



## EXCLUSIVE

69-41

The ruling party's vicious internal power struggle is now in its final round, and the outcome will be decided at the party's upcoming convention in Pokhara. But before that, there was the small matter of the no-trust vote against Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala that wannabe Sher Bahadur Deuba wanted to settle first. The vote was set for 28 December, and both factions did some grandstanding about secret or open ballot to hide the fact that they were both terrified of losing.

Both sides met for the duel in the murky fog-shrouded Singha Durbar on Thursday morning. The rebels led by Deuba boycotted the vote when the Koirala camp insisted that the voting should be open. Allegations of monetary incentives for floor-crossing loyalists have been rife. Initially,



MANOHAR RAI

the rebels looked for a way out of the impasse, including discussion about cabinet positions for dissidents. But by afternoon, when it looked like Deuba didn't have the arithmetic in his favour, he and his supporters staged a face-saving walkout.

But when the Prime Minister returned from his customary bowl of soup and siesta, Deuba was addressing a corner meeting for the press. "We didn't agree because it was to be an open ballot," he said. The voting went ahead anyway, and the final scores: 69 for Koirala, 41 Deuba loyalists who walked out, 2 abstentions and one absent (Deuba's mentor, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai).

So another brinkmanship taking us to the edge of an intra-Congress crisis. The question everyone is asking is: wouldn't it be better to just split the party and get it over with?

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## POST-MORTEM

In the 36 hours of mobocracy that ruled Kathmandu's streets last week, we caught a glimpse of an area of darkness in our country's soul.

BINOD BHATTARAI

On 26-27 December, Nepal had no government. Legitimate political parties cowered, citizens were afraid to speak out, the capital sank into an anarchic limbo. It was all the more shocking because we had been brought up to believe that things like this weren't supposed to happen in peaceful Nepal.

It won't be the same again: Nepalis of all castes, class and ethnicity will hereon be aware of their physical appearance. Our multi-ethnic land which prided itself on "unity in diversity" suddenly descended into politically-inspired tribalism. For the first time, Nepalis in the hills who look like they are from the tarai, or Nepalis in the tarai who look like they are from the hills were forced to feel like foreigners in their own land.

The government, when it did act, made things worse. We had an Information Minister who went on air demanding an apology from the actor without confirming whether the statement attributed to him was true. The leader of the Marxist-Leninist party refused to believe the actor's denial. Five young Nepalis were dead, and then the unseemly scramble began to capitalise on the fallout.

"Last week was one of those times in the history of nations when many latent issues converge," explains Chaitanya Mishra, professor of sociology at Tribhuvan

University. "The government was not there at a critical moment." It was only on Wednesday afternoon, after things began to get really out of control that the Prime Minister's office began taking stock. The only party that showed some sanity was the main opposition UML, which began drafting its now-famous statement warning people "not to fish in muddy waters". Everyone else—Congress factions, the Nine Left, the nationalist Right, the Maoists—were more interested in bending the violence to suit their agenda.

Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai had fulsome praise for those who took to the streets to protest "Indian expansionism, capitalism and the fascist Koirala clique". But even he seemed worried about the spectre of communal violence: "It is the Indian government that is expansionist, not the Indian working class [i.e. the vegetable vendors, etc, in Nepal]."

As in any post-mortem of a riot of this type, there is no shortage of conspiracy theories. But there are linkages, and one can work backwards by analysing motive. The first anti-Hrithik protest occurred in Bharatpur and was reported by the *Chitwan Post*. It spread to Biratnagar, still tense after student-police clashes. Kathmandu papers did not start reporting on it till 22 December. And despite the government's attempts to pin the blame on *Spacetime Dainik*, that paper's coverage was mild compared to the vituperative headlines in the other newspapers.

By this time, all kinds of left and right fringe groups were ready in



The unprecedented anti-Indian nature of the Kathmandu riots last week couldn't have come at a worse time for Nepal's tourism industry and trade. Indian tourists had just started trickling back after the hijacking one year ago, and trade with India was beginning to see a big spurt in Nepal's favour. Last week could change all that. Indian visitors and investors are seriously spooked. Flights from India are nearly empty again, most hotels and casinos are deserted, and Indian business houses which were gearing up to set up manufacturing bases in Nepal in 2001 are now not likely to come.

Although the street protests of 26-27 December were indiscriminate, and Nepali businesses were also stoned, the most vicious and organised attacks were against Indians, Indian-owned businesses, Nepalis of Indian origin and Madhesis from the tarai. An executive at a Nepal-India joint venture told us: "Doing business here was bad enough. Now it has become worse. Security is deteriorating, government policies are becoming more regressive, and now

Kathmandu with banners, pamphlets, and mobs wound up into a frenzy. All government targets were fair game, and businesses were stoned. But the most organised and vicious attacks were on Indian interests. There was an outpouring of pent-up anti-Indian feeling accumulated over the years. The conflagration lit the fuse of Pahadi-Madhesi discord. The shockwaves from Kathmandu reached the tarai towns where there was some retaliatory violence.

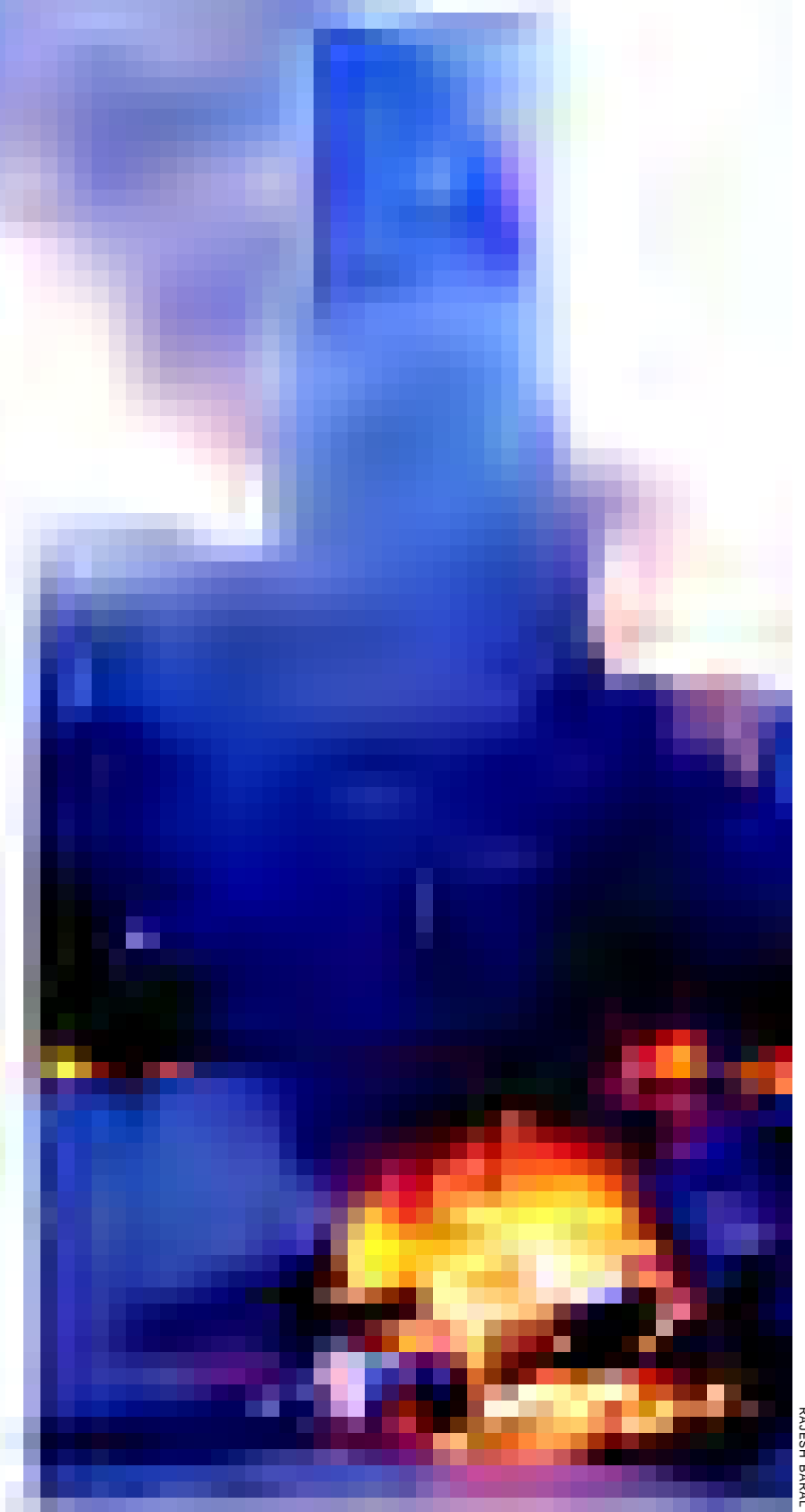
There were underlying causes that made

the frustrations of the Nepali people fertile ground for various power centres to cash in on. Aside from joblessness, inflation and shortages, ten years of democracy have also made Nepalis aware of their rights. Without policies that address the need of the people to be heard, grievances pile up. Says another TU sociologist Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan: "Our rulers have always used power for repression, discrimination, domination, exclusion and domination of the weak. But with growing awareness in the masses and the Maoists politicising them, we could be heading towards worse problems unless the rulers mend their ways."

