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New year New decade New Nepal



The Freedom To Be Fair

It was a journalist who once said that journalists were people without any ideas, but having an ability to express them. These are cynical times, and you will find that it is people in media themselves who are most cynical about media.

It has also become fashionable in Nepal's adolescent democracy to be cynical about democracy itself. We like to make fun of freedom.

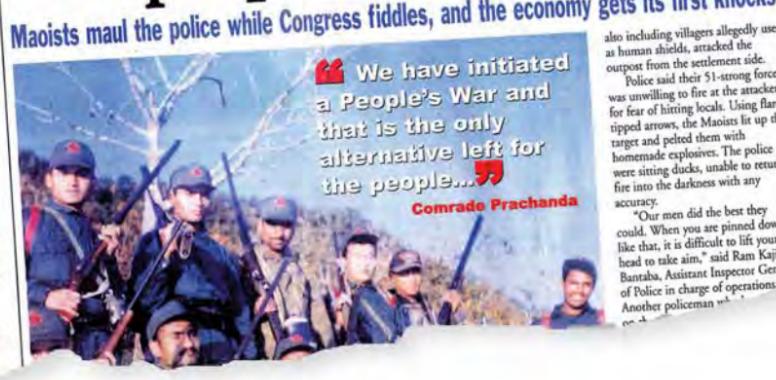
Those who want to take us back to the bad old days of authoritarianism like to rub it in: they say that compared to 15 years ago, the only difference today is that Nepalis are free to complain about how miserable they are. OK, but that is precisely the point.

Back then you were forced to say how great everything was. A shackled and shameless media parroted the official line. Looking back at those farcical times, we remember there was no direct, overt censorship. But there was an insidious and more dangerous form of censorship: self-censorship.

We accepted the boundary of freedom, and we did not cross it. Today, we know that freedom once won doesn't come with any...

The people don't want war.

Maoists maul the police while Congress fiddles, and the economy gets its first knocks.



2000

Nepali Times marks its tenth year with a special Anniversary Issue that looks back at the Nepali decade since the first issue in 2000.

As Nepali Times enters its tenth year, and the country enters a new year and a new decade, it is a good time to look back at the most dramatic ten years in Nepal's history.

benefit of hindsight, we often sound naïve and innocent, sometimes cocky and idealistic. In our first editorial in 2000, we wrote:

"Nepali Times is an idea whose time has come. Newspapers do more than just hold a mirror to society. They

become the mirror itself. Journalism is called history in a hurry. It is also culture, sociology, anthropology and philosophy in a hurry. Nepali Times will aspire to be a true reflection of our times: a journal to record the life and times of Nepalis in the decades ahead. A newspaper also needs a set of values to sustain itself. In a society cursed with extreme inequality, some of those values are fairly obvious: to speak for the last, the lost and the least. We will be fair, and we will protect our independence intensely."

Back in 2000, we had no idea just how dramatic the decade ahead was going to be. The first

(nearly) 500 issues of this newspaper coincided with a period of great transformation. The nation was buffeted by war, traumatised by a royal massacre unprecedented in human history, witnessed a people power uprising, and saw a shaky but non-violent transition from monarchy to republic. Guerrillas went from the bullet to the ballot and emerged as the single largest party, and the most inclusive assembly in our country's history was elected.

Nepal became a model for non-violent political change: a case study that proved revolutions don't necessarily have to be bloody. And even though successive governments had no time for development, Nepalis at the grassroots endeavoured to improve lives. In the past decade, despite failed governance, Nepal's child mortality rate came down by 20 per cent, and our maternal mortality rate, though still very high, decreased dramatically. Female literacy has shot up.

Imagine how much more progress we would have made if there had been a stable political climate and a more accountable government committed to basic needs. If there had been political will to push projects for power, irrigation and infrastructure we could have met domestic demand, and created jobs so Nepalis wouldn't have to migrate for work.

Let's hope that in the next decade we will live in less interesting times. That our coverage will be less obsessed with the political quarrel of the day, and celebrate the ability of individual Nepalis to overcome adversity. We hope that by 2020 we will have made up for lost time.

KD
Kunda Dixit
Publisher

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DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Editorial from the 8-14 November 2002 edition of *Nepali Times* laments the chronic disunity among Nepal's political leaders.

2002

UNTIED NATION

There is something in the Nepali character that makes us more divisive and prone to disunity than any other people. Perhaps our shared history is so faint, its symbols so ephemeral, our future so abstract, that it breeds individualism. The 'patriotic songs' every morning on radio extol the virtues of the impeyan pheasant, Mt Everest and Lumbini. But they sound like parodies.

Individually, we are proud to be Nepalis, but we can't seem to be collectively proud to be Nepalis. We like Nepal, but can't seem to stand other Nepalis. Especially if they are Nepalis who are doing well for themselves. It is this frog-in-the-well psyche that has kept us from getting ahead. There are

many examples of Nepalis who have excelled in societies where there are no other Nepalis to pull them back.

It's not for lack of ability that we lag behind. It is not even because we have low self-esteem. A prime minister who has just been sacked told the youth wing of his faction, in all modesty, that he was "the best prime minister Nepal ever had, and will ever have". Well, some prime ministers are born great, others attain greatness, and still others just think they're great.

With misplaced pride on that scale, it is no wonder that we can't work together. Just look at our track record. Communist parties the world over are known for their

divisiveness, but even by international standards, our comrades have set world records in disunity.

We don't know how bad it is in other countries, but it could be that this is a mentality common to poor countries, where the people are left to quarrel over such small pickings. They end up fighting each other instead of those who are cheating them.

Congress vs Congress vs Congress, UML vs Congress, UML vs ML, ML vs ML, RPP vs RPP, ironically, even the leftist party that called itself 'Unity Centre' eventually split. Usually the reasons are not ideological, but personal envy, jealousy and pride.

Somehow, the Maoists have not split yet. But give them time. They are Nepalis after all.

Because we take things so personally, we haven't as a nation been able to transform our genuine and deeply felt sense of national pride into a unity of purpose. We can, and must, override our ingrained cultural individualism to achieve a sense of collective destiny. Otherwise we will just keep on fighting each other until there is nothing left to fight over.



SUBHAS RAI

Mainstreaming the Madhes



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

In the summer of 2002, I took a break from college in Delhi. I had begun interning with a new local daily, but my sole aim at the time was to get published in *Nepali Times*—a paper I had read, admired, and wanted to be a part of since its inception.

I sent the editor a badly written, incoherent column on discrimination against Madhesis, which was rightly edited down and published as a letter to the editor. I realised an armchair rant would not get me a proper byline, and decided to visit Rajbiraj— notionally my hometown but a place I'd barely spent any time in—and did a story on the town's decay relative to neighbouring urban centres. The editors got interested, polished and used the story. Mission accomplished, I headed back to university.

My real immersion into Nepali politics began as the king took over, democrats and Maoists

started talking, and a lot of politics shifted to Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehru University, where I was doing my Master's, emerged as a hub. Nepali leaders were to be seen hanging around dhabas; Nepali students provided them with logistical support; mid-level Maoists started making public appearances; and there was a concerted political and media challenge to Indian policymakers to dump their twin pillar theory.

During that period, I contributed sporadically to *Nepali Times* and some Indian papers on the evolving politics, while working with *Himal Southasian* magazine. Covering events revealed the emergence of Maoists as the principal game changers, the necessity of a sustained democratic consensus, and for an Indian policy in tune with the aspirations of the broadest segment of Nepali opinion.

In January 2007, as the Madhes movement shattered the old precepts of Nepali nationalism, Kathmandu was shellshocked. This paper gave me space to convey through a

personalised piece how having a Madhesi background, even if one was from a privileged, upper middle class Kathmandu-based family, invited insinuations about nationality. The need at that time, and even now, is for established interests to empathise with those who have been deprived of dignity and rights simply because they come from a certain race, gender, caste, ethnicity, or class—not in a

paternalistic, patronising manner, but as equal citizens.

After a brief, and unhappy, foray into the world of international NGOs back here, I returned to journalism in mid-2007 with a regular column in *Nepali Times*, initially called 'Tarai Eye'. Clashes between the state and Madhesis, Maoist and Madhesi parties, and Pahadis and Madhesis had increased. There was a fundamental realignment in all parties. The armed movement had picked up.

Spending time on the ground in the Tarai, and with militants across the border, was a crash course into the exploitative Kathmandu-Madhes relationship, the intimate cross-border links, the stratification within the Madhes, the crushing poverty, and the blurring between politics and crime.

Of course, one cannot understand Madhesi party politics without getting a handle on national level dynamics. The elections were another lesson (perhaps forgotten) on the Maoist skill in building up a multi-class and multi-ethnic alliance. Given the fragility of the process since then, most writings have inevitably turned towards looking at Maoist ambition and dogma, the fear and insecurity of the other parties, the reversal in Indian attitudes towards the Maoists, the NA's rehabilitation, and the lack of progress in either constitution making or the peace process.

There have been downsides. I have got many things wrong—from specific election results, to

how events in Tarai were expected to play out, to why a certain actor behaved in a certain way. The column has also earned me multiple, contradictory, labels I could do without—RAW agent, anti-India, Maoist sympathiser, pro-army, anti-UNMIN, UNMIN stooge, Madhesi chauvinist, *pahadi dalal!*

But writing for *Nepali Times* has been a delightful experience, not least for the paper's weekly dose of pluralism, and the fact that not one of my columns has been censored, even if they went against the editorial line.

The language of public discourse will continue to be Nepali. But English journalism cannot be dismissed as a sideshow anymore, given the importance of the diplomatic and donor community, the middle class, the diaspora, business elites, and some bilingual national policymakers. As *Nepali Times* celebrates its tenth anniversary, here's hoping for another decade of pluralistic, progressive journalism that will report and analyse events as honestly as possible. Nepal needs it more than ever before. 🇳🇵

How plain speaking found a platform

ON THE WEB

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END ON A HIGH

Let's see how long this will last ('End on a high', #482). When are the rest of them going to learn that these Maoists won't budge unless we force them to? Government should use a two-pronged approach—provide opportunities for youths so that being a Maoist cadre has a high opportunity cost, and strongly enforce the law. Only then will they start to learn.

Pwloj

BEYOND CONTROL

While ethnic conflict must be avoided ('Beyond control', #482), we can't maintain the status quo anymore. There must be proportionate representation

and transparent affirmative action in each part of the state machinery, not just in political bodies. Sadly, you do not see this happening when you look at the list of newly selected government officers. Looking at the figures, things were better during the Panchayat days!

R Rai

WITCH-HUNTS

Abuse and ill treatment of women is not new in Nepal ('Witch-hunts', #482). The only difference now is that some have spoken up about it. I recently saw a very upsetting documentary about the ill treatment of young Nepali widows. The current government policy of setting aside a few rupees for men to marry widows shows you

how trivially the government takes the issue. I would really hate to see the fate of our womenfolk to be used as a political issue for our parties to score points over each other.

Rishav

SOUNDS BITES BITE

I approve of Prachanda's public call for dialogue with India, and his courage to openly irritate India ('Sounds bites bite', #482). I don't understand critics who claim he has in a way surrendered our sovereignty. Our sovereignty was always only 'partly' ours and Prachanda has only pointed that out. It is parties like NC, UML who have sold our sovereignty to India. Nepal needs fair relations with its

neighbours to develop and we must have the right to cultivate productive, long-term relations with both India and China. We must resist all foreign interventions of the most blatant form that NC, UML promote.

Patriot

TIMES IN THE BLOGOSPHERE

> East-West with Kunda Dixit:

The Tarai is turning into one giant elongated metropolis.

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2007

This Guest Column in the 23-29 March 2007 edition of *Nepali Times* was by academic Saubhagya Shah, who died last Wednesday in Kathmandu.



ROBIN SAYAMI

One year itch



GUEST COLUMN
Saubhagya Shah

There must be something in our national psyche that makes the Nepali mood swing so swiftly between irrational exuberance and incorrigible pessimism. Those who joined the April Uprising to overthrow the royal regime and those who subsequently assumed the reigns of power exuded irrepressible confidence and spoke of righting all the wrongs and writing up a brave New Nepal.

Ordinary citizens, who'd suffered through such promises in the past, were wary, and those who had lost out in the royal debacle were forlorn. Nearly a year later, the national mood is back to self-doubt and despondency.

Much has happened politically in the past year that has generated immense enthusiasm for the future. The whole state machinery, the political parties, civil society, and regional and ethnic forums had begun to focus their energies on the task of holding the elections to the constituent assembly. For a moment it seemed as if we could all live together happily ever after.

Alas, except for just the small matter of the South that had been forgotten during the celebrations. The sudden violence that engulfed the eastern Tarai left April's triumphant paradigm in tatters. There was the sight of mighty leaders and their auxiliary intelligentsia first dismissing the Madhesi uprising as the handiwork of a few miscreants, then threatening the use of force to put out fires supposedly

ignited by fundamentalists and reactionaries, and finally making a 180-degree turn to embrace the same revolt as their own - all within a week.

While it is understandable that the eight-party ruling coalition should differ on ideology and policy, it displayed consensus on the nature of the malaise that has been afflicting the Nepali nation. Over the years, especially during the past year, the '238-year old monarchy' has been identified as the single most unremitting evil that has plagued the country politically, economically, and culturally. According to this explanatory matrix, subscribed to by the political parties and civil society formations, and endorsed by the Indian

A peace compromise, or compromised peace?

establishment and the west, this country can not hope for salvation as long as the author of the unitary state and the 'feudal' Hindu culture, the House of Gorkha, is done away with.

