra—himself, Nepali sitar and tabla player Sawan Joshi and Japanese Tomoco Tamako and Tetsutaro Tamaki, saxophone and bass players. The band was well received by Japanese audiences

when it performed in festivals like the Fuji Rock Fest.

Bobin and the Mantra have just released a self-titled album that still shows traces of their leader’s identity crisis. A unique fusion of traditional Nepali and western instruments, it bears the unmistakable sounds of master musicians but lyrically, the album reveals the confusion that Bobin felt in his early days. “My English and Nepali are not as strong as my Newari but I still feel more comfortable using English to express myself,” confessed the singer. ●

Alok Tumbahangphey



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# 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 Balamram Nepal, Section Officer in the Department of Congratulations and Felicitations.

UNDER MY HAT  
Kunda Dixit  
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](http://www.BlueMountain.com/hmg.gov.np). Thank you.’

## Nepal Can Be Greater Again

RSS-VHP  
The nation marked the 285<sup>th</sup> 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 Prajantra Party (RPP) split again on Friday into its 47<sup>th</sup> 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, Bellyup Airlines.



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