The public had high expectations that democracy would solve some of these issues with time, but after a decade of waiting patience is running out. And there comes a point when all it needs is a seemingly harmless rumour to set off a chain reaction. Political scientist Dev Raj Dahal sees a crisis of confidence between the rulers and the ruled. "There is

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a large gap between what political parties say their policy is, and what they actually do," he says. To the social problems add power centres that focus public frustration on scape-goats and you have a recipe for disaster. ♦



RAJESH BARAL

## Tourism, investment hit

we have to look around before heading out to work."

The absence of Indian tourists, known for their spending sprees during their Nepal holiday, will be felt most seriously by shopping centres and supermarkets, casinos, hotels, restaurants and airlines. Roughly 34 percent of all tourists in Nepal used to be from India, and this had dropped by 30 percent even before last week's riots. The fact that the anti-Indian demonstrations got wide play in the Indian media, especially cable television, will not help matters.

Things are going to be even more devastating for trade. Nepal's exports to India have registered exponential growth since the new trade and transit treaty was signed in 1996. Overall trade with India grew by more than 80 percent in 1998-99, and Nepal's exports to India have grown an astounding six-fold since 1996. One third of all foreign investment in Nepal is Indian—there are 164 Indian joint ventures here. If this growth in formal trade between India and Nepal is hurt, the only people who will benefit will be smugglers and back-alley dealers.

(See also: Trade in tatters, p9)

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## AUTOPSY

An Indian actor doesn't say something and five people are dead. What would have happened if he had actually said what he is supposed to have said? What does it say about the state of our polity, the psychological state of this country that a harmless rumour which should have been laughed off as a joke, turns deadly serious and picks up a communal flavour? As someone said: "All you need is an 'ass' to turn laughter into slaughter." How fickle is our national pride, how volatile has our society become, that something like this can light the fuse of conflagration.

Unknown to most of us, we seem to have imported the insecurity and paranoia that we used to observe south of the border. How rumours of Ayodhya set off carnage across India, how Indira Gandhi's assassination triggered a pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi. These things weren't supposed to happen in peaceful Nepal. The explanation isn't that Nepalis or Nepali society has changed. (It has. Our value systems and traditional tolerance have been replaced with selfishness, greed and materialism.) But last week's violence was also an indication of what happens when you mix prejudice with politics. There is latent bigotry and an undercurrent of racism and intolerance in every society, but it is not until some cold-blooded and calculating politician comes along that society's hidden vice manifests itself as overt violence. Someone has to stoke the embers, fan the flames, and finally pour oil on it for it to spread. And this looks like what happened in Kathmandu.

If you look around there is no shortage of those who would have benefited by cashing in on the frustration of the public over the incompetence of successive elected governments in the past ten years. Democracy hasn't just been unable to deliver development, it has also institutionalised corruption, law and order has become an everyday problem, joblessness and inflation has gone out of control. The environment was tinder dry, waiting for a spark. And as the flames spread, there was no shortage of those who wanted to cash in: the Congress factions, the nine leftists, the ultra-right, the Maoists, communal chauvinists.

This week we see that ultimately it was never about Hrithik Roshan, it was not even about India-Nepal relations, and it threatened to degenerate as we had warned last week into a hill-plains rupture within Nepal. If anyone is doing a post-mortem on last week, there is an easy way to figure out who the architects of the anarchy were. Just ask: who had a motive, who benefited? Those who want to roll back parliamentary democracy. And who were the losers? The Nepali people.

## ONE STEP FORWARD

If the Bhutanese refugee groups in Nepal welcomed the agreement of the Tenth Round of the Ministerial Talks last week in Kathmandu, then who are we to be sceptical about it. At first glance, it does look like a breakthrough. Bhutan and Nepal agreed that they would examine documents belonging to the head of families to verify who is a true refugee, and consider anyone below 25 years old as a member of a refugee family. There is now a faint hope that many of the 100,000 refugees languishing in camps in eastern Nepal for the past ten years (17,000 of them were born there in the past decade and have never been to Bhutan) may be able to go back to their homes. As Rakesh Chhetri argues on p3, the sudden mellowing on the part of the Bhutanese



government is directly related to recent international pressure from the EU, the United States, and Bhutan's donor consortium. There could also be an added element: the slaying last month of ten Bhutanese in Assam by militants has shocked the country. This is potentially a much more serious crisis for Thimpu, and has sensitive ramifications for its relations with India as well. Best to get the refugee thing sorted out once and for all before it becomes entangled in India's dangerous northeast. Now the real question is how smoothly and quickly will verification happen? It should happen ASAP. It is in the interest of neither Himalayan monarchy that the refugee crisis drag on.

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## STATE OF THE STATE

by CK LAL

# Beyond borderline insanity

*I against my brother  
I and my brother against our cousin  
I, my brother and our cousin against the neighbours  
All of us against the foreigners*

- Skinhead Scriptures

After Prithvi Narayan Shah created Nepal by extending the territory of his tiny Gorkha principality, he faced an even greater challenge. Nepal now existed, but how about Nepalis? Forging a national identity for such a diverse land was more difficult than checking the hegemonic forces of the East India Company. So he tried to kill two birds with one stone: he defined Nepali nationality in terms of distrust of people from the south. Seeds of xenophobia were sown by the founding father himself. To this day, we see Nepali nationalism defined usually as anti-Indianism.

The Anglophile Ranas continued this policy even though they socialised mostly with Indians and hired hagiographers, like the rulers had done earlier, to trace their ancestry to the royal houses of Rajasthan. Over a period of time, this love-hate relationship with India got embedded in the psyche of Nepali people. When Ranas were overthrown with the help of Indians in the spring of 1951, New Delhi came to be regarded with a mixture of fear and hope by the elite of Kathmandu.

King Mahendra exploited the fear when he staged a bloodless coup by imprisoning the prime minister, dismissing the entire cabinet and dissolving the first elected parliament of the country in 1960. To create solidarity around the crown, he instilled the fear of Indians in the masses. For King Mahendra, "we" were those who supported his Panchayat, all others were "they"—Indians or their stooges. Nationalism became the rallying cry of a regime that needed India to define itself.

Those were also the days when the Naxalbari uprising was sweeping eastern India. In Calcutta, students protested the Vietnam War. To deflect attention, court ideologues rediscovered the old bogey of "Indian expansionism" and served it on a platter to the Nepali leftists. For the followers of Naxalbad in Nepal, the Jhapti communists, Indian expansionism thus became a louder cry than American imperialism. Indira Gandhi swallowed up Sikkim much later. The fear of Indian expansionism in Nepal predates that event.

This brand of what came to be called "Mandale-Male" nationalism (an unlikely fusion of extreme-right and extreme-left ideologies) was so pronounced on Nepal's

college campuses during the seventies that when students' leaders thundered, "We will blow up the Kosi barrage and wash Bihar into Bay of Bengal" we actually took them seriously.

Then reality began to bite. When the Indians imposed an economic blockade for almost two years in 1988-89 it suddenly dawned on us that 'hate-India' was a very fragile foundation of Nepali nationalism. Anti-Indianism lost some of its charm when the neighbour up north refused even moral support during our face-off with India. The resulting economic turmoil hastened the People's Movement.

During the decade of democracy, no event captured the fervour of anti-Indianism of the seventies. Mahakali, Kalapani, Laxmanpur, IC 814 and even the



A Madhesi and a Pahadi find warmth on a tyre fire in Asan on 27 Dec.

scurrilous publication of "Nepal Gameplan" by the Indian media failed to rally Nepali people against the Indian state. It appeared as if Nepalis had seen the futility of fuming at an enemy outside when most our real enemies were within. All that was proved wrong by the events of last week. Proof is the 'hate-India' sentiment, assiduously cultivated by interest groups for decades. That poor Hindi film actor was just an excuse. In all probability whoever started the rumour knew that the spark had a receptive dry hay waiting to catch fire. And how the capital burnt—and continued to burn even after the statement was proven to be false.

The media was one of the reasons the fires refused to abate. It is easy to dismiss

the complicity of the Chitwan media, who first picked up the story, by attributing it to 'small-town sensationalism'. However, the complacency of national broadsheets who followed up on the story without once double-checking it is unforgivable—especially when the infamous interview was available on the Internet. The national media forgot that foolproof rule of journalism: when in doubt, leave out. Everyone was out to out-scoop the competition by playing up the story with inflammatory headlines and sensational captions. So the whodunit, last week's deadly farce, still hasn't been solved. But we know that there has been a serious rupture in ethnic relations within the country caused by a situation that got out of hand because of a serious crisis of governance.

Hypothetically, let us examine what would have happened if events were allowed to run their course. As the violence escalated, the army could have taken over the streets in order to enforce peace. In all probability, this would have happened after the dismissal of the present government on charges of incompetence. An even worse outcome could have been the arrival of Indian troops supposedly upon the "request of His Majesty's Government of Nepal" because of the threat to "Indians and people of Indian origin in Nepal".

Considering such a conspiracy, it doesn't look very surprising that the rumour was spread deliberately, carefully followed through, and its after-effects well co-ordinated. Protests were too well organised to be spontaneous.