If this is the considered and principled conclusion of the victors of the April Uprising, what is delaying the declaration of a Nepali republic? What the king offered on 24 April 2006 after 19 days of urban uprising was an unconditional surrender: the crown has already put its head on the chopping block. It is now up to the victors to carry their conviction to its logical conclusion, roll up their sleeves, and get on with the real task of creating jobs, health care, and education for the masses.

Enough pulpit pyrotechnics: people need bread, not just circuses. As the Speaker has reminded the politicians on several occasions, the parliament that has been resurrected on the strength of the revolt has unlimited powers, including the one to terminate the monarchy permanently. If this is the political reality, the constituent assembly might turn out to be another dogmatic fetish that serves no practical purpose. What can the constituent assembly possibly accomplish that the existing legislature can't? Since the communist and liberal parties that have passionately espoused the anti-monarchy line have complete control over the 330-member interim parliament, a proposal for a federal republic or any other restructuring that is deemed fit could sail through with an absolute majority.

This ambivalence is encoded, perhaps unwittingly, in the 2006 treaty that was signed between the seven party government and the Maoists. The historic deal was not christened shanti sahamati (peace agreement) or shanti sandhi (peace treaty) but shanti samjhauta (peace compromise, or compromised peace). Does the choice of words convey that the deal was a negative convenience for both parties rather than a positive consensus? The interpretive slippage between compromise and agreement perhaps reveals something about the quality of the new peace. ❑

Nepali Times is reprinting this Guest Column as a tribute to Saubhagya Shah, who was assistant professor and coordinator of the Conflict, Peace and Development Studies program at Tribhuvan University.



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**Wishing you
Happy
New Year
2010**



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Liquidity crunch or crisis?

On Wednesday, 30 December, Himalmedia convened a discussion of bankers and government officials about the liquidity crunch in Nepal.

Krishna B Manandhar, Deputy Governor, Nepal Rastra Bank

In the last 5-6 years, remittance grew at 20 to 50 per cent a year. Everybody seemed happy since there was cash coming into the country.

Then in September/October, remittance growth slowed and liquidity injected from NRB dropped to 40 per cent. Since there was major reduction in the source, naturally liquidity became tight.

There are two causes of the liquidity crunch. First, there was a dramatic increase in imports, especially of gold. Contrary to popular belief, the rise in gold imports wasn't caused by a price differential with India. Actually, the import of gold coincided with the increase in the price of gold in the international market. It became a lucrative investment because gold is an extremely liquid instrument.

For the first time in 36 years, there is a deficit balance of payment of Rs 19 billion in the first quarter. BOP has been in deficit only four times in our history.

Second, private sector credit growth is higher than deposit growth, which automatically results in tight liquidity. Therefore, NRB issued guidelines. We didn't issue it earlier when the real estate market peaked because commercial banks didn't have alternatives to invest. We didn't want to spread panic.

Manish Kumar Singh, Bank of Kathmandu

NRB took repo auction as a rescue measure but a longer term measure would be preferable. Even after the repo auction, monetary demand has not been fulfilled,

which has raised the interest rate. This is a crisis and NRB is not taking measures to lower the interest rate. If NRB issued treasury bills, the repo auction could be scaled back, which would reduce panic.

Ratna Raj Bajracharya, NCC Bank

Half the problem is created by NRB, although there are outside factors, namely the increase in imports and decrease in remittances. There is enough liquidity in commercial banks from fixed deposits. My gut feeling is that within commercial banks, 20-30 per cent of deposits are call deposits. NRB is making money from it.

Also, what's the use of treasury bills if NRB doesn't redeem them?

Parshuram Chhetri, Bank of Asia

We need a long-term solution. For that exports have to go up, remittance growth should go up and more FDI should come in. However, we are so dependent on imports, it will be hard to bring that down. It is better to encourage foreign investment, which is not possible unless the labour problems are solved.

The short-term solution is to issue treasury bills. NRB should allow them to be cashed at a predetermined rate.

Commercial bank cash should also be seen as a short-term cash reserve ratio (CRR). While revenue collection is being done through commercial banks, they stay in NRB vaults. Instead, why not invest the surplus cash in commercial banks with its own account? We are confused, is NRB in favour of increasing the interest rate, or reducing it?

The real estate bubble was a problem but was not responsible for the liquidity crunch.

Janak Sharma Poudel, Global Bank

To ease the current liquidity crunch, a certain per cent of the liquid cash in vaults should be counted as CRR. The media also

shouldn't create panic in the public. As for a deposit ceiling, no one wants to deposit more than Rs 1 million. For instance in real estate transactions this keeps changing hour by hour and they don't bring the money to the bank. Money from the public is not going into the system.

ATMs have also contributed to the cash shortage. Hundi and capital flight are responsible for the liquidity crunch. NRB must intervene to reduce imports and check capital outflow.

Siddhant Pandey, Ace Development Bank

Banks should know that putting 25 per cent of your portfolio in one sector is very risky, yet NRB has to remind them.

Meanwhile, the media is hurting confidence in the market. People prefer physical gold to paper gold just to keep in the house. Confidence has also been hurt because the development budget is frozen.

Indra Raj Humagain, ID Bank

There is lack of confidence in the market among customers for various reasons. While NRB and the government are partly responsible, the media hasn't helped by sensationalising economic problems. Depositors are safety-sensitive not interest-sensitive.

It also didn't help that 3.5 per cent of corporate deposits in 150 financial institutions went to NRB.

BN Gharti, KIST Bank

I prefer the word 'crunch' to 'crisis'. It is a crisis when we can't pay our depositors when they want to withdraw. A crisis occurs if there is a deficit of Rs 5-7 billion.

Kumar Lamsal, Sanima Bank

There are many reasons but the real one is the lending growth rate exceeded the deposit

growth rate. We should understand the increased lending and double deposit.

Bhuvan Dahal, Nabil Bank

Trade deficit has widened to 50 per cent. Real estate has indirectly contributed to the crunch. As people profit from the rise in real estate prices, their expenditure levels have gone up. There were Rs 8 billion worth of imports in the last three months. By discouraging people from buying vehicles, we can increase local tax. Hundi should be brought into the system.

Fiscal interventions, not monetary policy, will solve the problem.

Rajan Singh Bhandari, Citizens Bank

Defaults on home loans or vehicle loans is less than one per cent, bank exposure is not risky, and we are within NRB norms. The media must not spread panic.

Jhapat Bohara, Development Bankers Association

Seventy per cent of the population is not banking so you can't say there are too many banks. However, CRR has to be reduced.

Keshav Acharya, Advisor, Ministry of Finance

Non-economic factors rather than economic factors have brought about this situation. The security situation is bad and investment cannot be encouraged. Money is used to earn additional money, rather than a means to a productive end. I agree with NRB's intervention, money should have impact on the economy, not just on the money market.

The budget was delayed by five months, which has kept money out of the market and made the crunch worse. The government should not just renew treasury bills, but also redeem them.

The government will soon introduce payments by cheque for more than Rs 1 million.

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A decade lost

We kept the economic clock static



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



BILASH RAI

This Beed vividly remembers conversations with friends trying to go to Nagarkot on the eve of 1st January 2000. Everyone around the world was concerned about Y2K, and what the 21st century would be like. India discovered its IT back office potential and its economy boomed. In Nepal, though, it seems the clock stood still despite the political upheavals of the period 1990-2000.

Of course, we saw the liberalisation of the telecom sector, a boom in the real estate and financial sectors fed by speculative and unregulated investments, the surge in remittances as more people left, the increase in FM radio stations and television channels, and the rise of private education firms and educational consulting services. But despite all this, GDP growth has been lower than inflation.

Hotels are in worse shape than they were a decade ago. While tourist arrivals have inched up, Thamel's once wholesome night life is now overrun by dance bars and prostitution. Tourist taxis

haven't changed, and Nepalis still can't ride the comfortable Greenline buses.

As the number of loadshedding hours has climbed and most households have gotten generators, NEA has been reduced to a backup power source. The same people pen op-eds and speak at hydropower seminars, which remain venues for effusive promise making, even as Nepal has dropped to the bottom five in terms of electricity consumption.

While the world has moved on to televisions on mobile phones and through satellite dishes, we still have the same set of operators who can't even deliver with generators despite signing 24 hour delivery contracts with their customers. The fact that no customer complains speaks volumes about the apathy of people towards service

delivery. Similarly there has been no addition to the stock of petroleum products for the valley and the lead stock has dwindled to just five days. Gas stations keep on making money by either hoarding or selling adulterated stuff. Most haven't even bothered to change their old analogue dispensing pumps.

While flights have increased, the airport remains the same, there are fewer luggage carts per passenger today than ten years ago and still only two queues to get through security. The national flag carrier continues to operate with one-and-a-half aircrafts (two aircrafts with three engines) and the airport buses are the same as well, with Indian Airlines buses still sporting West Bengal number

plates. Indeed, the airport exemplifies just how little has been achieved this past decade.

Private sector businessmen have gone from courting political leaders, to flattering the King when he took control, to fighting with one another on planes to sit next to Pushpa Kamal Dahal. They still believe that proximity to power rather than professionalism leads to success.

If there was anything that boomed it was the development sector. A swarm of development consultants rushed into Kathmandu as NGOs mushroomed, keeping hotels abuzz with seminars, workshops and conferences. Compared to 2000, surely we have more per capita reports! We have now more

people talking about transparency and governance, while their own organisations don't have either.

We have more junkets organised, more *bhatta* (per diem) expended and as one nationalist asked the Beed: why do more and more expatriate development workers choose to have babies in Nepal?

But this Beed has sincere hopes and expectations that the column on 27 December 2019 will have a different take. And not just because it is necessary to live up to the dreams outlined in my book *Unleashing Nepal*, but because of the strong conviction that people now feel that politics needn't hinder economic development, so long as the youth step up to the plate. www.arthabeed.com

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Miracle in Kalimati



KIRAN PANDAY

SUVAYU DEV PANT

Sushil Chhetri left home in Surkhet when he was only six years old with dreams of becoming a hero. Instead, he ended up pawning trash on the streets of Kathmandu and Nepalganj. Now an articulate, good-looking 19-year-old, Chhetri runs his own centre for street children in Kalimati (pictured, above).

Dream Home attends to about 30 children between four and

twelve years old. They all live elsewhere, but come in every weekday and some weekends at 8am before going to a nearby school Chhetri has arranged for them. The centre helps them with homework, and gives them supplementary instruction in everything from basic arithmetic to sexual health. Sex education is necessary since many of the kids have been married off at a young age, and are not aware of the hazards of sexual and marital life.

Most of the children are

Indian nationals born to migrants originally from Bihari towns like Samastipur, who beg in cities across South Asia but increasingly, find Kathmandu more accessible. These economic migrants first started trickling in about a decade ago. Most begin by begging but slowly graduate into more lucrative jobs, like selling vegetables by the roadside.

Children at Dream Home say they are very happy and are learning a lot. Since arriving, they have scored very well on

exams, with some getting as high as 95 per cent in some subjects. More importantly, they have become more confident.

"They've begun to stand up to parents who want to marry them off early and are more serious about school and their future," says Chhetri.

The centre gets some help from NagarHope, a Nagarkot-based organisation, but so far has survived without substantial

A former homeless child is now an aspiring actor who helps educate street children in Kathmandu

external funding thanks in large part to Chhetri's flair for cinema. About two years ago, he started a production company called Ghetto Films that makes films about social issues, like homelessness and drug abuse. The actors are all ordinary people who have suffered the grim lives they depict on screen.

Chhetri plans to screen these movies at village schools across the country when the new academic session begins in a few months. He hopes to educate children about social ills like drug use. In return, he will only

ask the schools to donate old and unused books to the centre in Kathmandu. "We don't go around begging for money. I've seen how these so-called donor-funded NGOs work and I'm not impressed," says Chhetri.

In Nepalganj, Chhetri worked for an orphanage that, he later discovered, made money out of the children under its care. Indignant, he complained to a well-established organisation that promptly rescued the children. He worked for another NGO for a while but became frustrated with them too when they refused to help a street child who had bone marrow cancer.

At about that time, Chhetri saw advertisements seeking actors to work in Kathmandu, and immediately packed his bags. He acted in two movies, but his nascent career quickly slumped and he wound up back on to the streets. That's when he started Dream Home in Kalimati.

The key lesson he has learned is that the city isn't what it's cut out to be. "So many villagers come to city hoping to strike it rich, but eventually are all disappointed," he says passionately. "Through my documentaries, I want to tell young people in the villages that they should stay put and help people there, because the city doesn't have much to offer." 📧

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- **Thursday** - School Times - everything kids should know
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- **Saturday** - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate



MIRKO MANCINELLI

Kathmandu kids

MICHAEL F WILLIAMS

Poverty is evident wherever one goes in Nepal, and the capital is no exception. The street kids of Kathmandu are perhaps the most obvious signs of this malaise: Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) estimates there are around 5,000 street children working and living on the streets of Nepal.

This number continues to grow, with roughly 300 to 500 children leaving home every year for a variety of reasons. Some do so because of abusive, alcoholic parents, maltreatment at home, peer influence, and the temptation to earn more money. But life on the streets is hard, especially for younger children, and as a consequence they often end up taking drugs, abusing alcohol, and even suffering sexual abuse at the hands of locals and foreign tourists.