The only consolation is that things could have been worse. As a Madhesi who was repeatedly abused and threatened during the winter of discontent last week, let me say this: King Prithvi Narayan Shah did not mean this country to be the exclusive domain of any one racial group, ethnic community, cultural cluster, economic class or dominant castes. He meant Nepal to be a garden of diversity. The moment that diversity is disturbed, we all are doomed. If we can't hang together in adversity, we will all be hanged separately by forces that do not want to leave us alone or live together. The moral of the story: nationalism that is hatred towards others is self-annihilation. We must build an inclusive nationalism. ♦

SUBHAS RAI



# Homeward bound?

After trying since 1993 to try to solve the Bhutanese refugee question, the 10th round of the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Ministerial Level Committee has finally made some progress. So far, the talks had hinged on the “verification mechanism for the four categories of refugees” and on “harmonising” the position of the two sides on each of the categories. For nearly eight years, they had failed even to agree on the jargon let alone on a common viewpoint on the definition of refugee.

On a wider geopolitical canvas, the refugee crisis has chilled relations between the two Himalayan monarchies. If Bhutan’s uncompromising attitude has impeded progress, Nepal is to blame for agreeing to categorise the refugees. When he was home minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba agreed in July 1993 with his Bhutanese counterpart, Dago Tshering, on the categorisation. At that time, Nepal had no strategy to bring Bhutan to the negotiation table. Deuba agreed to four categories of refugees:

- forcefully evicted bonafide Bhutanese;
- voluntarily emigrated Bhutanese (a term Bhutan conveniently uses for those who signed migration forms under duress);
- non-Bhutanese; and
- Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.

Nepal is now convinced that the over 100,000 refugees, 17,000 of whom have been born in the camps, will be able to go back



**There is light at the end of the tunnel for 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal as talks in Kathmandu last week made progress on verification.**

home only if they are verified through the heads of their family. This is the right approach, since Bhutan keeps the census and land records of its citizens in the name of the head of the family. Refugees need to be identified and verified through heads of the family on the basis of citizenship cards and other documents such as land and household tax paid receipts.

Bhutan is not willing to take back all the refugees, and insists that verification be done by interviewing individual refugees, which is a cumbersome process. If Bhutan’s demand is accepted, then more than half of the refugees will

not be able to go back home. This is because the names of 17,000 children born in the camps and a large number of refugee youth who got evicted in their childhood along with their parents prior to 1995 are not recorded in the census register of Bhutan.

As mediator, the UNHCR has suggested a formula to break this stalemate on verification: the unit of verification should be the nuclear family, including unmarried young people up to the age of 25, and elderly relatives and identification through family heads. Nepal agreed, but Bhutan rejected this compromise.

It is quite apparent that the progress made in Kathmandu last week was due to mounting international pressure which compelled Thimpu to search for a compromise. The Bhutanese refugee issue was getting internationalised through the refugees’ own efforts, since they knew that only support from the world community would be able to make a difference. Nepal came to the scene at a much later stage. The first major breakthrough in internationalising the issue happened with the European Parliament (EP) resolution in March 1996 urging Nepal,

Bhutan and India to speedily resolve the issue. The EP passed a second resolution in September 2000. The UN Human Rights Sub-Commission also issued two statements for early repatriation of Bhutanese refugees in 1998 and 1999.

Today, that Bhutan is under increased international pressure is evident from the resolution of the European Parliament in September, concern expressed by donors at the Round Table Meeting of the Bhutan aid consortium held in Thimphu from 7-9 November.

The much overdue American attention and concern about the Bhutanese refugee issue came through the proposal of the Assistant Secretaries of the US State Department for South Asia Karl Inderfurth and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration Julia Taft who visited Nepal and Bhutan in December. Taft’s proposal was to “identify the refugees and the head of a nuclear family, who would then identify the members of his/her family. Having agreed upon this, they could proceed on with an actual verification process and determine which of the four categories of the nuclear family,

identified by the family head, are qualified to go home”. This statement is close to Nepal’s proposal, although Bhutan has not reacted to Taft’s statement publicly. The official Kuensel weekly said: “Mr Inderfurth told Kuensel that the US officials now understood better the refugee issue, the steps that were being taken to resolve the problem, and also appreciated Bhutan’s concerns.”

In its resolution the European Parliament denounced the deplorable situation of Bhutanese refugees and called on Bhutan, Nepal and all other parties involved, to speed up the process of repatriation of refugees to their country of origin. Recognising the goodwill of Nepal in accepting the refugees, the European resolution significantly censured India for pretending the refugee problems as a bilateral issue of concern only to Bhutan and Nepal. It urged New Delhi to take part in helping resolve the refugee issue. Bhutan rejected both the United Nations and European proposals.

During the donor’s roundtable in Thimpu in November, European and Japanese diplomats are said to have expressed serious concern on the refugee issue and the discrimination against Nepali-speaking Lhotshampas. The Austrian representative at the meeting said that the issue of “economic refugees” in the context of Europe should not be confused with the “status of minorities” (like Lhotshampas) residing in the country for many years and respecting its leadership and the government. Bhutan should follow a policy of inclusion to gain long-term economic, social and political field. The Danish participant expressed concern over the discriminatory policies against Lhotshampas which included denial of citizenship identity cards, government employment and trade licences. The Dutch stressed freedom of expression, press and organisation for conflict resolution, and added that such things did not necessarily go against Bhutan’s consensus culture. The Japanese representative at the roundtable said that his country believed in a fair and equitable solution of

refugee problems. The meeting also praised Bhutan’s development record. The remarks of the donor community are available on the UNDP website ([http://www.undp.org.bt/RTM2000/TM\\_Report\\_main.htm](http://www.undp.org.bt/RTM2000/TM_Report_main.htm))

In his letters, Bill Clinton’s urged Bhutan to reach an agreement with Nepal to begin the process of verification for the repatriation of refugees during the Tenth Round in Kathmandu. If Bhutan fails to agree to the US proposal, the US has said it would urge multilateral donors to divert international aid from Bhutan to the refugee camps through UNHCR.

The major area of concern during the Tenth Round in Kathmandu 25-27 December was to agree on a “common perspective” on the method for verification. In a major breakthrough both parties not only agreed to begin the verification process of refugees on the basis of family units, but also agreed to establish a Joint Verification Team (JFT) by this week. So there is now a clear road map, and this is a big step forward. The main purpose of the verification process is said to be the preservation of the family integrity—families will not be broken up. The basics of the repatriation process on the four categories of refugees are a downstream process.

The Bhutanese delegation also promised that all valid documents possessed by refugees will be checked by the verification team. This is important since a large number of refugees possess documents issued to them by the Bhutanese government. The Tenth Round has set the right tone and cleared the first hurdle. Had Bhutan played its traditional delaying tactics this time also or if it creates problems in the verification process in future, it will surely invite international intervention, which will not be in its best interests. The challenge for the international community now is to monitor that the verification process is fair and equitable and to keep continuous pressure on Bhutan until all refugees can go back home. ♦

(Rakesh Chhetri is a Bhutanese political analyst. [rakesh@bwco.wlink.com.np](mailto:rakesh@bwco.wlink.com.np))



## LETTERS

**HRITHIK**

Your story “It’s not about Hrithik anymore” (#23) compels me, as an Indian, to be worried. The question, which immediately springs to my mind, is: “Was it about Hrithik at all?” During the last two days, I have been witness to a senseless outpouring of violence targeted at the Indian community. All for an alleged remark which Hrithik vehemently denies he ever made. He has only been made a scapegoat. I wonder why the perpetrators of the violence did not stop to think that even if Hrithik said what he was rumoured to have said, doing what they did would only confirm his views. The only logical conclusion is that they did not want to: they wanted to go ahead and have their party. Senseless violence does not lead anywhere. A nation that ceases to think ceases to grow. I only hope that better sense will prevail and the Nepali people will

be able to defeat the forces which are bent upon destroying the very fabric of Nepali life and culture.

**Naveen Kumar Kathmandu**

Such a fuss over a small remark by a nobody called Hrithik. Why are we making him so important? When our own prime minister speaks to Nepalis in Hindi, why can’t an Indian actor express (if indeed he did) his negative views about Nepal? If an Indian minister had made that remark, it may have been understandable to make an issue out of it. But over a remark by a film star?

**Shailja Pradhan via Internet**

**CONSTITUTIONAL?**

Shiva Gaunle’s praise of the king’s constitutional role is well deserved (“Thirty years of King Birendra’s reign” #23). However, there is one aspect of his role which has not been strictly

constitutional, the nomination of members to the National Assembly. The Constitution states: “Ten members to be nominated by His Majesty from amongst persons of high reputation who have rendered prominent service in various fields of national life.” The supposition that adequate representation of certain interests will not be possible through the competitive system of election. Does this not imply that those nominated should be of non-political or non-partisan nature? There have been a number of cases



in the past ten years of politicians who would otherwise find no chance of entering the House, and even those of dubious character, have been nominated. As constitutional monarch, the king is above partisan politics. Shouldn’t his nominees also be the same?

**S Grimaljee Kathmandu**

**THANKS, MR POSTMAN**

In view of eight long years of excellent service at the Lalitpur post office, I feel obliged to come to the defence of the Nepali postal service (#23) and the many faceless, poorly paid employees who continue to provide a vital service in the days of mobile phones and the internet. I have never insulted an employee by demanding that he/she cancel stamps in my presence on my mail even when they added up to

hundreds of rupees, and my faith has been rewarded because every time, without fail, my packages have reached their destinations. Only on one occasion has my mail returned, but the fault lay with the US Postal Service. We all have our litany of complaints, but we must also acknowledge honest, diligent work, particularly when people are working for a pittance and the temptation to be dishonest can often seem justified.

**Bhim Gurung Sanepa**

**TIMES OF NEPAL**

When I first stumbled on Nepali Times, I thought it was yet another paper in the pile. Going through it later, I found every article carefully crafted and minutely edited. There seems to be a lot of effort in the whole making of the newspaper. It has become a solace for a reader like me tired of reading politicised propaganda-filled papers. Your

regular columnist Kunda Dixit has a good sense of humour, CK Lal writes splendidly. Wish you would make your crossword easier!

**Dr Sabin Ranabhat Pokhara**

I very much enjoyed reading the piece in your Daily Online Edition on the Maoist insurgency “Journey to Maoland” (#23). I was carried away by the way Sudheer Sharma narrated his travels. Keep those stories coming.

**S Prasai Gaborone, Botswana**

Our local hat collector shouldn’t have a hard time writing a humour column for this issue. Just recount the week’s events, as this week has been a farce in itself. If only it weren’t so tragic.

**U Thapa via Internet**



# Women, rights, and the



**The government is organising seminars to discuss the new women's bill "at the grassroots". But women's rights activists are unhappy with the process and the provisions of the bill.**

## MANJUSHREE THAPA

In the last days of 2000, the government made an unprecedented move: the Parliament's Law and Justice Committee sent the 11th Civil Code Amendment Bill, informally known as the "women's bill", for discussion to the grassroots level. Five teams headed by MPs from different parties were set up to conduct seminars in 14 districts (one for each zone) on the controversial bill. According to Committee Chairperson MP Mahendra Madhukar, the teams will solicit opinions from approximately 60 chosen individuals at each seminar, including district, municipality and VDC officials, members of women's NGOs, women in local government, and other significant personalities. The seminars were slated to start on 31 December in Jhapa and last ten days, with the final and

possibly largest seminar taking place in Kathmandu. "The seminars are primarily concerned with the inheritance rights provisions in the bill, the subject of the greatest disagreement and debate," states MP Madhukar. "Our aim in conducting them is to gather a popular vote on the bill."

None of the prominent women's rights activists has been invited to the seminars so far (though the Women's Security Pressure Group is trying, on its own initiative, to attend as many as possible). It is but natural that they find many reasons to feel sceptical. Is this a manoeuvre aimed at removing the bill's inheritance rights provisions? Says Shanta Thapaliya, "This is not unlikely. I'd like to be positive about MPs taking initiative on women's rights. There is much conservatism in those involved, but maybe, by some luck, some

good people will prevail in these seminars."

Manju Thapa is more blunt: "Why seek a popular vote only for a bill on women's rights? Other equally important bills, like the citizenship bill, weren't put through this process. The committee's members would rather see this bill fail than succeed, and so they're preparing the grounds to reject even the limited rights it grants women."

Drastically varying results could emerge from biased target groups and flawed methodologies. What do the questionnaires to be used in the seminars ask? MP Madhukari says, "That information won't be released beforehand. To do so would be like leaking test questions."

There are fair grounds to question the government's fancy footwork. Eleven years after democracy, the Constitution, the *Muluki Ain* Civil Code, and even

new acts and court rulings remain stubbornly uncommitted to granting women legal equality. One part of the Constitution states: "No discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general laws on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or ideological conviction..." But lawmakers in Parliament and in the courts are loath to address the discrimination in that very document, and in the *Muluki Ain* Civil Code, an often-anachronistic code which, in compliance with Hindu law, holds women below men. It's a tribute to the small and overworked group of women's rights activists that the present bill has even made it to Parliament.

The first movement towards such a bill began in 1995, when lawyer Meera Dhungana filed a writ petition at the Supreme Court asking that the term "son" in Clause 16 of the *Muluki Ain*'s inheritance law be repealed as it discriminates against daughters. Current inheritance laws allow a woman to inherit paternal property only if she is over 35 and unmarried. By contrast, all men over 18 enjoy the right to inherit paternal property in Nepal's prevailing system of *angshu*, or birthright inheritance.

The Supreme Court issued a ruling wrought with ambiguity. It agreed that Clause 16 discriminated against women, but declared that repealing it would grant women dual rights to inherit their parents' and husbands' properties, and thus discriminate against men. The Court ordered Parliament to submit a "just" bill within one year, but went on to state that changing current laws "could affect the patriarchal order" of Nepal. The Court explained: "Society cannot accept it when

social values are changed suddenly."

This awkward ruling did force an apathetic Parliament to finally do something about gender discrimination in the *Muluki Ain*, but it also set up the Supreme Court as the guardian of the (patriarchal) Nepali social order. Women's rights advocate Sapana Pradhan Malla, who represented Dhungana in court, argues that the ruling was confusing. "How can discriminatory laws be changed without affecting the patriarchal order?" Malla asks.

Other women's rights activists are unified in criticising the Court's conservatism. But the Supreme Court is not the only conservative force. In complying with the court order, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs submitted the 11th *Muluki Ain* Amendment Bill—"the women's bill"—in 1997. The bill betrays a reluctance to recognise women and men as equal. It almost seems designed to foil serious efforts for women's equal rights.

The bill addresses a mishmash of important issues, of which inheritance rights comprise a major and contentious part. Among other provisions, the bill stipulates that:

- daughters be named equal heirs of parental property;
- women receive part of their husbands' property before divorce;
- current age restrictions for widows to claim their husbands' property be removed; and
- time and age restrictions for married women to claim their husbands' property be removed.

The bill also facilitates some aspects of the implementation of laws. But many activists, including Malla, voice reservations about the bill's oversights. For instance, women must return paternal inheritance upon marriage—in effect they

enjoy inheritance rights only so long as they remain single. Widows who re-marry must return their first husbands' inheritance. Married and unmarried daughters are treated unequally as heirs. In cases of bigamy, daughters of second wives are discriminated against. Women are granted no maintenance from their husbands during divorce proceedings which can take years. And women are granted no right to stay in their maternal homes in cases of domestic violence. "The bill still defines women's rights based on their marital status," Malla argues. "There is no recognition that women should enjoy equal rights through all stages of their lives."

The conditional legalising of abortion is another contentious aspect of the women's bill. Again, Malla expresses reservations about what is missing. A married woman may abort a foetus within 12 weeks—but only with her husband's consent. In cases of incest and rape, and if the birth will cause mental or physical harm to the woman or the child, the window is extended to 18 weeks. But unmarried, widowed and married but abandoned women will still be denied abortion rights. "The majority of women presently jailed for abortion won't be helped by this bill," Malla states. "Those who most need abortion legalised won't benefit at all."

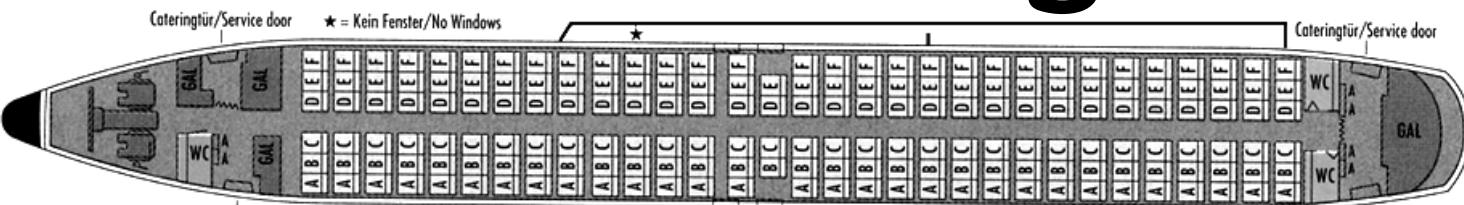
The rest of the bill proposes changes in the areas of divorce, rape, succession, adoption and sentencing. Some of its provisions are positive: rape cases are to be tried in closed camera courts, with female police officers handling victims. Sentences in rape cases are increased. Significantly, paedophilia, which lacks a law of its own, has been encompassed by the bill's provisions on rape. The age of consent for marriage has been raised to 18 for women and 20 for men. And the sentence for bestiality has been equalised for both men and women (previously,

## HERE AND THERE

by DANIEL LAK



# Cabbage class



Krabi, Thailand - Robert Louis Stevenson famously wrote that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive. Clearly, these are the words of a man who has never experienced the ordeal of air travel. Aside from the fervent wish that the plane lands and takes off safely, and stays aloft in between, where is the hope in air travel? Much of it seems designed to emphasise that the traveller is unimportant to the airline, the authorities who designed the airport, and the functionaries who regulate the flow of people from country to country.