Peer pressure is one reason for drug taking among street children. A 2002 report by CWIN detailed the devastation: "The consequences of alcohol and drug use on street children's lives range from acute and chronic health and emotional problems to disruption in interpersonal relationships, school failure, social marginalisation and criminal behaviour."

Drugs, in particular, are often taken by street children to help them forget about their problems and overcome hunger. The most commonly used are cannabis, heroin, opium, glue, boot polish, and petrol. The generosity of tourists may only perpetuate the vicious cycle of abuse.

Life on the street is grim, but some are fighting to offer children a brighter future

The situation of street children in Kathmandu may seem almost beyond repair at first glance. But there are groups in the capital helping get children off the streets. HELP/Nepal, for instance, has established a home for street children near Pashupati. Hamro Ghar provides a warm, safe

and welcoming environment where street children can sleep, shower, eat, study, receive medical care, and play with other children their own age.

The house currently sleeps around 40 boys and girls between the ages of 3 and 17. During the day, that number often surges to around 70. The children come to Hamro Ghar to escape the harsh realities of life on the street, and here they have the opportunity to learn English, Maths, and Nepali as well as sewing for the girls. A second house, just behind Hamro Ghar, is due to be completed early this year and will offer a vocational course in baking.

It's easy to dismiss such efforts as drops in the pond. With thousands of children on the streets, the vast majority in Kathmandu, it's not easy to reach everyone. Yet the work of organisations such as HELP/Nepal is vital and effective.

One of the problems in working to rehabilitate street children is actually getting them to abandon their lives on the street. The International Labour Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) notes that children become hardened after spending time on the streets, and resist going back to a more structured environment where they must do what others tell them to. But Hamro Ghar aims to give these children a very real alternative to street life. Far from locking them back into the adult world many escaped from in the first place, the program seeks to help children break the destructive cycle of drug and alcohol abuse and create a better future for themselves.

HELP/Nepal has started working with those who represent the future of Nepal.

www.helpnepal.org

काम सानो ठूलो भन्ने हुँदैन । पसिनाको कुनै रङ र जात पनि हुँदैन । काम गरेर खान लजाउनु पनि हुँदैन । चोरेर, ढाँटेर, छलेर, लुटेर खान पो लजाउनुपर्छ । जो जहाँ रहेर जुन काम गर्छ ऊ त्यसैमा रमाउनुपर्छ गौरव गर्नुपर्छ र समर्पित भएर गर्नुपर्छ । काम नै शक्ति हो, भक्ति हो र मुक्ति हो । कामको इज्जत गरौं, पसिनाको सम्मान गरौं ।

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KIRAN PANDAY

Looking back, and beyond



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

A day is a long time in politics, a decade is an eon. Ever since the beginning of the modern era in Nepal, major political changes have occurred almost every ten years. Following the overthrow of the Ranas in the 1950s, a succession of defining events such as the royal-military coup of 1960, the centralisation of political power in the 1970s, the plebiscite in 1980 and the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990 prepared Nepalis to expect 'something big' every ten years. But no one expected the magnitude of change of the past decade.

It's difficult to pinpoint the principal force that accelerated the march of history. But fissures in the old regime came to the surface in September 2000 when the Maoists attacked the Dolpa district headquarters even as soldiers at the Dunai barracks watched. Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi was subsequently forced to resign for criticising the Royal Nepal Army.

The Dunai fiasco showed that the army was indeed a 'state within a state', a characterisation made by Harka Gurung during a closed door meeting (Issue #10) at the residence of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. The former prime minister had said that the king once told him in no uncertain terms that his title of Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the RNA was not just ceremonial.

In December 2000, communal riots were sparked off by a statement

purportedly made by Hrithik Roshan. In a week of madness following the false report, first the capital burnt, then its flames sparked retaliatory fires in the Tarai plains. The seed of the Madhesi-Pahadi divide were sown in the psyche of an entire generation.

The beginning of the end of the Shah dynasty began with the Narayanhiti Massacre of 1 June, 2001. The declaration of a republic in May 2008 was a mere formalisation of the decision of 1 February, 2005, when Gyanendra opted to be the CEO of the country rather than its king.

We will have to wait for the publication of the former king's memoir to discover whether the RNA had any role in his resolution to take the country back to the stone ages, but after the putsch, he became a virtual prisoner of the force under his own command.

Nepal's decade of drama has not ended

The challenges of building a new Nepal remain more or less the same as those enumerated in this column (#400): writing a constitution that institutionalises reform, builds an inclusive Nepali identity, lays the groundwork of a national consensus and consciousness, and initiates the process of economic transformation. The monarchy is gone for good, but the twin threats of militancy and militarism cannot be faced if the political centre crumbles under the weight of its own contradictions.

Former Indian Prime Minister IK

Gujral once remarked that he had read about revolutions only in history books and was privileged to have seen one unfold in Nepal. Since those also serve who wait and watch, we all were participants in the making of history. Being a columnist, I had a ringside view and saw who was fighting who from up close.

In military-speak, the media is a force multiplier that forms the public perception of a war, which then becomes the reality. It was not homemade guns that made the Maoists the most powerful leftwing insurgents in the world, it was the media that helped them look larger than life and then become what they were presented to be. It is interesting to note that the most ardent supporters of the Maoists in the past are their severest critics today.

To the everlasting shame of some of us in the media, Nepali journalism was either shallow, lazy or openly partisan. It did rise up when its freedoms were threatened, like after the 1 February royal coup, but soon lapsed back into complacency. The media failed repeatedly to perform the most basic function of any profession, "do no harm". Ironically, journalism has become an even more hazardous profession in the four years of volatile political transition since the war ended.

After a decade of pontificating about politics in this State of the State column, I will now try to shift the focus of this space towards analysing the media. Citizens may not be interested in the inner workings of the media, but the media is interested in us. That is why it needs to be watched.

THIS WEEK

Merry Christmas, General Toran

Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal relented to the defence minister's nagging and sneakily promoted Nepal Army General Toran Bahadur Singh to the post of Lieutenant General on Christmas Eve. The prime minister probably hopes the hoopla over the promotion of the general, accused of involvement in the disappearance of 49 alleged Maoists from the Nepal Army's Bhairabnath Battalion between 2002 and 2003, will have died down by the time he returns from an official visit to China. Unfortunately for him, the Maoists are demanding the government rescind the promotion in Parliament and have challenged it in the Supreme Court.

Happy New Year.

Closed for business.

Ten days after the Maoists declared the autonomous state of Newa amid territorial disputes, Newar groups re-declared the federal state of Newa, saying they had been excluded from the Maoists' bash. Representatives from 16 political parties, including the Maoists, UML and Nepali Congress, were present at a function in Kathmandu on Saturday. The Rastriya Janamorcha Party isn't so enthusiastic about federalism, however, and has decided to shut down the country in various phases, urging the government to 'save nationality'. Gandaki and Dhaulagiri zones were closed on Sunday, Bheri and Karnali on Tuesday. At the time of going to press, a Valley bandh is on for New Year's Day.

Strike three

Garbage collectors finally went back to work on Monday and had to collect almost a fortnight's worth of rubbish rather more efficiently than they are used to. But Sisdoles only slumbers; don't be surprised if that familiar stink returns before long. The Nepal Medical Association took the baton from the garbage collectors on the strike-relay and promptly closed down all health



institutions, except emergency services, demanding that the government provide professional security in all medical facilities. They have issued a week's ultimatum for the government to upgrade the entry level pay scale for doctors in government service, and to waive additional tax levied on doctors working in the private sector.

Unmanly vendettas

Wednesday brought more news of women being abused around the country: a man set his wife on fire and threatened to kill her if she told anyone while she was lying in Mahakali district hospital with first degree burns all over her body. In Kapilbastu, a woman was denied food for weeks and forced to toil in the fields as her body withered away because her in-laws weren't impressed with the dowry they received. In Nuwakot, a man slit an 84-year-old woman's throat saying she had killed his mother using black magic. "She lived to be 84 because she was a witch," he told police.

Don't be waiting on Kalki, Avatar is here



Pandora's box

James Cameron's sci-fi epic *Avatar* premiered on 16 December to much acclaim. The film, which has been 12 years in the making, cost a reported \$500 million and boasts unprecedented CG effects. Not unreasonably, then, it was one of the most anticipated releases of the year.

Sadly, the movie's something of a letdown for everyone but CG aficionados. While the performances are believable, the plot is hackneyed and, at points, mawkish. Cameron also directed the tearjerker *Titanic* so *Avatar*'s melodrama comes as no surprise.

But first, here's a quick synopsis: it's

the year 2154, and a team of marines and scientists from resource-starved Earth venture out to Pandora, a distant planet, which holds vast deposits of an energy-rich mineral called Unobtanium. However, the deposits are within territory inhabited by the Na'vi, an indigenous race of 9-10 feet tall, blue, cat-like bipeds. So the team first plans a diplomatic tack: using a machine to zap human minds into alien bodies, or avatars (hence the title), which they hope can win the trust of the Na'vi and convince them to move elsewhere.

The effort on the ground is

spearheaded by a paraplegic marine named Jake (Sam Worthington), who transports in and out of the Na'vi world, relaying valuable information about the locations of the deposits and viability of a military strike. On an early reconnaissance mission, Jake meets and eventually falls in love with Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), a young Na'vi leader who initiates him into their lifestyle.

Meanwhile, rifts appear within the human ranks, as the belligerent marines attempt to abort the diplomacy, led by the team of scientists, in favour of a military approach. The scientists and Jake, won over by the Na'vi's charms, jump to their defense and a full-blown war erupts. When the dust settles, Jake must answer for himself a question that tugs at the plot all along: is it better to be Na'vi or human?

The CG graphics and the thumping

background score are indisputable winners. Cameron reportedly had to create new cameras to shoot the movie, and the results are spectacular. The Na'vi religion, also Cameron's brainchild, is internally coherent, not the usual New Age mish-mash of fantasy movies about alien cultures. Indeed, the movie can't help but remind one of an utterly worldly problem: the sufferings indigenous groups have had to endure at the hands of colonisers.

However, we've seen this plot too many times before, most recently in *District 9*. Besides, the romantic subplot develops far too quickly and is scarcely believable. The two protagonists are different species, after all. But weak plot or no, *Avatar* is definitely worth your time. The 3-D version of the movie is due to be released in Kathmandu soon. 🇳🇵

Suvayu Dev Pant

Memory of Leaves

RAJANI THAPA

'Nepalis writing in English' are a relatively new vista in Nepal's literary landscape. Some significant works have been published in recent years, but it is still thrilling to read a work situated in a familiar context. Manan Karki's *The Memory of Leaves* is an evocative first novel that makes its mark on the scene with impressive ambitiousness, yet ultimately proves frustrating.

The book is written in three parts, intriguingly titled 'Watson', 'Sherlock' and 'Agnivesh', three first-person narratives that pivot around a central, tragic event. The first section skirts around the story deftly, revealing it in bits and pieces. The narrator, Watson, is a dying and embittered man and his voice is alternately melodramatic and moving. This wavering, almost embarrassed tone fits the character well as he meditates on his life. The passages meander between the present, when Watson is literally preparing for death, and the past, when he recalls the tragic death of his young daughter and its aftermath.

Karki is sometimes long-winded and one longs for conciseness at times, but there are some quite beautiful passages here. In the beginning, Watson is self-consciously literary. Yet when the end nears, the façade drops away and a more genuine, and genuinely sad, self emerges. Here is a man on the brink of death, looking back on his waste of a life, and the painstaking manner in which he details the destruction of all his relationships is poignant.

Unfortunately, the rest of the novel falls short of this initial promise. 'Sherlock' and 'Agnivesh' seem hastily written and their protagonists are not well fleshed out.

Sherlock is Watson's childhood friend and you expect some insight into the latter's tragedy, but it isn't forthcoming. His role is significant, yet the way the author sketches it out makes him seem strangely peripheral.

Further, and rather absurdly, Sherlock is an ex-policeman who is apparently wealthy enough to have retired by the age of 45 to throw money at a personal project, a private detective agency with almost no clients. This is explained away by the mention of family money, which Karki might get away with had he not already used that ploy to explain away Watson's lack of employment in the first section. It seems as if the

The latest Nepali to publish fiction in English comes close to delivering, but falls tantalisingly short

author cannot be bothered to deal with the logistics of normal lives, so he makes the major characters impossibly rich to grant them the leisure to stroll around Kathmandu ruminating on their lives. It's not as though a good narrative is obliged to incorporate the mundane details of what we recognise as normal lives. Karki has some keen observations rendered in imaginative metaphors and lovely turns of phrases, but lyrical language fails to move when it lacks context and is not rooted in a plausible reality.

Agnivesh's narrative, too, proves half-hearted and fails to tie the story together. We have here a very angry young man whose dead sister seems to mean very little to him. The

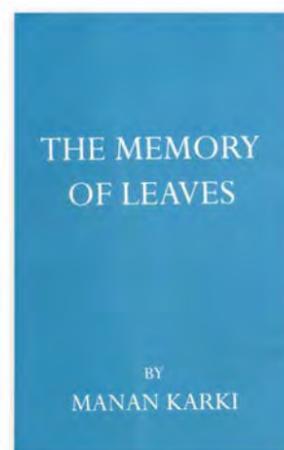
author shows us how destructive the tragedy has been to Agnivesh's life, but he comes off as one-dimensional. That Karki pays far too little attention to character development is seen even more starkly in his treatment of Watson's wife Madhu, who has been a 'vegetable' since the death of their daughter. One of the central problems of the novel is

that Madhu never comes to life, in the past or the present. Karki does not bother to give Madhu any kind of voice or inner life, and her being in a vegetative state seems merely a convenient device. He makes her an apparition floating around with nothing to do or say, and does a great disservice to a potentially powerful story.