The experience begins with the taxi ride from home, the insistence by all but the most humane of drivers that the metre is hopelessly out of date and airport runs always cost more, and you're leaving anyway, so dig deep and drop all your local currency into his willing palm. The departures area is next. Kathmandu isn't the worst of them, Delhi is, but Nepal doesn't compare too unfavourably. That long queue at the x-ray machine, the RNAC clerks who take forever to produce a boarding pass and the luggage man who attaches the tag and then insists on a gratuity to lug your bag two metres to the conveyor belt. Things aren't much better in London or New York where the queues for economy

**Travelling is not better than arriving: its impossible to do either with equanimity.**

class check-in look suspiciously like bread lines in depression-era Oklahoma or the old Soviet Union.

And as for the experience after that, at least in Nepal there's nothing to tempt me to spend any money. I've already bankrupted myself to buy the ticket, I don't need to buy any pashmina shawls, malt whisky or sushi. A departure lounge without a Body Shop, Harrods or booze vendor would suit me fine. None of this compares with the sheer agony of the flight itself. Again, I emphasise that, as a man of the people, I am talking about economy class travel. Those in the know refer to the seats in the back of the aircraft as cabbage class. They're not far wrong. The seats are too close together. Relaxation, let alone sleep, requires the assumption of a position that would challenge a

contortionist. There is an eclectic assortment of music and speech on the in-flight audio network, but you can't hear it over the roar of the engines. And the movies can't be seen properly, either on the distant bulkhead screen or the silly little thing on the seat in front of you covered with greasy fingerprints because some genius of a designer decided that a touch tone control system would amuse passengers.

No point in mentioning the toilets as you can never get in to them anyway. Probably just as well; most older aircraft have what's known as "gravity" flush system that seems to indicate that the plane was flying upside down when most people used the toilet. Then there's the landing, usually announced well after the aircraft has plummeted a few thousand metres amid strange roaring noises from the wings and general spillage of drinks. In Pakistan, the announcement is "God willing, we shall soon be landing." A friend wryly pointed out once that the event of landing itself was not where we needed the help of the almighty. It was in the manner of landing, preferably softly and right side-up.

The departure experience, right down to the rapacious crook who drives the taxi, is repeated faithfully upon arrival. Why are immigration officers always surly? Perhaps it's the constant procession of grumpy, uncomfortable passengers, fresh from cabbage class, and not looking forward to the fleeing they're about to get from the taxi driver. So, apologies to Mr Stevenson, travelling hopefully is not better than arriving: its impossible to do either with equanimity. Unless, of course, you pay the absurd sums required to fly club class where any liberal principles of equality are jettisoned as blithely as the contents of an aircraft septic tank. Next time, I'm going by ship, a trifle difficult from Nepal perhaps, but perhaps someone could dig us a canal from the Bay of Bengal. ♦



# Bill

women bore greater punishment). Yet in many of these issues, Malla points out oversights: for example, the bill fails to define rape more broadly than vaginal penetration.

The present bill touches on very few of the 54 separate discriminatory laws in the Constitution and in the *Muluki Ain* which are identified by the Forum for Women, Law and Development report. Even some Parliamentarians criticise it as conservative: over 70 amendment proposals have been submitted on it to date, including proposals by MPs of the CPN (UML) and other left parties who hold, among other things, that women should not return inherited paternal property upon marriage. As for the Nepali Congress party, which is responsible for drafting the bill, it has never been in a rush to take up the issue of women's equal rights. Equal inheritance rights have always been the rallying cry of the left. A will system, which would be an obvious alternative to Nepal's birthright system of *angsha* inheritance, is sporadically raised by non-left leaders, but they've displayed no initiative in discussing this option seriously.

A recent study by the Forum for Women, Law and Development shows that women are clamouring for change: 95 percent of the women interviewed felt that existing property laws discriminated against them; 90 percent felt the same way about citizenship, marriage and divorce laws; and 60 percent felt that laws related to legal and court proceedings were discriminatory. And as the "women's bill" goes all over the country for discussion, activists must ask themselves



MIN. BAIRACHARYA

whether to support it. Manju Thapa feels that activists needn't bother lobbying to pass this bill in its present state—it is preferable to work for a bill that unambiguously grants women equal inheritance rights. Others feel that the bill is at least the beginning of a long struggle, and that it must be supported as such. "We should lend it our conditional support," says Malla. "But we must continue working for other important rights which it leaves undone."

In fact most women's rights activists are not focussing on this bill but on other efforts, like following through with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Ratified without reservation by Nepal in 1991, this convention ostensibly provides legal avenues to overturn discriminatory national laws.

Meanwhile, MP Madhukar says the suggestions gathered by the five teams will be compiled into a report, which will then be considered by the committee as it redrafts the 11th *Muluki Ain* Amendment Bill. There is nothing to prevent this process from dragging on for months, or even years. Many activists feel the government is simply acting in bad faith, at best trying to pass only token amendments, or at worst to endlessly delay the passing of any

amendment at all. How long will it take for the redrafted "women's bill" to be tabled for voting? "To send this bill to Parliament in a timely fashion is our main responsibility," says Madhukar. So it will be tabled in the upcoming session? After a pause, Madhukar

says quite confidently, "Yes, I believe it will."

And if the redrafted bill contains no new provisions for inheritance rights? Thapaliya is quick to answer: "Let's see what the committee does. We are also prepared to respond." ♦

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## Nepal-Bhutan talks inch ahead

Nepal and Bhutan have finally taken a step forward towards resolving the refugee problem involving about 100,000 people. Last week the two sides agreed to form a joint verification team (JVT) for "validating of family relationship as well as verification of the status of the people in the refugee camps". The JVT is to visit the camps this month to make "logistical, security and other arrangements". This basically means that work will begin to see if the people in the camps are actually Bhutanese evicted from their homeland—as Nepal has been maintaining—or economic migrants—as Bhutan claims.



"There may be delays over technical matters but this is a step forward," says Gyan Chandra Acharya, spokesman at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The plan is to verify refugees as members of a family group for those up to the age of 25. Those above 25 will be dealt with individually. For verification purposes any papers proving Bhutanese citizenship will suffice.

The Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) had only one agenda during the talks that lasted three days: to determine the mechanism for verifying the refugees. Nepal insisted on taking the family as the unit—because many refugees who came in as minors and also those born in the camps don't have the necessary papers—while Bhutan held on to screening all individuals. The two governments were silent on what to do with refugees not living in the camps.

From here the refugee problem moves towards other, perhaps more contentious, issues such as classifying them into four categories as agreed in October 1993—bona fide Bhutanese evicted forcefully, Bhutanese who immigrated, non-Bhutanese people and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.

Nepal and Bhutan did not meet for seven months after the last meeting but Foreign Ministry officials say they noticed a marked change in the Bhutanese attitude towards the refugee issue. That was partly a result of pressure from donor nations like the US and the EU. The European Parliament's resolution in September was the most scathing: it said Bhutan had delayed finding a resolution to the problem and ruled that the people in the camps were victims of arbitrary deprivation of nationality and forcible eviction. "Shocked by the sudden and arbitrary" resolution, which it said was "highly partisan, unsubstantiated and ill-timed," Bhutan wrote to the EC saying that the bilateral process was close to reaching a solution.

In the past Bhutan squarely put the blame for delays on the frequent changes on government in Nepal. In the same note Bhutan also said the origins of many people were in question as they cannot be separated from "the hundreds of thousands of wandering people in the region who have been displaced by demographic, environmental and economic circumstances in Nepal." The verification process could shed light on this issue.

## Hearings on pork barrel funds begin

The Supreme Court has begun looking into a petition seeking the cancellation of Electoral Constituency Development Programme funds which MPs have been spending on projects of their choice. MPs gets Rs 1 million each every year to be used at their discretion. The petition was filed by the self-styled anti-corruption activist Bharat Jangam, who was also successful in getting the Court to order the cancellation of pensions for former MPs a few weeks ago. The petitioner argues that the funds from the central coffers are used to fund partisan projects.

## Winter mountaineering round-up

Only four climbing expeditions decided to try their luck in the Nepali Himalaya this winter. Five climbers from the Himalayan Guide Winter Amadablam Expedition and three from the Jagged Globe Winter Amadablam Expedition reached the summit of Mt. Amadablam in the first week of December. Two members of a Korean expedition also made the summit of the 6812m peak the same week.

A 10-member Polish International Makalu Expedition is presently attempting to climb the world's fifth highest peak considered by many the most formidable and inspiring mountain in the Himalaya. Expedition leader Krzysztof Wielicki will attempt a repeat ascent on the 8463m peak. "Wielicki is attempting the west pillar, a seldom tried route. It is exceedingly difficult, a very steep pillar," says Kathmandu-based mountaineering correspondent Elizabeth Hawley.

Wielicki, one of the first group of climbers to accomplish a winter ascent of Everest, is the fifth person to summit all 14 eight thousand-metre peaks in the world. Seven people have climbed the world's 14 eight-thousand metre peaks since Reinhold Messner managed the feat in 1986. "One other person claims to have done all fourteen. But one ascent is not confirmed," says Hawley.

# CNN Info-Tech 2001

Placing Nepal on the Global IT Map

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# Banking on social responsibility

SAGAR SJB RANA

On 30 September, 2000, Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) issued a notice in *The Economist* seeking proposals from applicants wanting to take over two “state-owned” banks, Nepal Bank Ltd (NBL) and Rastriya Banijya Bank (RBB), on management contracts. The government had decided to hand over the management of the banks to firms with banking experience, a move based on, and influenced by, a report of KPMG Barnet which declared the two banks to be “technically insolvent”. So far, 41 firms are said to have submitted applications for the contract, and the government is preparing to hand over one of the banks by April 2001.

This rapid development is in line with the policy of privatisation of government-owned entities adopted some ten years ago. In the past two or three decades, liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation have become the mantras of the Reagan-Thatcher free-market doctrine strongly pushed by the industrialised countries and its local advocates in many developing countries. Nepal is no exception, and in its single-



Some banks are more equal than others. If private banks all flock to choice areas, who is going to provide banking services in remote underdeveloped districts?

..... minded pursuit of liberalisation, voices of caution have been trampled. Responsible people are making extremely subjective statements not backed by facts, and these are often headlined by the media. One such statement illustrates this market fundamentalism. The CEO of a leading international bank recently pontificated thus: “There is no government bank anywhere

in the world that is profitable.” This is quite incorrect. Nepal Bank Ltd in fact made steady progress under joint ownership: majority share holdings and management controlled by the government, and only a minority share held by private sector investors. And this occurred despite having to serve the needs of remote areas through expansion of branches covering all

but a few districts of the country. That was until 1995-96 when the government transferred a part of its NBL shares to the private sector, effectively abandoning its controlling majority holdings. The appointment of the chair and the majority of the directors, until then the preserve of the government, was now handled by

private investors. The decline of NBL is in part linked with this transfer, and it vividly showed that parastatals operating under government control can actually become less efficient after they are handed over to the private

a provision in the management contract to ensure that the less profitable branches or even those running at loss, should remain in operation. These branches can continue to be subsidised by the profit of other branches. The

Nepal Bank Ltd made steady progress under joint ownership: majority share holdings and management controlled by the government, and only a minority share held by private sector investors. And this occurred despite having to serve the needs of remote areas.

sector. But the other reason for the decline of NBL is the entry of new commercial banks which are not bound by the condition that they have to provide credit to the less-profitable remote areas of the country. This burden was confined to government-owned banks while new banks could choose prime areas of business and skim the cream of profitability.

This is not an argument against privatisation per se. But if the decision-making authorities, in their wisdom, see no other alternative to handing over management to private bidders, there should at least be

responsibility of providing banking services in less affluent and remote areas should be shared by all commercial banks.

Why should the remote and needy areas of the country be deprived of essential services such as banking? Providing basic services to neglected areas may work out to be much cheaper for the government in the long term than buying arms and ammunition to quell the ongoing insurgency. ♦

(Sagar SJB Rana is President of the Nepali Congress Lalitpur District Committee. He is Secretary General of the Centre for Consolidation of Democracy and was a Director of Nepal Bank Ltd, 1980-88.)

BARBS

by BARBARA ADAMS

## Kathmandu, 27 December 2000



Those who have been complaining that they never see news of Nepal when in foreign lands because the press seems to have lost interest must be relieved. Nepal last week projected its new image into the living rooms around the world. Was it Nepal that we saw on the BBC: images of stone throwing youths, being attacked by police in riot gear, and chaotic streets full of rubble and burning tyres? Or was that Gaza? Alas, it was our own once-tolerant and gentle people engaged in an anti-Indian rampage—all provoked by a carelessly reported (and now reportedly never uttered) slur against Nepal by one of India’s young movie icons.

Somehow during those fraught three days my mind kept going back to the student riots in 1979 which were directly responsible for the holding of the referendum to decide if the country wanted a Panchayat system “with suitable reforms” (which never came, by the way, and therefore the Jana Andolan) or a multi-party system which came partly because instead of “suitable reforms” the country got greed and corruption, and scandal after scandal.

The 1979 riots, like the riots last week, started at Amrit Science College (ASCOL) and were sparked by an innocuous procession of students who were attempting to present a petition to officials at the Pakistan Embassy to protest the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The police overreacted. There was a lathi charge and several students were injured. The next day student-police clashes spread like wildfire all over the valley. Rumours about police throwing students out of the college windows spread like wildfire, and before one was really aware of what was happening real flames were shooting up in the centre of Kathmandu.

The flames and the clouds of smoke rose into the darkening sky. The students had set fire to the Gorkhapatra Santhan, RNAC as well

There is unspoken relief that at last the festering sore of discontent has burst and the pus has started to run out.

..... as anything burnable belonging to the Government, including cars and buses.

The next day, early in the morning, His Majesty King Birendra is reported to have driven alone, without any security or any previous notice, to the scene of the previous nights rampage. Profoundly shocked by this culmination of several days of raging student and other popular discontent, His Majesty almost immediately announced the holding of a referendum so that the public could vote on whether they wanted the present Panchayat system “with suitable reforms” or an actual multi-party system. (Popular reaction had soon changed from shock at Bhutto’s demise to loud demands for multi-party democracy.)

We all know what happened next: an allegedly rigged referendum, a leap in corruption and scandals, and then, about ten years later, the Jana Andolan and the restitution of the supposedly much-longed-for multi-party system. Within weeks after the Interim Government was formed, the young were complaining that there were no signs of the change that their friends had died to bring. They were aware of the tripartite agreement which restricted intrinsic and positive change in the system, but could not accept the extent to which things remained the same, even worsened, under the new, supposed “democracy”.

People soon began to refer to the new regime as, “the multi-party Panchayat system”. It retained much of the old mentality and many of the old anti-democratic laws, but lacked the Panchayat experience in governing. It did not address and/or punish the human

rights excesses, corruption, and lack of real justice inherited from the Panchayat system, all of which were well documented in the Malik and Rana reports. Instead they allowed, or even facilitated, appalling and all-pervasive increase of almost all the aberrations of the regime they had supposedly overthrown. So much so that today, there a nostalgic longing for the redictability and security of the “good old days”.

And so, after about ten years of “demo-crazy”, devoid of real progress in providing jobs for the youth and basic needs for the poor, an attempt of students to protest a seemingly non-existent insult to Nepal by an Indian actor, and the usual police over-reaction has again erupted, to nobody’s surprise, into full-scale street battles. The new and troubling element in the present conflict is its specific targeting of Things Indian.

Whether or not we like Indian Government policy towards Nepal, we all have Indian friends and we were acutely embarrassed by the violence directed at them. We must not forget, however, that it has been the policy of successive Nepali governments, starting with the Panchayat era, to encourage Indian economic presence in Nepal.

Aside from the anti-Indian activities of some of the rioters, much was *deja vu*. The sirens of police vans and ambulances, the wild rumours, the vagueness of the numbers killed and injured. There is apprehension everywhere in Kathmandu about the future, but also a sort of unspoken relief that at last the festering sore of discontent has burst and the pus has started to run out. ♦

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SALIL SUBEDI

Nepal has already imported electric, kerosene and LPG heaters worth Rs 100 million this year from Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Italy, Spain and Germany. Add to this the untracked imports of the little Indian electric heaters, and you start to get an idea of how warm this country needs to be kept.

Kerosene heaters have been the choice of heating in the middle-class market for nearly a decade now, mainly because they're affordable and portable. The most popular brands are the Korean Kerona, the Chinese World and Lucky Star, and the Japanese Fujica, priced anywhere between Rs 2,200 and Rs 9,000, depending on where you buy them and how "original" they are. They're usually round—it's almost like sitting around a fire—and radiate heat in all directions.

# Keeping warm

The *sahuji* swears he's selling you an "original" heater. Soon, you're swearing at him—your room is still freezing.

Salesmen insist that the heat generated by one of these lasts "long after the heater has been turned off."

Electric heaters are growing in popularity and there are different kinds. Leave the Indian and Nepali coil heaters to make tea and noodles in office kitchens. They cost only Rs 200, but consume an amazing amount of electricity and pose many safety hazards. A serious electric heater could be a fan heater (Rs 1,500-4,000), a storage heater with heat conduction segments (Rs 10,000-15,000), an electric oil heater that uses thermal oil radiation (Rs 10,000-13,000), or a fast-warming convector heater (Rs 5,500-6,000). Most electric heaters are 2,000-watt devices, which means every hour of use adds Rs 12 to your electricity bill.

Three years ago, LPG-powered heaters from Europe started making their appearance here. You can smell the gas and they hiss a bit, but they heat very fast. As long as you can keep yourself in cylinders, you can keep warm.

Each of these heating systems comes with its own set of problems that strain your budget, health or the environment. Kerosene heaters give out toxic carbon monoxide fumes which any user will tell you cause

respiratory problems. People dislike the smell of LPG and worry about an explosion. As for electric heaters, the low-end ones can be unsafe, and electricity is expensive. Really expensive.

So how do you choose? First, decide what kind of aggravation you can handle. Then make a budget, taking into account your initial investment, how long you need to run your heater every day, and operating and maintenance costs. For instance, it's important to know that an hour's use of a kerosene heater costs Rs 5 on average, an LPG heater also Rs 5, and an electric heater anywhere between Rs 6 and Rs 12. Then there's the issue of maintenance. Space heater technicians say that the instruments would work more efficiently and last longer if they were treated better.