The Memory of Leaves is disappointing precisely because it has so much ambition and potential to begin with. You

can forgive the author slight self-indulgence in his prose, because he writes so beautifully. But one cannot help feeling let down by the way he abandons his story after raising so many expectations. 🇳🇵

The Memory of Leaves is published by Pillar Press (Ireland) and may be downloaded at <http://sites.google.com/site/memleaves/> (contribution optional)



REVIEW

Nepathya's back with a bang in 2010

"As our society heads to a peaceful and prosperous future with the new constitution being written, we wanted to come up with a fun-filled romantic album, but the current situation inspired us otherwise. This album has ended up being patriotic, one yearning for peace," says Amrit Gurung, frontman of Nepathya.

"My new album has nothing different. I'd like people to listen to it first and then decide for themselves because this is for them," he explains. Nepathya's new album is titled *Mero Desh* after the poem by Vikram Subba, and features eight songs, old and new.

Nepathya fans have waited long enough for this album. Amrit says "unavoidable circumstances" precluded the release planned for last year. On the bright side, it didn't cramp their creativity: yet another album is slated for release in 2010. Enjoy the Nepathya bonanza this new year. *Mero Desh* is widely available in the market, was produced and released by nepa-lyaya and is being distributed by Ranjana Cassettes. *Pravat J Gurung*



ANUP PRAKASH



EVENTS

- ❖ Megan Adamson Sijapati speaks on **Nepali Muslims, Islamic Revival, and the New Nepal: A Look at Secularism, Religion, and the Politicisation of Identities**. Sijapati, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, reviews the heterogenous history and contemporary situation of Muslims in Nepal in the light of Nepal's political transition into secular statehood. This free public lecture will take place 4pm, 4 January at the Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, 4472807
- ❖ **People After War**, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393
- ❖ **Nature Through Lens 5**, photo exhibition organised by Wildlife Conservation Nepal, at Nepal Art Council until 2 January, Babar Mahal, 4433075



Quest Entertainment

Three Idiots

Two friends [Madhavan and Sharman Joshi] embark on a quest for a lost buddy. They encounter a long forgotten bet, a wedding they must crash, and a funeral that goes impossibly out of control. Then another journey begins through memory lane, as we are introduced to an old friend free-thinker, Rancho [Aamir Khan]. The reason for his long-time disappearance unfolds with the story.

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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 482

Q. Who do you think is/was the best prime minister?

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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

If you are wondering about the sudden rise in cloud density this week, here's why: a powerful cyclone (intense low pressure) over the Indian Ocean sucked in cold air from Siberia, creating a rare North-South airstream across the Himalaya. The longitudinal jet stream formed over Kashmir, then weakened as it shifted laterally eastward to Nepal. Because of the source, the clouds didn't have much to offer except light snowfall on mountain tops and drizzles in the lower valleys and plains on Wednesday and Thursday. The satellite picture shows a rare view of the north-south jetsream in its typical shape as it travels eastward across Nepal. Expect improved weather with sunny intervals on New Year's Day and more sunshine over the weekend, but be prepared for more chilly mornings.



FRI	SAT	SUN
17-3	18-3	19-2



DINING

- ❖ Kathmandu is now home to an authentic **Irish Pub** in Ananda Bhawan in Lazimpat. Guinness and Kilkenny beer as well as specialities such as Fish n' Chips, Guinness Burgers and Irish Chicken Stew are served to the strains of Celtic music. This week, you can still catch the last of the **German Food Festival** on New Year's Day. 4416027 www.irishpubnepal.com
- ❖ **Christmas Turkey Dinner**, till 1 January, K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070
- ❖ **Live continental BBQ Fiesta**, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday
- ❖ **The Corner Bar**, 5-7pm happy hour, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818
- ❖ **Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel**, every evening 4.30-6.30pm, **Wine and cheese**, every Friday & Saturday, 5-8pm, **Strawberry Étagère**, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East, **Oriental Nights**, all flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- ❖ **Lavazza Coffee and Baskin n' Robbins**, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234
- ❖ **A cafe's café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- ❖ **Jazzabell Café**, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Jhamsikhel, 2114075
- ❖ **Al Fresco**, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, **Kakori**, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, 7-10.45pm, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999
- ❖ **Teppanyaki** meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9am-10pm, 4425341
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- ❖ **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999
- ❖ **Tiger for Breakfast**, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068
- ❖ **Stupa View Restaurant**, for vegetarian creations & clay oven pizza at Boudha Stupa, 4480262
- ❖ **Gokarna Forest Resort** for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 44512126

MUSIC

- ❖ **Rox Bar** at the Hyatt Regency may be this weekend's choice if you don't fancy the hassle of grubby Thamel. Every weekend, a rather eclectic crowd gathers in Boudha, drawn less by the dress code and matching prices than by the prospect of accessible sophistication, a little light dancing and some absorbing live music from Inner Groove (Fridays) and Aprilrush (Saturdays). If you fancy staying on then there's also a lavish **Sunday Jazz brunch** at The Terrace from 12-3.30pm. 4489362, 4491234
- ❖ **Baja gaja** every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok, 7.30pm, 5526212
- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop BBQ everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- ❖ **Some like it hot**, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 7pm, 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm
- ❖ **Nepali Ghajals** at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589
- ❖ **Rudra Night** live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326



KIRAN PANDAY

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Chabahil (Branch Office) | Pokhara (Branch Office) | Nepalgunj (Branch Office) | Ghorahi (Branch Office) | Surkhet (Branch Office) | Butwal (Branch Office) | Biratnagar (Branch Office) | Itahari (Branch Office) |
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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

2001
DAY ONE: Tourism entrepreneurs fielded Volkswagen vans with 'Tourist' banners to ferry tourist groups to and from the airport as the UML strike got underway on 27 May. For individual travellers, rickshaws were the best (and most expensive) way to get to town. The cheapest way was to walk.



KIRAN PANDAY

2005
PHAGUN SEVEN: King Gyanendra and Queen Komal gracing a program at Tundikhel to celebrate 55th Democracy Day, which was also the queen's 55th birthday.



KIRAN PANDAY

2006
FAREWELL TO ARMS: (L-R) Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula hand over the signed arms management accord to the UN peace team's military advisor Jan Eric Wilhemson at Hotel Shangri-La.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

2007
GARBAGE IN GARBAGE OUT: The garbage piling up outside Bir Hospital in Kathmandu's city centre as the dispute between contractors and the municipality dragged for a week. The issue has been partially resolved, but the trash is becoming a serious health hazard.



PHURBA TENZING SHERPA

2008
ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Himalmedia reporter Shailee Basnet on the summit of Mount Everest on 25 May. She climbed the mountain with the First Inclusive Women's Sagarmatha Expedition.

All hail, all hell

Would I live in Kathmandu if I weren't Nepali?



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

I live next door to the UNESCO Monument Zone of Patan Darbar Square. The neighbourhoods surrounding the palaces, temples and courtyards of this exemplar of Malla dynasty's golden age are a living, breathing blend of Newa commerce and culture more poised than the overrun sprawl of Kathmandu and the sterilised preservation of central Bhaktapur.

Yet I treasure the back gallis and bhattis of Mangal Bajar and Thaiti as much as I do the constantly evolving cast of restaurants and bars in the twin cities fronting the Bagmati. I appreciate the eclectic expression of western and Nepali cultures across the Valley as manifest in the galleries, concert halls and thoroughfares. I love the stray dogs dozing in the winter sun, the eagles wheeling across the blues skies, the obtuse bulls planted on city roads. And I couldn't do without the pockets of serenity around such indicators of the Valley's ancient history as Taudaha and Nagdaha, and the getaways stowed into the ridges and furrows of the guardian mountains ringing us.

After some time abroad, I've also come to the conclusion that this year's errant rains notwithstanding, the Kathmandu Valley has some of the best weather in the world. It's a privilege to share these mostly balmy climes with family, and friends old and new, Nepali and pharen. The longer I linger, the more I feel at home.

But as I crossed the Bagmati the other day, peering right into sewerside slum life, I was forced to ask myself: would I live here if I weren't Nepali, and hadn't grown up here?

The answer, I was surprised to learn, is no.

The whole of the Kathmandu Valley has been designated a World Heritage Site on account of our seven Monument Zones, but these cultural treasures are havens besieged by urban squalor. Traffic jams occupy the Valley's inhabitants, as garbage heaps do our stray dogs, eagles and holy cows. Sleazy dance bars and massage parlours constitute the Valley's chief entertainment, jazz and film festivals be damned, and proclaim their ubiquitous presence ever more boldly. There are precious few green or farming spaces left as the rush for unreal estate continues apace with the wholesale levelling of the natural landscape. It's a measure of how perverse the capital's living experience has become when it takes a bandh for us to reclaim our streets and breathe freely.

It's no use shuttling visitors to the Valley from one darbar square to another, one stupa to

another, hoping they'll be blind to the incredibly offensive clanging clamour of our modern capital city. Rather, open your eyes to what we have become accustomed to. How casually we walk past an expanse of rotting garbage, how hopelessly we accept bandhs, how callously we flout traffic rules. How little we do to



change things because we feel we can't change anything on our lonesome. How would the reality of Kathmandu appear to someone visiting for the first time?

It saddens me to concede that Kathmandu could really be Crapmandu, not Catmandoo. That the probability of my being here leans heavily on a certain nostalgia for times gone by and the ease of being 'from here'. But

I'd like to think my being here also aspires to a revival and rejuvenation of those times we once knew, and a little more than that.

Where then to start this new year and decade? There is so much at stake for the national polity in the months to come it may seem futile to imagine attracting state support. But not to imagine how to make the Kathmandu Valley livable again is even more so. The Nepali habit of evacuating bodily fluids into the environment may keep bodies clean, but transpose that philosophy to society at large and you get Kathmandu - spotless houses submerged in a sea of sewage.

We might start with a little civility on the streets of Kathmandu. When did honking ever clear a traffic jam? We might start with more responsible waste disposal. Compost your veggie waste if you have a garden, and cut down on plastic bags. We might start with neighbourhood organisation for better roads, better drains, better street lighting. But we have to start somewhere. If we don't, who will?

The stars in 2010

The year 2009 passed into history as the International Year of Astronomy, marking 400 years since the invention of the telescope by Galileo and his discovery of the moons of Jupiter. On the eve of New Year 2010, amateur astronomers across Nepal may want to take note of the most exciting celestial happenings to come.

Eclipses in 2010

After the midnight Blue Moon lunar eclipse on new year, there are one solar and one lunar eclipse in 2010. There will be an annular solar eclipse on 15 January. Annular eclipses are not total eclipses, the moon is a bit too far away to completely obscure the sun's disk. The eclipse will start at 12:23pm and end at 15:36pm, with the maximum eclipse at 14:10pm. A (partial) lunar eclipse will take place on 26 June.



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

Planet observing:

The little elusive planet Mercury will be seen in the evening after sunset in the west from late March to mid-April, mid-July to mid-August, and mid-November to mid-December. On 3 April 2010, Mercury and Venus will lie just three degrees apart (conjunction).

Venus returns as the evening star in February and will dominate the western skies after sunset until October. Besides the above conjunction, Venus also meets up with a few other planets.

Note 7 August, when Venus and Saturn are 2.8 degrees apart in the west-southwest at nightfall and 18 August, when Venus is 1.9 degrees from Mars in the same region.

Mars will be visible in the evening sky almost all year long, from mid-January to mid-December. Mars reaches its opposition on 29 January, around which time it will be at its biggest and brightest as seen from Earth.

Jupiter reaches its opposition on 21 September. It is up in the evening sky at the beginning of the year, January to mid-February, and again at the end of the year, from September into 2011.

Saturn reaches its opposition on 21 March. It moves into the evening sky in March and remains there until September, but with a limited view of its rings.

Meteors in 2010:

The best meteor showers are those that occur close to a new moon, which allows for darker skies and sightings of fainter streaks. One shower in 2010 fits that bill. The Perseid meteor shower peaks on 12 August, three days after a new moon. Perseid meteors can fall at the rate of 80 an hour.

Wishing you all clear skies and a very happy new year 2010 as this column bids its readers goodbye after four years.

kedarbadu@gmail.com

BEYOND FALSE DEBATES- Krishna Kumar
Reflections of a teacher- Snehlata Gupta
Still terminally ill- Zakia Sarwar
A casualty of nationalism- Marshal Fernando and Santasilan Kadrigamar
Good on paper- Shanta Basnet Dixit

IN ADDITION

'The emerging complexity of Dalit consciousness'- Laura Brueck
'Macaulay's stepchildren'- Anjum Altuf
'Hindutva then and now'- Subhash Gatade
'Kaplan's savage orientalism'- Michael Roberts

Plus check out our new blog at www.himalmag.com/blogs/
OVER THE TOP - RAISING A REGIONAL RUCKUS



Kishore Nepal in *Naya Sadak*, Sunday, 27 May

नयाँ सडक

Preparations are underway to celebrate the 31st birthday of the heir to Nepal's throne, Crown Prince Dipendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. With this royal birthday around the corner, people's attention is focused on the Crown Prince.