All of this sounds like common sense, but make sure you clean your heater before putting it away and keep it away from the dust in the summer. Though the temptation to huddle close to a heat source as you eat, drink and be merry is strong, try to avoid spills. Keep any grease-able parts such as wicks greased, or you'll find yourself paying Rs 250 for a replacement. It also helps to buy as close to the "original" as possible. Chinese-made "Japanese" kerosene heaters are among the most pernicious—and

widely-bought—fakes. Devendra Jiv Tuladhar, a heater dealer in Mahaboudha, says, "They come with big tags that say JAPAN PRODUCE or MADE IN JAPAN." Increased demand and competition over the last five years have spurred Nepali traders to go to the Guanyao area in China, also called "electric town", and order cheaper products. Unfortunately, here, no-name=no-quality. Other ways to tell a fake are checking to see the wick-holder is stable, looking for chromium-plated rods and a well-printed catalogue.

As for the high electricity tariffs, there might be a way out. In winter, power consumption shoots up almost 20 percent from 300MW to 350MW. NEA authorities say it's difficult to stop people using electricity during the peak hours, 5-9 pm. But as energy expert Bikash Pandey says, "Electricity is a high-quality energy—for Nepal it makes sense to use Time of Day (ToD)."

ToD is a billing option that doesn't just count the units used, but also keeps track of the time of day they're used, and off-peak use is charged at a lower rate. The NEA has recently started offering the facility, but following some arcane logic, there's been no publicity about the scheme. An official says on condition of



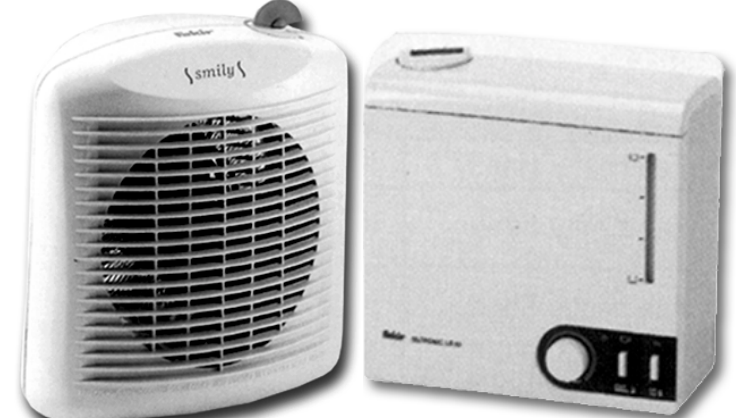
MIN BAJRACHARYA

anonymity, "People have to come and ask to change their billing system." All very strange, but worth a shot.

Architects and energy experts insist that all the heaters in the world won't keep you as warm as cheaply as smart planning and construction can. Says Pandey, "We haven't incorporated the concept of conserving ambient temperature in rooms." Architect Punya Sagar Marahattha, theory lecturer at the Engineering College, agrees: "Windows and doors are in

the wrong direction and the use of cold-retaining materials like marble for floors is rampant. It's fashionable to construct big concrete blocks," says Marahattha.

But there are ways to make even a concrete block warmer. If you don't have as many south-facing windows as you'd like, double-curtain the north-facing ones. Even thin cotton and rush mats help if you have concrete or, heaven forbid, marble floors. Insulate rooms and seal cracks in doors and windows with cotton and scotch tape. If that doesn't help, buy a heater. ♦



# Charcoal and gold

Making charcoal isn't the most lucrative, green or legal enterprise, but in many villages on the Valley-rim, people have no choice but to keep at it.

felling the trees, the charcoal producers neatly arrange the chopped branches to the top in the pits and cover them up with damp green leaves so that the flames do not burn the wood to ashes. After setting the leaves alight, they leave. In about 90 hours, the charcoal is ready. To produce a large sackful of charcoal 10-12 trees are required.

The villages on Champadevi hill, also known as Bhasmasur Danda, and similar places on the Valley-rim have been supplying charcoal to the Kathmandu area for decades. But, with the growth of alternative technologies and the introduction of community forestry, it's getting harder for people from Valley-rim villages to supplement their income from farming small strips of land with the production and sale of charcoal. And now they are being driven to cutting down trees under government jurisdiction.

Take a walk through the streets of Wotu in Kathmandu or Mangal Bazaar, and it's obvious that there's still a demand for charcoal in the city—and there are enough suppliers to ensure the price is never high

enough for people to make anything but the most meagre living off it.

Wotu is the hub for charcoal trade in Kathmandu, and technically it is an illegal trade since practically all the charcoal there is obtained from trees felled clandestinely. But it has tradition on its side and so no one does anything to stop it. There is, however, a cloak-and-dagger-ish feel to the way supplies are brought in. The salesmen themselves have not had any trouble with the authorities, but their bosses aren't taking any chances. A shopkeeper in the area describes how the operations are carried out: "There's a goldsmith in the neighbourhood, for example, who has contracted people at Rs 150 a day to sell charcoal. And his suppliers from the villages come early in the morning when it's still dark. You see them sometimes, in rags, carrying bamboo torches. He pays them and disappears. It's all done very quickly."

Charcoal is mainly in demand in the city not for barbecues or roasting ears of corn, but in goldsmiths' workshops. There are three kinds—brown, white and red. Goldsmiths use the brown one as it burns very slowly

and produces a lot of heat. This charcoal is produced from very rare trees like the *agratthi*. The white and red varieties burn too quickly without producing much heat. The temperature in a small 20 cm furnace exceeds 2000° Celsius. Goldsmiths don't seem to think it's the ideal fuel, but as yet it's the only thing they use. "It's expensive, but so far we haven't tried any alternatives," says one from Patan. "We could use LPG or electricity. But the gas machine is very noisy and also dangerous to handle. As for electricity, there's no guarantee it will be available all the time. So we're compelled to use charcoal."

Charcoal retails here at Rs 60/kg, or Rs 850 for a 15-kg sack. Lama says the charcoal business doesn't supplement his income as much as he'd like it to. "We earn around Rs 2500 a month if we can sell regularly in Kathmandu," he says. Lama can raise his price October through January, when the demand for gold jewellery is fuelled by Dasain, Tihar, and the wedding season. Suppliers like him then visit the city twice a week on average. They're paid around Rs 550 per sack. They know they take a risk

doing what they do. "The forester snatches all the charcoal. We also run into cops sometimes, but they let us go—after we pay them Rs 10-15 per sack," says Lama.

There are other places also around the Valley, like Kakani and the villages near Pulchowki, where trees are felled illegally to produce charcoal. There's even charcoal made from wood salvaged from the Pashupati cremation site. There are still other places that local residents would like to mine to produce charcoal, but can't, like Jamacho, where there is an army barracks, and the Shivapuri Watershed Reserve. The forests of Champadevi were undisturbed for some time, until the army barracks moved out of there about a year and a half ago. "We're very poor. There's nothing else we can do except maybe go to Kathmandu and work as wage labourers," says Lama. "The forest might last only another five years. Don't know what I'll do next."

Neither the villagers nor environmentally concerned people are happy with the situation. But no one

yet seems to have come up with a sustainable, legal charcoal-producing initiative, so Pasang Lama will keep felling government-owned forest. After there isn't anything left on Champadevi, he might have to move to the city, another daily-wage labourer part of the growing urban influx, dependent on chance and luck for work. Or he and others like him might find other forests to turn into charcoal, and extend their tenuous subsistence on the Valley-rim for a few more years. Either way, the situation looks grim for Pasang Lama and the forests around the Valley. ♦

Clockwise from below: A chopped tree on the south side of the Champadevi government-owned forest, packing freshly made charcoal in a sack for sale in Kathmandu, a goldsmith burning brown charcoal in his furnace.



SALIL SUBEDI

A night embraces the small village of Simpani on the Champadevi hill south-west of Kathmandu, 35-year-old Pasang Lama (first name changed) quietly walks into the forest on the hill where he's buried his treasure—charcoal. "It's about time to take the burning coals out from the pit or they'll be burnt to ash," he says. "Couldn't make it during the day." That was because a *chappale*, or forest guard, had been making his rounds on the lookout for people like Lama who illegally chop down trees in government-owned forests in the area and burn them into saleable charcoal to make a living.

On Champadevi hill, along every 10 m are dug pits 3-4 feet deep. After



ALL PHOTOS: SALIL SUBEDI



BIZ NEWS

Economic mark sheet

At a time when everything else seems to be going wrong, consumer prices continue to remain low. The Nepal Rastra Bank, in its economic report for the fourth month of the fiscal year, says government spending is up, mainly due to increased disbursements for budgeted projects. However, even though resource mobilisation improved compared to the corresponding year-earlier period, it was not enough to match expenses and forced the government to borrow Rs 1 billion over statutory limits. The deficit of Rs 3.61 billion was plugged with foreign cash loans (Rs 1.42 billion) and an overdraft of Rs 2.19 billion.

The National Urban Consumer Price Index grew by 2 percent compared to 2.7 percent last year. Prices were kept in check by a drop of 3.4 percentage points in the index for food and beverages which was enough to offset the 2.5 percentage point increase in prices of goods in the non-food and services categories. The price of imported goods, including petroleum products, rose most dramatically.