2001

This translated comment on Crown Prince Dipendra's marriage plans appeared in the *Nepali Times* of 1 June 2001, the morning of the royal massacre.

A suitable prince

People are asking why the crown prince is unmarried at this age, and whether his future as the heir to the throne is in danger.

This is not an uncommon worry for the Nepali people, who have a lot of faith in and respect for the royal family. Crown Prince Dipendra is perhaps the first member of the Nepali royalty to break tradition and not be married even at 31. The Royal Palace is also concerned about the Crown Prince's marriage. But many do not know where the Crown Prince's heart lies.

People close to the Crown Prince speak of two women he

has an emotional relationship with. According to them, one is a childhood sweetheart, while his relationship with the other began when he was older. "It might be that the Crown Prince is finding it difficult to choose between the two," jokes a palace employee, adding, "But he does not support bigamy."

Crown Prince Dipendra turns 31 on 27 June. It is high time His Royal Highness got married. The Nepali people wish to celebrate his marriage soon and in the grandest manner. Everyone is worrying about when this will happen.

2002

Execution

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 January

हिमाल



Duradanda, in Lamjung District, is a three-hour walk from the road at Besisahar. Muktinath Adhikari, principal of the Padmini Sanskrit Higher Secondary School, was taking an arithmetic class in Grade 10 at noon on 16 January, 2002 when armed Maoists arrived and took him away. On a hillside overlooking the town, they tied 45-year-old Adhikari to a tree with his muffler, thrust a skewer through his shoulder and chest and then shot him in the right temple with a pistol.

The villagers had been warned not to remove the body, or they would also be killed. Maoists say Adhikari was killed because he was an informant, had not given 25 per cent of the Dasain bonus of the school teachers to the Maoist cause, and continued to teach Sanskrit despite warnings not to. Adhikari was a member of Amnesty International Group 79.

2003

King Gyanendra gave no hint of the coup to come in this translated interview in 2003.

"A constructive monarchy..."

King Gyanendra in an interview with *Nepal* 18 August-1 September

नेपाल

On active monarchy

"An active monarchy is not reasonable in itself in the 21st century. Neither is it the demand of the times, nor is it our wish. You can, however, call it a constructive monarchy that, remaining within the constitution, performs its duty towards the people..."

On constitutional monarchy

"We all believe there is no alternative to constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. But some problems have arisen in this regard, and they are technical ones.



That could be because some theories do not match our traditions and ground realities."

On Maoist demands for a constituent assembly

"We should be clear about the reasons why we raise certain issues. We must also examine how it will impact Nepal and Nepalis. It should be clear (the proposals) can lead to the development

of Nepal and the prosperity of Nepalis."

On the king's authority

"The monarchy is exercising powers enshrined in the constitution prepared by the leaders of the change in 1990. We have never crossed the limit. The monarchy has not acted against the people's wishes, royal tradition or constitutional boundaries, and it will never do so."

On the national priority

"There is no debate that the people want peace, security and development. The peace process is moving ahead with the government's efforts. Why can't we have a roundtable conference for development just when we are talking about such a meeting in politics?"

2005

This editorial after King Gyanendra's 1 February 2005 coup was supportive of the regime and critical of donors threatening to cut aid.

Donor threats

Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 20 February

समाचारपत्र

Since the king took control on February first, donor agencies have threatened to pull out. They have laid down conditions for the state to fulfill in order to receive continued support. Some of these so-called friends of Nepal have made up their minds without understanding the reality. The situation in the country is quite different from what they suspect or from the speculative reporting of the international media.

Several ambassadors have returned to their countries for consultations. Nepal's main donors such as the US, UK, India and the EU have threatened to stop both military and other aid if the government fails to restore fundamental rights. The king said the state of emergency would not last long, that such a step was necessary to create an environment for the multiparty system to thrive in. Several leaders under house arrest and detention are being released. There are signs that the state is gradually loosening censorship on the media. After February first, some positive things have been taking place but this information doesn't seem to be getting out to the outside world.

2006

A blow-by-blow translation of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord just past midnight on 29 November, 2006.

Midnight hour

Biswadeep Pandey in *Samaya*, 7 December

समय

It was the night of 28 November, and the entire nation's attention was on the prime minister's residence in Baluwatar. Senior party leaders, civil society members and observers were all there. They looked confused, almost harassed. The talks were delayed, and some were almost falling asleep from exhaustion, waiting for PM Koirala to wake up from his nap so the talks could resume.

Frustrated, a UML leader started shouting at Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, "Sitaulaji, where is my tea?"

The bickering did not disturb Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who was intently reading the newspapers. Deputy Prime Minister Amik Sherchan covered his face with his topi and took a nap. Devendra Raj Pandey was reciting satirical poems about the peace process, Laxman Aryal was practising yoga, and Lila Mani Pokhrel was being interviewed by radio stations on his mobile phone. Madhav Nepal asked his

assistant Ishwor Pokhrel to inform him when the talks began, and left Baluwatar. Tired of waiting, Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa ordered coffee, which took an hour to arrive. In the meantime, Maoist spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara inspected all the rooms at the prime minister's residence. Comrade Barsha Man Pun 'Ananta' ordered Frooti to cheer up the leaders.

Krishna Prasad Sitaula and Baburam Bhattarai were the only leaders serious about summit talks. At 11.30pm, Prime Minister Koirala finally came down to the hall and the mood changed instantly. Leaders woke up from naps, and others came back, and soon the leaders of all eight parties were present. Sitaula read out the agreement, there was some discussion, and it was finally signed at 12.30pm on 29 November.

2007

A year into the peace process, Nepali newspapers exposed contradictions between the words and actions of the Maoists

Maoist paradox

Drishti, 14 August

दृष्टि

What they say

What they do

"Abandon violence"	Use threats and violence
"Peaceful transformation"	Threaten to return to the jungle
"Keep the PLA in camps"	Keep YCL wing active
"Committed to CA"	CA won't happen
"CA decides on monarchy"	Declare republic before CA
"Stay in government"	Quit government
"Insist on proportional representation"	Oppose proportional system
"Mobilise army against Madhes uprising"	Against army bodyguards
"Expansionist India"	Meet Indians in Siliguri
"Ceasefire and peace process"	For 'urban uprising'
"Negotiate with Congress"	Left party unity

2008

The CA finally voting to declare Nepal a republic was the subject of this editorial cartoon by Rabin Sayami.

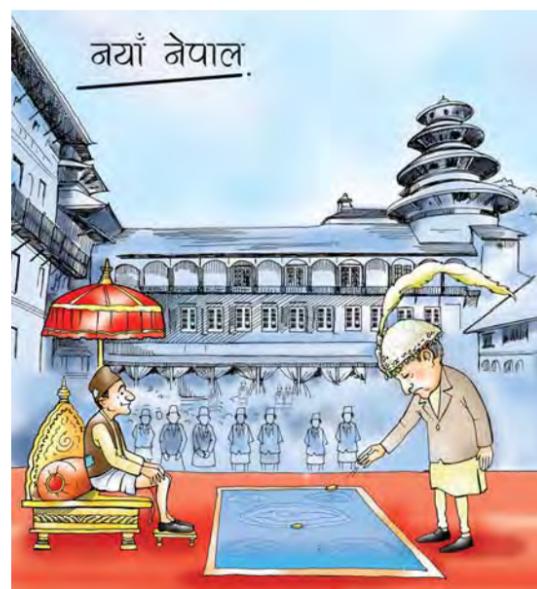
End of an epoch

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 May-12 June

हिमाल

King Gyanendra dug his own grave when he said, "the Nepali people want a king that can be seen and heard". Gyanendra's ambition has led monarchy to its very end. The loss of internal support and international recognition marks an end of an epoch.

Gyanendra's lack of foresight and selfishness made him the last king of Nepal. He failed to realise that the Nepali monarchy could only continue to exist in a form similar to the British monarchy. As a result, even our neighbours that formerly gave strong support to Nepal's monarchy, accepted republicanism easily.



ROBIN SAYAMI

2000

Interview in 2000 with Maoist Chairman Prachanda reprinted from the *Revolutionary Worker*. Pictured is the only likeness of the man available at that time.



SUBHAS RAI

“We have to make a big leap...”

Nepal is a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. And MLM (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) says that in oppressed countries like this, in general, a revolutionary objective situation prevails...When the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was initiated in China under the leadership of the great Comrade Mao, it directly impacted on the revolution in Nepal. There were so many materials from the Chinese Cultural Revolution that came to Nepal...inspired mainly the younger generation of communists and the masses.

In 1986 only the Communist Party of Peru had finalised MLM as the party ideology. We had some documents from the PCP. We had a debate to adopt MLM as our ideology...this is our ideological, political and subjective basis...

We found the mountainous region in Nepal is very favourable for guerrilla warfare, for People's War...we also looked at the fact that we are surrounded on three sides by this big Indian country.

The West (of Nepal) is historically, geographically, and culturally the basin of this revolution. It is the main point for the revolution - the people here are more oppressed by the ruling classes, and the government in Kathmandu is very far from here.

In making the plan for the initiation there was great debate over how to go to the armed struggle because many people were influenced by 'peaceful' struggle, work in the parliament, rightist and petty bourgeois feelings and a long tradition of the reformist movement. Then we said that only the process must be a big push, big leap. Not gradual change. Our view was we should declare freely and frankly that we have initiated the People's War and that is the only alternative left for the people, for their emancipation, for their independence from brutal imperialists.

And in the plan for initiation we had a military plan to attack the police force, the landlords, the local goons in rural areas. But we did not have a big plan for sabotage in the capital because, at that time, we did not want to create a situation where with one strike the intellectuals would go away from us. We wanted to sustain their support.

The intellectuals' instinctive tendency is that we have to learn all these things, we should read everything...and then we can make war. But we said no, this is not Maoism. This is not Marxism. This is not dialectical materialism. This is not according to the scientific theory of knowledge. The question is learning war through war.

There are big contradictions among the ruling classes: they are fighting among each other, and there is also an unstable situation with India. Because for us, ultimately, we will have

to fight with the Indian Army. When the Indian Army comes in with thousands and thousands of soldiers, it will be a very big thing. But we are not afraid of the Indian Army. In one way, it will be a very good thing. They will give us a lot of guns. And lots of people will fight them. This will be a national war. And it will be a very big thing. They will have many difficulties intervening. It will not be so easy for them. But if they stupidly dare...they will dare, they will be compelled. They will do that stupidity.

We have to prepare for that. And for that reason we are saying we will also need a particular international situation. And for us this has to do mainly with India, Indian expansionism. We declare we have made a base area then formally we will make a central government, a People's Republic of Nepal: the government of the People's Republic of Nepal.

My main thrust is that I hate revisionism, I seriously hate revisionism. And I never compromise with revisionism. I fought and fought again with revisionism...

And from the economic, cultural and political basis, we see that a new wave of world revolution is beginning. This is fact. We have to grasp this question because just like Mao said, there will be 50 to 100 years of great turmoil and great transformation...



2001

King Birendra released doves on his 53rd (and last) birthday on 28 December 2000 at Tundikhel. Taranath Ranabhat, parliament speaker and head of the commission of inquiry on the royal massacre, brandished at a press conference the Colt Commando rifle used by Crown Prince Dipendra. Post-massacre editorial in the *Nepali Times*:



PRADEEP SHRESTHA

Those were the last words King Birendra spoke as he collapsed in the billiard room on Friday, 1 June 2001. Shock, rather than pain, was writ large on his face. More than the shock of being shot, it was the shock of knowing who had just shot him.

“What have you done”, he murmured, as he slowly slumped to the floor. Nepalis will also want an answer to that haunting question as they agonise over what happened that night. As individual citizens, and as a nation, we will have to come to terms with this unspeakable slaughter and move on with our lives in the days ahead. We will soon know what happened, we will be told in excruciating detail of the exact sequence in which the royals were slain, we will get the forensic and ballistic evidence, we will hear clinical descriptions of how many bullets, and about the nature of the fatal wounds. There may even be hints as to motive.

But no one is going to be able to explain what was going on in the head of this young man, and what psychological or chemically-induced rage made him convert what he may have seen as a personal dead-end into a dead-end for his family and a kingdom that he would have inherited. Nepalis will ponder this cataclysmic event and what it means for the direction our society, culture and polity are headed in. An unimaginable

“Ke gardeko?”

tragedy like this isn't just a lesson in morality, it turns our beliefs and value systems on their heads. Where does insanity end and evil begin? An entire generation of Nepalis alive today will carry this as a burden on its collective conscience. There are no answers: just a numbing sense of the senselessness of it all. And finally, it will only be the inexorable passage of time that will give us the distance from this moment.

Some of us will seek solace in the Gita. But even our holy books didn't foresee senseless carnage on such a wild scale - not among the warlike gods of our pantheon,

not among lesser mortals. But the Gita does have a message that is relevant: how to gain wisdom from suffering. The epic battles of Kurukshetra, the jealousies, greed and vanity that afflicted our gods bring them down to a human level so that we can recognise our own failings in them. Our holy books, like Greek tragedies, bestow upon

readers a sense of relief by catharsis.

With time the conspiracy theories will also lose their scornful and cynical edge. But like theories of the third gunman behind the grassy knoll in the JFK assassination, or the bomb attack on Rajiv Gandhi, they will never really go away.

The fact that our democratic institutions have withstood this crisis more or less intact is an indication that despite our deep sense of insecurity and loss of self-esteem, our multi-party setup is much stronger than we might have thought. Our pluralistic democracy, free press, our civil-military relations, the government-palace combine took a major battering, but the institutions of democracy showed a hidden resilience. Let us not underestimate the power of our democracy to survive and adapt. 🇳🇵



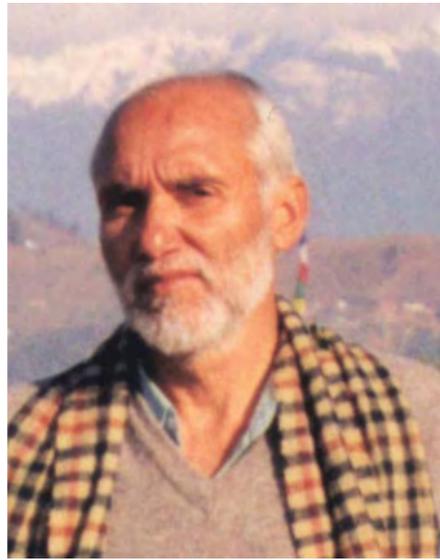
2002

It was the civilians in the countryside who suffered the most during the conflict from atrocities by both sides.

Murderous middle ground

SAGAR PANDIT in DANG

Ram Mani Gyawali (pictured) would have been alive today if he wasn't so concerned about the electrification of his home village of Kerunga in Argakhanchi. Ram Mani had been threatened many times, knew he was on the Maoists' hit-list and had been living in Kathmandu for the past three months. But last week he had to go to Butwal to take delivery of a transformer so he could fit it in Kerunga. The family, including his wife, four children and grandchildren were settling down for the night when there was a knock on the door. "Ram Dai," someone called.



Laxman, his wife Sita who was also beaten up, and Ram Mani's family are in Kathmandu's cremation site at Aryaghat this week for the 13-day mourning period. Ram Mani was targeted because he was honest, plain-speaking and a popular VDC chairman. Last year, the Maoists had asked for a Rs 200,000 'donation'. The brothers not only

refused to pay, but also held a press conference to say why they were not giving in to extortion.

"He was the type that didn't tolerate any nonsense," Laxman says of his brother, who was even jailed during the panchayat regime for telling King Birendra that the system was corrupt and unrepresentative.

Ram Mani was killed, but there are hundreds of others who are caught between threats from the Maoists and the counter-insurgency campaign of the security forces.

Urmila Oli of Purandhara VDC in Dang is an inmate at the military camp in Ghorahi. She was the appointed head of the 'people's government' in her village by the Maoists after her husband Bhim Bahadur Oli joined the rebels about two years ago. "I am not a Maoist, they made me one," she told us before breaking down. Seeing his mother sobbing, Urmila's two-year-old son started crying as well.

There are many other 'accidental Maoists' in Ghorahi. Jan Bahadur Pun, 16, took part in the battle of Kapurkot in December and was forced by the Maoists to be a porter, ferrying fallen rebels out in a *doko*. "With them I had to walk long distances without food or rest," says Pun. "I was in

school when they came and took me in." Many of those in detention told us they were enlisted as militia after training to use a musket for seven days.

Pun's camp-mate, 17-year-old Khadga Bahadur Buda of Rolpa, has a different story. He signed up because he had to fulfill a family obligation. "They came and told my father to send a family member to join the militia," says Buda. "They would have killed him otherwise."



He was overpowered by Maoists with pistols and khukuris. There was a quick 'trial'. Others overpowered his wife and son upstairs, and looted their belongings. Ram Mani's body was found later, his head was nearly severed from his body, and there were signs of torture: long half-inch deep khukuri gashes all over his body.

"The body was completely mutilated, he had been hit and slashed," Ram Mani's younger brother Laxman says. "He was killed because he loved his village and wanted to improve it."



SUBHAS RAI

2003

Columnist Puskar Gautam, a former Maoist commander for Okhaldhunga, analysed the breakdown of the second ceasefire and future Maoist strategy in this comment printed in September 2003.

Offensive strategy



COMMENT
Puskar Gautam

The ceasefire is off, the country is back at war. We seem to have come full circle to 25 November 2001 when the first truce was unilaterally broken by the Maoists after three rounds of fruitless negotiations.

At that time the Maoists took the war onto a new level by attacking the army base at Ghorahi, inflicting huge losses. This time, they have already given us a hint of what lies in store: a campaign of assassinations and bomb attacks right here in the capital, designed to spread panic and fear. Unlike previously, most of the ambushes and raids on police stations in the past two weeks have taken place in daylight, indicating a greater confidence among the Maoists about their ability to make their getaway and melt back into the population. The blasts and assassinations of the past weeks could be a warm-up exercise for the big ones expected as precursors to the three-day national strike on 18-20 September, 2003.

Meanwhile, in the midwest fierce frontal battles continue, with the army even using helicopters for airborne attacks on Maoist positions. Although the army's intelligence about Maoist hideouts and movements seems to have improved, the assassination of its senior psywar counter-insurgency expert in Kathmandu shows that it is still deficient.

Curiously, the Maoists appear to be holding back from launching a full-scale offensive on military targets in the Kathmandu Valley. This could be because they are waiting for the political parties' agitation to be

over, or it could be that they feel their present strategy of high-level assassinations, national strikes and terror tactics will suffice to soften the hardline stance of the state on the issue of a constituent assembly to craft a new constitution.

As usual, as with all the goings-on in Kathmandu, international geopolitics casts a long shadow. The Maoist leaders did let it slip out when they briefly surfaced that they had been 'let down' by India, even though New Delhi doesn't figure on the list of five points that Baburam Bhattarai gave this week for why his group called the ceasefire off. This could have something to do with the fact that CP Gajurel, the senior Maoist who was caught trying to fly to London on a false British passport last month, is still in Indian custody.

They have also been sharply critical of 'imperialist' America, and suspect the US could play a role similar to Peru in 1992, when they helped security forces to apprehend Abimael Guzman in 1992 just as his Shining Path movement was about to launch an urban guerrilla war on Lima.

The Maoists are still playing the palace against the parties according to Mao's dictum of "divide the enemy and take the war forward", and by doing so are also trying to play India against the West. In their analysis, India supports the parties whereas the US and UK are sympathetic to the king.

The reported convergence of Indian, British and American interest to get the palace and the parties together means that there is now considerable international pressure to ensure that the situation in Nepal doesn't spiral out of control. The fact that Nepal was pretty high on the agenda of US Undersecretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca during her visit to New Delhi must mean that the Americans and Indians are making efforts to coordinate Nepal policy.

Senior British officials who met King Gyanendra during his recent visit to London have reportedly advised that a rapprochement with the parties is not only desirable but essential in order to bolster the strength of constitutional forces against the Maoists. Interestingly, Western support for the king, the Maoists' insistence that they want to negotiate directly with the king, and the parties targeting the king in their street protests all have the same net result: it puts the king firmly into the political mainstream. Everyone within Nepal and outside seems to be waiting for King Gyanendra's next move.

The three-pronged battle for state power is deadlocked because each needs the help of the other to isolate the third, but none can agree on the terms because everyone wants to gain overall control over the others. There are few signs of a tripartite or even a two-way agreement between any of the factions. The anti-monarchist Maoists and the king appear to have irreconcilable differences, but the king and the political party leadership could strike an accord if only the king gave the green light and agreed to bring the parties back within a constitutional framework.

The Maoists want a safe landing, but they can't agree to anything less than a constituent assembly since otherwise they will find it hard to explain to their own cadre what all the fighting was for. Both sides realise that there may be a military victory in this conflict, but it will leave the country in such ruin that it won't matter who won.





THOMAS BELL in BENI

It is the morning after in Beni and a scene of utter devastation. The police station is a blackened wreck. The barbed wire had been clipped away and the perimeter wall blasted open at several points. Sandbags at

the sentry posts are torn to shreds. Near the army base, a woman is washing the bloodstain from the steps outside her shop, while her daughter looks on. The police and soldiers guarding the police base fought from 10:30 on the night of Saturday, 20 March, until 6 the next morning against thousands

Bad blood in Beni

of Maoists, until their ammunition ran out. Those who survived either fled, or were taken prisoner. Down the road, the soldiers at the army base kept fighting till daylight and most of their casualties took place in the morning.

Next door, the CDO building has been reduced to rubble, and is still smouldering. The street outside is littered with spent ammunition and unexploded bombs. People pick their way around in silence, their faces covered, glancing at the grotesquely disfigured Maoist corpses that lie strewn about.

The army camp is the only government building to survive partially intact, although it was nearly overrun at one point. Some

25 mortar rounds and a rocket landed here, fired from the mountains above. Whoever decided to put the district headquarters here at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi wasn't thinking of security.

Lt Col Ragu Nepali's office with its sandbagged windows is a wreck. He estimates there were at least 5,000 Maoists involved in the attack: frontline fighters, militia and porters. "They came in waves, like the sea, one after another, one after another," said Nepali, looking exhausted after two nights without sleep. "There were more women than men. And many, many child soldiers. I saw them while I

was shooting back." There were six Maoist bodies inside the army base and Nepali points them out: "They are all young children, this one is a girl."



2005

This metaphorical *Nepali Times* editorial after King Gyanendra's coup on 1 February 2005 tried to circumvent the military censors by replacing the word 'democracy' with 'trees'. The newspaper came out with white holes where the censors had expunged paragraphs and cartoons.

Hariyo ban Nepal ko dhan

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely. The role of trees is to introduce oxygen into the atmosphere and to ingest the carbon dioxide that human and mechanical activity spews into our enclosed airspace so prone to inversion. They provide shade to the pedestrian, a demographic category which today is highly neglected by our increasingly motorised urban populace. Tree-lined boulevards and parks are the mark of any civilised society and the colour of leaves and bark have associations in the human mind with the very evolution of the species. Take away the trees from our sight and senses and our very existence suffers.

Trees reach down to the grassroots and hold the soil together, they reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The sun and the trees, together with the supportive action of water, soil and air, make possible photosynthesis,

the driving mechanism of life on earth. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets seems to have been hasty.

True, Kathmandu's poplars and eucalyptus are imports and they do not have the strength of indigenous varieties. But the fact is that they have provided cover and beauty for a long time now. They have become our own, like so many other exotic species that dot the landscape. It is said that these imports are vulnerable to strong winds due to loose root structures but our analysis shows that the maligned arbours have not been guilty of destruction to the extent that they have to be done away with. All in all, the trees should not have been axed. Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back the greenery?



2006

After ten years of war, Nepalis welcomed the end of conflict, and some Maoists realised it was more important to build than to destroy.

Swords into ploughshares

RAMESWOR BOHARA in SURKHET

As he readied his paddy terrace for planting last week, Ram Bahadur Gurung of Gumi VDC in Surkhet got a pleasant surprise. A group of armed Maoists volunteered to help him.

Some comrades ploughed the field, others used hoes and the women guerrillas waded knee-deep into the slush to plant paddy. The People's War now has a different focus here in western Nepal: to win hearts and minds.

Aware that the people blame them for past brutality, the rebels are on a public relations offensive. Ram Bahadur had got used to being forced to give shelter to Maoists and feed them. Now he doesn't know whether he can trust the guerrillas who still have rifles slung over their shoulders. "They say there will be peace now," says a wizened 70-year-old farmer, "they help us in the

fields, so we are not as afraid as we used to be."

Just three months of ceasefire, and it is hard to tell that these lush green hills have been soaked with blood the past ten years. The Maoists murdered party workers, teachers, traders. More died in brutal crackdowns by state security.

The rebels cut suspension bridges, blew up telecom towers, roads, radio transmitters, hydropower stations, making this isolated region even more remote. Development has been set back decades, as VDC buildings, health posts, schools and drinking water systems were demolished.

"We were at war and had to obey party decisions," explains Comrade Jitendra, "we won't make that mistake, the focus now is not the war." It is clear that comrades who till recently believed that power came out of the barrel of a gun now seem to be convinced that power comes from the people. "If the leaders decide to disband the PLA we will go along with it," says Comrade Pratik of the rebel's Sixth Division.

Many still think the ceasefire is another Maoist ploy. But Comrade Ramesh appears contrite, "We will now turn from destruction to development."

2007

A field report from the Madhes three months after the movement that changed the face of Nepal and inspired other demands for autonomy.

Smouldering anger in the Madhes

KUNDA DIXIT in SIRAHA

Nearly three months after they witnessed an unprecedented explosion of violence, the towns of the central and eastern Tarai are limping back to normal. But the ethnic polarisation of Nepal's plains may be an enduring legacy.

Here in Lahan where it all started in mid-January, many hill residents who fled back then have returned. Protests by the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) do not seem to have the same energy these days, especially after the Tharus refused to join, following the massacre of Maoists in Gaur three weeks ago.

The atmosphere is still charged, cross-border crime is widespread and there is a general sense of

lawlessness. Kidnappings for ransom, mainly of hill people, by one or other of the Tarai militant groups, are a daily occurrence. Attacks and death threats against journalists have forced many to move out. Few think proper elections can be held in June.

"Things will never be the same again," says one Lahan resident, "Nepal is now divided and the border is the East-West highway."

Indeed, election politics and new ethnic polarisation could create a volatile mix in Siraha and its adjoining districts as campaigning for elections heat up. The Chure-Bhabar agitation is a direct response to a militant Madhes and represents the interests of the Tamang, Magar and other hill-ethnic groups that live along or north of the highway.

Meeting Madhes demands for re-demarcation of constituencies by plains people will short-change hill

dwellers, and vice-versa. Highway towns like Lahan are where these interests intersect, and delineating voting units north-south will favour Madhesis while hill ethnics living here will benefit from an east-west arrangement. All this is made much more complicated by past gerrymandering.

The most direct impact of the last three months is that the Maoists are now 'internally displaced people' from the eastern Tarai, and everyone who didn't like them (from royalist land-owners to local political party cadre) are happy with that. But unlike the rest of Nepal, which has experienced a year of ceasefire, the war never ended here.



2008

Dambar K Shrestha, Special Correspondent of *Himal Khabarpatrika*, recounted the attack by Maoists on 22 December 2008 in this article published in *Nepali Times*.

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

For the first time in my 13 years in journalism I was beaten up last Sunday. And I was beaten up for saying I was a reporter. Not even during the war years, when I spent days collecting news with the guerrillas walking up and down the mountains, did I ever feel threatened. On 21 December, they came barging into our office at high noon.

I was in my cubicle working on the next issue of *Himal Khabarpatrika*. The regular Sunday morning meeting was taking place down the corridor...I saw a gang of 25 people heading purposefully towards the meeting hall. There was a big commotion, a chair came crashing through one of the windows...When I looked into the meeting room, it looked like a battlefield. They had pinned down the



BADRI POUDEL

terrified staff inside and were beating them mercilessly. "You dare write against the workers?" they shouted. They were searching for Rameswor Bohara who had

written an investigative piece on Maoist threats and extortion.

Just then Kunda Dixit, *Nepali Times* editor and co-publisher of Himalmedia, came out of his room and three attackers immediately pounced on him. As blows fell, he said: "Is this your democracy? Is this the new Nepal you are trying to build?" This was dangerous, and I tried to get Kunda Dai out of there.

I told the attackers, "Please don't use force, let's discuss this." They asked me who I was. I said I was a reporter, thinking that would be safer. But they started raining blows on my face. I collapsed on the floor as blood started spurting out of my mouth. Kunda Dai tried to rescue me, but they hit him again from behind.

Later that evening, I heard Maoist union leader Salikram Jammakattel lie in parliament and say that it us who had attacked the Maoists! He repeated that on the *BBC Nepali Service* later that evening.

But the very next day on Avenues TV he said it was indeed his group that had attacked us and he threatened to do it again.

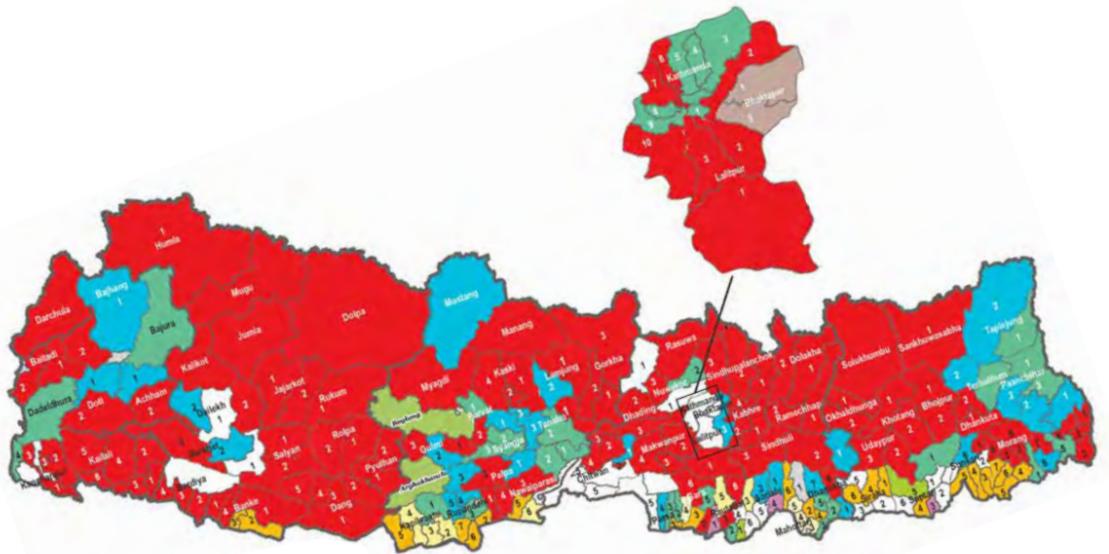
I was never afraid during the war. Now I fear the Maoists, and I fear for my country. 🇳🇵



2008

Results of the 2008 CA elections broken down by constituency in this map published in the special election issue of *Nepali Times*.

- Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists)
- Nepali Congress
- Communist Party of Nepal (UML)
- Madhesi Janadhikar Forum
- Independent
- Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party
- Sadhbhabana Party
- Nepal Workers and Peasants Party
- Janamorcha Nepal



2009

As attacks on journalists continued in 2008 and 2009, *Nepali Times* marked Press Freedom Day on 3 May with this editorial:

Press for freedom

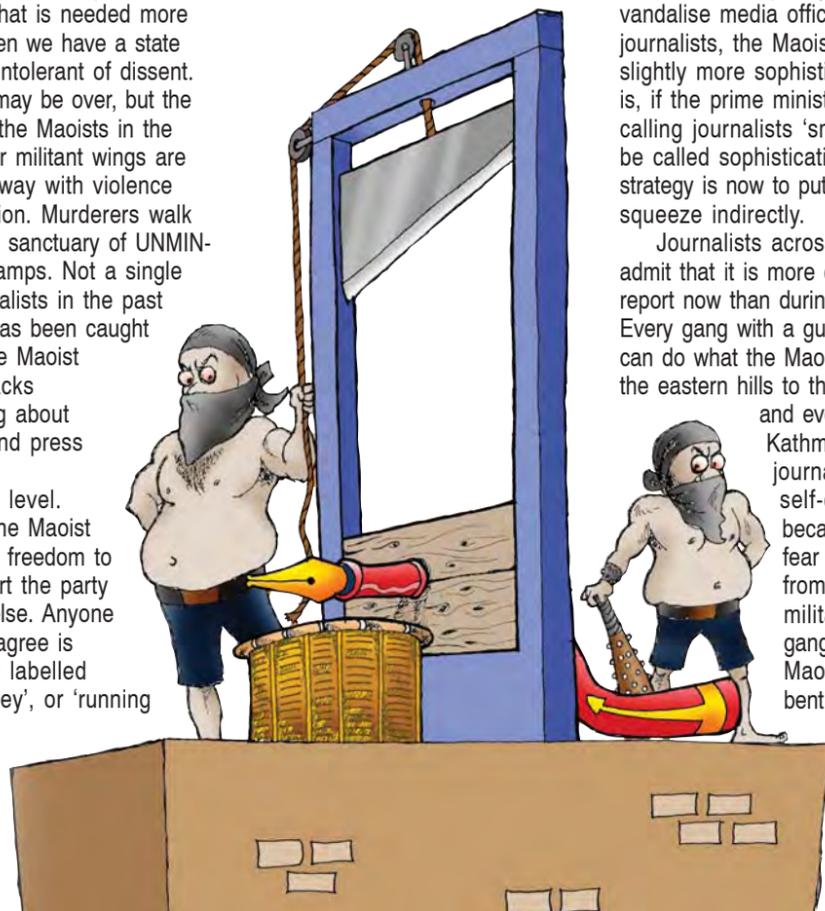
Press freedom is an absolute. One can't be 'partly free'. It has become fashionable these days for the government to re-invent 'Asian values' of press freedom and democracy: the argument that individual and political rights are somehow less important than social, economic and cultural rights. It's the old debate all over again, and the Maoist-led government is resurrecting a class-based definition of rights to stifle criticism in the press.

Unfortunately, we find the UN's human rights wallahs and bilaterals, who would never agree to any fetters on the press in their own countries, going along with this. It's like saying: "Sorry about the chains, but you're not fully ready for freedom yet."

Our post-conflict situation is characterised by a collapse of the rule of law and an epidemic of impunity. Things will get worse because the state is not serious about protecting human rights, and the NHRC has limited capacity and commitment. The UN's OHCHR is under pressure to go along because it wants to extend its mandate. In fact, it should remember why Nepal's human

rights activists lobbied hard to bring it here in 2005 in the first place: to augment independent monitoring. That is needed more than ever when we have a state actor that is intolerant of dissent.

The war may be over, but the behaviour of the Maoists in the avatar of their militant wings are still getting away with violence and intimidation. Murderers walk around in the sanctuary of UNMIN-supervised camps. Not a single killer of journalists in the past three years has been caught and tried. The Maoist leadership lacks understanding about democracy and press freedom at a philosophical level. Freedom in the Maoist lexicon is the freedom to blindly support the party agenda. Or else. Anyone who doesn't agree is automatically labelled 'feudal', 'lackey', or 'running



BILASH RAI

dog reactionary class enemy'.

After using ham-handed methods in the past year to vandalise media offices and attack journalists, the Maoists are getting slightly more sophisticated: that is, if the prime minister publicly calling journalists 'smugglers' can be called sophistication. Still, the strategy is now to put on the squeeze indirectly.

Journalists across the country admit that it is more difficult to report now than during the war. Every gang with a gun now feels it can do what the Maoists do. From the eastern hills to the Madhes and even in Kathmandu, journalists are self-censoring because of the fear of retribution from ethnic militants, criminal gangs and the Maoists. Each is bent upon

outdoing the other in intimidating the media. The state is unable and unwilling to go after the perpetrators because the party leading the government feels it indirectly benefits from a cowed-down media.

Press Freedom Day is being marked on 3 May, 2009 in Kathmandu to draw the attention of South Asian governments to their patchy record in protecting media independence. It gives us no satisfaction that there are countries in the region where journalists have it worse than us. 🇳🇵



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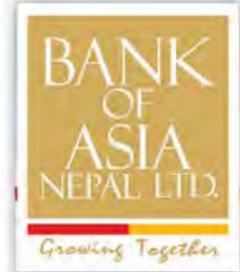
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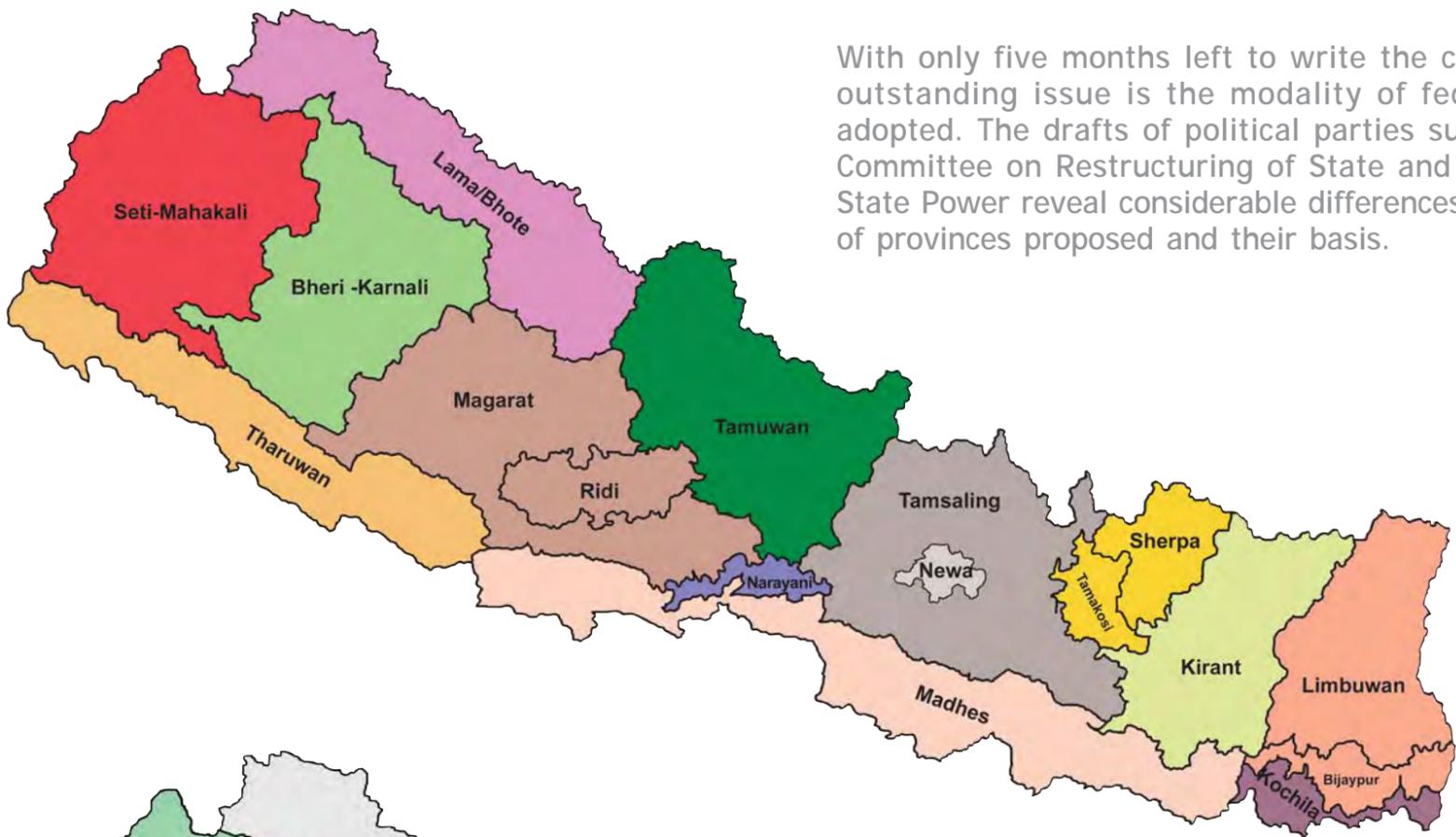


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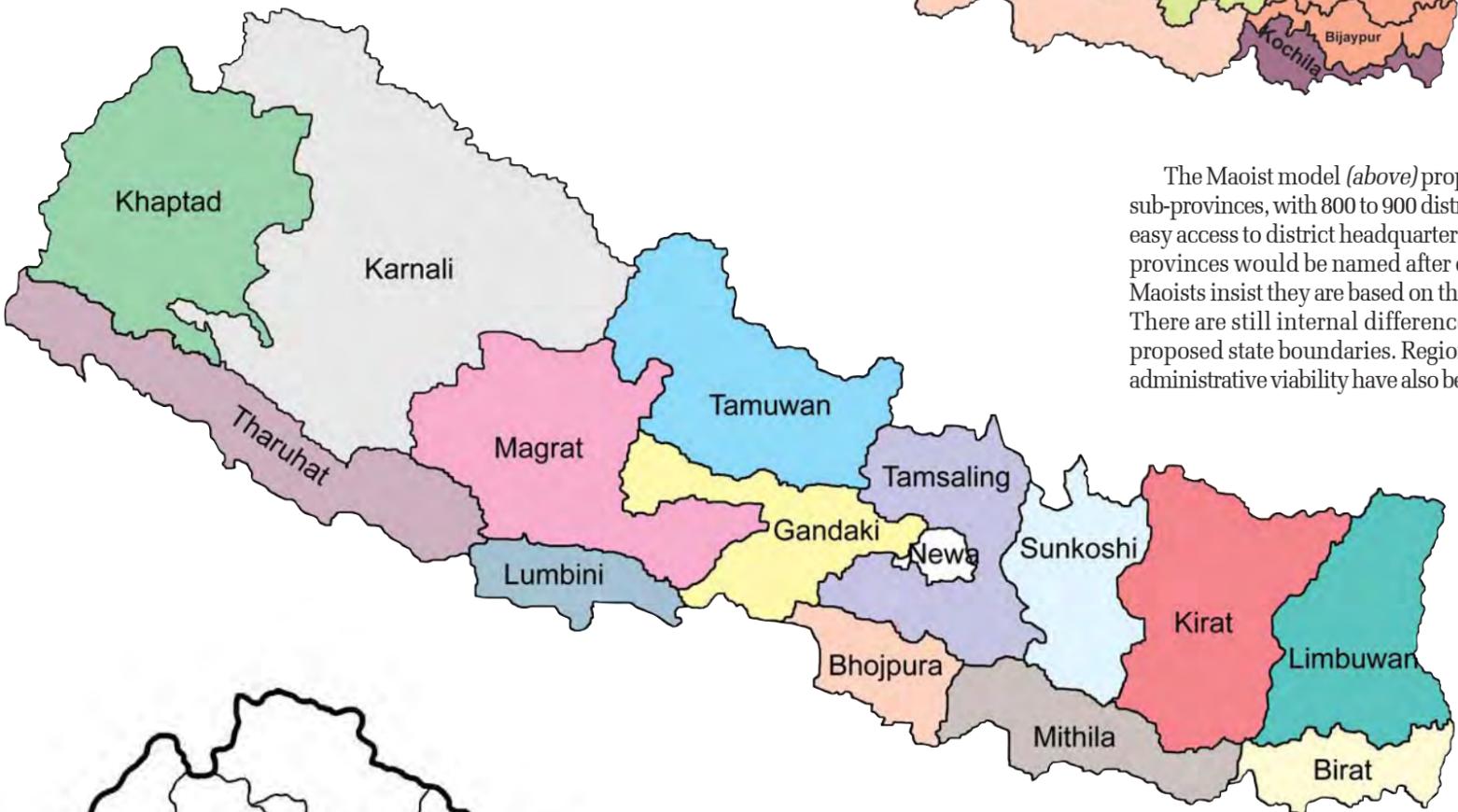
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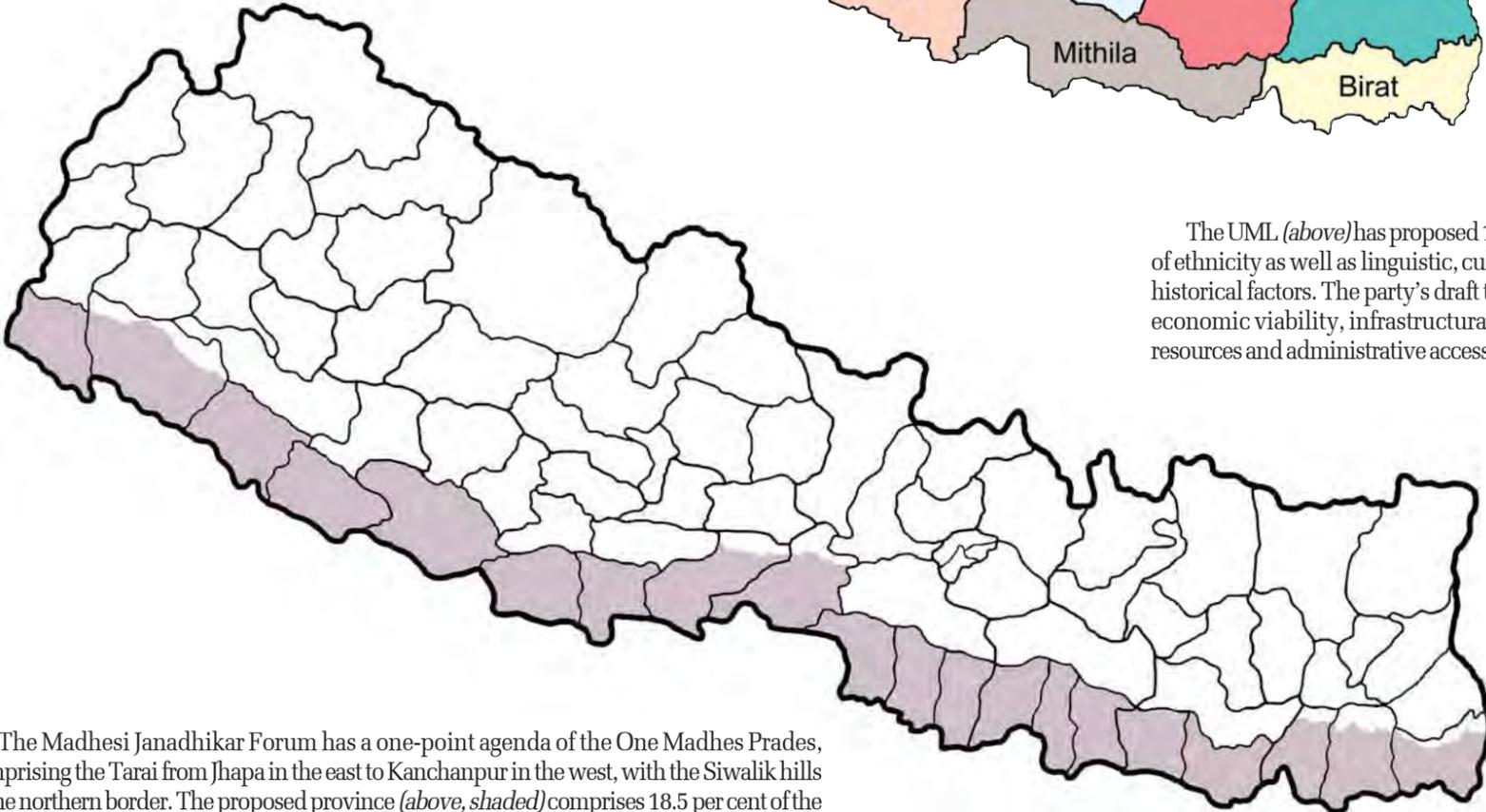
With only five months left to write the constitution the outstanding issue is the modality of federalism to be adopted. The drafts of political parties submitted to the Committee on Restructuring of State and Distribution of State Power reveal considerable differences in the number of provinces proposed and their basis.



The Maoist model (*above*) proposes 14 provinces and sub-provinces, with 800 to 900 districts so people will have easy access to district headquarters. Most of the proposed provinces would be named after ethnicities, though the Maoists insist they are based on the idea of 'nationalities'. There are still internal differences within the party on proposed state boundaries. Regional, topographical and administrative viability have also been considered.



The UML (*above*) has proposed 15 provinces on the basis of ethnicity as well as linguistic, cultural, geographical and historical factors. The party's draft takes into consideration economic viability, infrastructural development, natural resources and administrative accessibility.



The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum has a one-point agenda of the One Madhes Prades, comprising the Tarai from Jhapa in the east to Kanchanpur in the west, with the Siwalik hills as the northern border. The proposed province (*above, shaded*) comprises 18.5 per cent of the country's total area. The party has not elaborated on the hill and mountain regions. It acknowledges 'ethnicity, language, culture, geographical and historical continuity' as the major basis for creating provinces, and notes the need to consider economic interrelation, infrastructural development, natural resources and administrative accessibility.

The NC has proposed that federalism reflect geographical, cultural, ethnic identity and demographic diversity, taking into account economic viability and co-relation, and regional and local autonomy with decentralisation. Its proposal envisions dividing the nation into federal, provincial and local structures, but opposes the idea of ethnicity as the major basis. However, its concept paper is silent on the shape, size and number of provinces to be created. The party has stressed the need to form a State Restructuring Commission to demarcate provincial structures.

2004

A new year Under My Hat satire column by Kunda Dixit from the 2-8 January 2004 edition of Nepali Times.

Happy new ears

It's that time of the year again when each of us, individually and in armed civilian groups, have to make a choice: is it really such a good idea to embark on a new year at this point in time? I mean, do we actually want to go through another 365 days of this?

If your answer is in the affirmative, and you have made up your mind to take the bull by the horns in the china shop, then let me compliment you on your courage, shake you by the hand and wish you good speed.

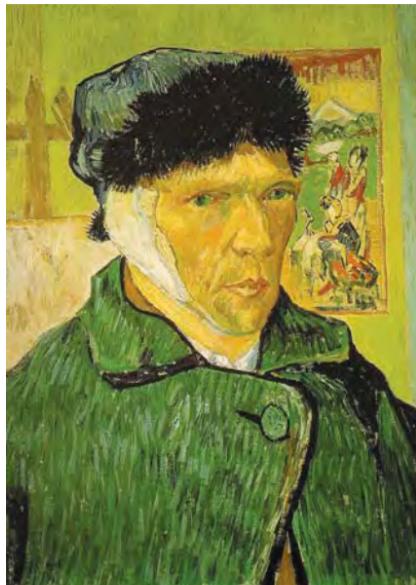
May your days in 2004 be filled with joy, prosperity, happiness, an absence of colliform bacteria in your bottled drinking water, an annual average of less than 50 microns per cubic metre of particulate concentration in the air you breathe, a mobile phone that can actually make contact on the first try and a flight to Delhi that takes off on the day that it is supposed to.

On a more personal note, let me say that I know from past experience that new year resolutions, once made, are difficult to keep.

However hard we try, by January the fifth, we are back to being grumpy couch potatoes with a poor sense of personal hygiene and smoking a pack of Yak a day. We need new year

resolutions that are realistic and which we can actually take to the implementation phase. Otherwise what's the point, right?

In view of the above, therefore, I have drawn up my personal list of new year resolutions which are not copyright and may be reproduced, stored in, or introduced into a retrieval system, and transmitted in any form (electronic, mechanical, photocopying or by the Hubble telescope) provided these suggestions are not attributed to the author or publisher in a court of law:



1. I will try my best to be grouchy and cantankerous throughout the coming year. After all, what is there to be cheerful about?

2. I will take up smoking as a hobby in the new year as part of my personal effort to keep beleaguered American tobacco farmers in business. It's the thought that counts.

3. Since it causes ulcer, I will stop drinking tea. And take up whiskey instead.

4. It's dangerous to keep your anger bottled up, so after being stuck for two hours in Teku because of a julus, I will give vent to road rage by knocking down every orange Hilltake portable road divider and stake my claim for the All-Nepal National Knockout Cup for Toppling Road Dividers in the Supporting Actor Category.

5. It is the duty of every citizen to contribute to the municipality's compost campaign, so I will begin the new year on a clean slate by dumping all my bio-degradable garbage on the sidewalk in front of my house.

6. I will try to read a book in 2004.

7. I will spend less time aimlessly surfing the net this year, and more time in the Casino watching underclad Uzbek artistes do the Nefertiti Bellydance.

8. I will join politics by opening a vulcanising shop and become sole supplier of X-tra Roadgrip Hi-flammable Tyres TM for the 25th Decisive Phase of the Street Agitation Against Regression.

9. I promise not to make utterances that may be construed to be seditious within earshot of the state law and order restoration council. This time, I really mean it.

10. I will endeavour to make a complete Ass of myself every week throughout this new year.

27 FEBRUARY TUESDAY

मेरो परिवारको सालारवाला मासिक खर्च

9	बन्ध्याको स्कूल फिस (२जनाको)	रु. २,४००/-
10	राशन/तरकारी/ज्यास	रु. १,०००/-
11	धरभाडा	रु. २,०००/-
12	विद्युत/टेलिफोन/पानी	रु. २,०००/-
1	बाइको किरा/पेट्रोल	रु. ४,३००/-
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