Exports continued to grow, and those to India increased by 50 percent. The export of woollen carpets, readymade garments and handicraft has stagnated while pashmina, tanned skins and pulses continue to do well. Pashmina sales totalled Rs 4.3 billion during the review period. Imports were slow during the four-month period, leading to a narrowing of the trade deficit by 3.9 percent to Rs 16.45 billion.

The balance of payments in the first two months was favourable, despite a current account deficit of Rs 2.6 billion which resulted from a drop in services and transfer incomes. Still, the country has enough foreign currency to pay for imports for 11 months. In mid-November, foreign exchange holdings in the banking system were Rs 100 billion, of which 82 percent was retained in convertible currency.

Tourism slumps

It was a bad year for Nepali tourism. As feared, the numbers are down by about 11 percent, due mainly to the hijacking of IC 814 on Christmas Eve and everything else we've done all year to keep tourists away.

If the post-hijacking publicity did the early damage, the five-month suspension of Indian Airlines flights and Royal Nepal Airlines' inability to increase seat capacity did the rest. Then, from 1 October, Indian tourists were required to produce valid identification papers while flying into Nepal. This forced many to cancel immediate travel plans.

But tourism was looking good in November when the number of third country tourists surpassed last year's count. Then came the hotel strikes and it was all over. The Nepal Tourism Board says only 376,503 tourists came to Nepal by air compared to 421,188 in 1999. The slump in arrivals was 10.6 percent, due mainly to the massive 32 percent drop in Indian arrivals. Indian tourist arrivals, which had begun to improve in the third quarter, again nose-dived towards the year-end, pushing figures down in the fourth quarter.

Hotel blues

The 10 February "deadline" trade unions had given government to resolve the dispute over the 10 percent service charge is nearing and so is the beginning of the new tourism season. But there is no word yet on what's happening on work to resolve the problem.

Bishnu Lamsal, secretary of the Hotel Workers' Joint Agitation Committee, told us the unions have not met the deputy prime minister since the last-minute compromise reached on 10 Decembers and unions decided to postpone their strike. Nor have they sat down with the other government committee that is working to find a way out.

The government had sought more time to allow the committee headed by National Planning Commission vice-chairman Prithivi Raj Ligal to complete its work and recommend a way out. There's no word on how far the committee has gone, even though we've been told that the industry has begun work in identifying clauses in the labour law that need to be changed.

Bhaktapur visit dearer

Tourists visiting Bhaktapur from 1 January on will have to shell out a \$10-dollar entry fee—twice the fee until last week. The municipality has fixed a Rs 50 entry fee for visitors from the South Asian region. The city began charging an entry fee seven years ago and uses the funds to restore its crumbling medieval temples and rest houses and to improve municipal services.

The tourism industry says the city's decision would affect their business because packages are sold in advance. Mayor Prem Suwal says the decision, was not made overnight. He also promises to improve tourist facilities. The city has raised over Rs 174 million from tourists since it began charging an entry fee.



ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Closed economy



There is no right to strike against the public by anybody, anywhere, any time.

The events that unfolded in the past week prove one point—strikes have been the only major achievement of restored democracy. Political ambitions and motives today hold this nation to ransom. The fact that we are losing out as a nation has stopped mattering to anyone. In the past two months, we have ruined our tourism industry with strikes and threats of strikes and if we continue to glorify our right to strike, we will not have any industry left, forget about tourism.

A country with a GDP of just over \$4 billion cannot afford any disruption to its economic activities. With half the populace living below subsistence levels, it is absurd to have such frequent disruptions. The plight of the

community makes pleas at all levels. The irony is that the level of understanding of the so-called leaders of this country is pathetic and their vested interests always rise above national interest.

Strikes are a sign of an underdeveloped country run by quasi-developed brains. Almost all encyclopaedias refer to strikes as a short-term outcome of the Great Depression, but it's extremely unlikely they'll have any historic impact in Nepal. Strikes are on the wane worldwide. The only region that continues to strike with clockwork efficiency is South Asia. But even in India strikes are regular only in states with low levels of economic activity. We should learn from the experience of West Bengal. The state has been plagued by strikes, including state-sponsored ones, and the economy has stagnated. A state that once led India's economic advancement is today an eyesore. The same could be the story for Nepal.

We need to question the concept of strikes. There's also the issue of the legality of strikes. Is it the fundamental right of a small group to encroach upon the fundamental right of the majority populace? The Labour Law does not explicitly talk about strikes in industries. In fact, no legal document addresses the basic question of what a strike is? Have strikes been successful in crippling normal life because the government is

either participating in them directly or indirectly? Or can it not provide adequate protection to its citizens to lead a normal life? Have strikes been successful because we dislike productivity and cherish the additional inactive day bestowed upon us? Don't we Nepalis, even if we crib about shutdowns, cherish the days we have to do nothing?

The issue in the past week of strikes is not the Rs 100 million lost either by way of empty hotels, restaurants, rafs and aircraft. It is the isolation we are nudging ourselves into. An economy that revolves around tourism closes on a day that is one of the biggest money spinners all over the world. We talk about WTO, an open economy and liberalisation, but do not accept the importance of a day of such high economic activity. Nepal will have to follow the world. Sadly, it cannot be the other way around.

The damage has already been inflicted and if we do not take immediate damage-control actions, the impact on the economy may be more far reaching than we can possibly comprehend. Either through legislation or activism, strikes and the threat of strikes should be eliminated. I personally favour legislation echoing Calvin Coolidge's words—"There is no right to strike against the public by anybody, anywhere, any time."

(Readers can post their views at arthabeed@yahoo.com)

Grindlays Gazette

INTEREST RATE UPDATE

NEPALI RUPEE	CURRENT%	PREVIOUS%
Call Money Avg.	5.20	5.30
84 Days t/bill	5.06	5.05
91 Days t/bill	5.26	5.25
364 Days t/bill	5.53	4.87
Repo. rate	5.76	5.75

Average rate of 91 days T/Bill moved slightly higher compared to last week average of 5.25. Market liquidity remained slightly excessive as most of the banks experienced lesser customer withdrawal due to continuous disturbance of last week. Expected range for next week 5.15 to 5.30 %.

FOREIGN CURRENCY : Interest rates

	USD	EUR	GBP	JPY	CHF
LENDING	9.50	6.50	6.00	1.50	5.13
LIBOR (1M)	6.64	4.90	5.86	0.89	3.49

BANK RATES (DEPO/LENDING)	Mkt Hi/Lo	Mkt Avg
S/A NPR	6.25/3.0	5.15
F/D 1 YR	7.25/5.5	6.63
OVERDRAFT	14.0/11.0	12.67
TERM LOAN	14.0/12.0	13.17
IMPORT LN	11.0/9.00	11.88
EXPORT LN	11.5/9.50	10.38
MISC LOAN	16.0/13.0	14.50

CURRENCY UPDATE

AG/USD	CURRENT *	WK/AGO	%CHG
OIL (Barrel)	26.80	26.18	+ 2.37
GOLD(Ounce)	272.70	273.55	- 0.31
GOLD ( NPR *)	7160	7135	+ 0.35
EUR	0.9422	0.9252	+ 1.84
GBP	1.4930	1.4800	+ 0.88
JPY	114.35	112.85	+ 1.33
CHF	1.6105	1.6445	- 2.07
AUD	0.5592	0.5565	+ 0.49
INR	46.66	46.66	0.00

\*Currency bid prices at 4.20 p.m. on 1/1 - Source Reuters

**Oil:** OPEC members' call to lower prices at the cartel's January 17 meeting and the resumption of Iraqi oil sales to Europe has helped lower prices, despite an exceptionally cold winter in the US and continental Europe.

**Currencies:** The Euro ended the year on a strong note, soaring to five-month peaks against the dollar and 10-month highs against the Yen after spending much of 2000 on the defensive. The US dollar was pressured by mounting concerns about the U.S economic slowdown and slumping Wall Street stock prices.

**INDIAN RUPEE OUTLOOK :** Economist feel that the focus of the market for the next few weeks will be trying to gauge the extent of a hard landing in the U.S. and get a clearer picture of what the Fed will do in the first quarter. At the moment the market is focusing on how weak the dollar can get as there is gloom over the U.S. economy and all major currencies are benefiting from that except for the Yen, which has its own problems.

Standard Chartered

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR NEPALI TIMES

	6 months	1 year
SAARC countries	US\$25	US\$48
Other countries	US\$40	US\$75

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In US\$	Dal-Lentil 1 kg	Bhat-Rice 1 kg	Petrol 1 Litre	Diesel 1 Litre	Kerosene 1 Litre	Electricity 1 Unit	\$ Rate
Bangladesh	0.74	0.37	0.40	0.22	0.37	0.04	53.80
Bhutan	0.69	0.36	0.58	0.36	0.21	0.02	46.67
India	0.64	0.36	0.57	0.28	0.13	0.05	46.71
Maldives	0.25	0.28	0.40	0.30	0.42	0.21	11.82
Pakistan	0.41	0.43	0.52	0.22	0.12	0.03	58.10
Sri Lanka	0.72	0.36	0.60	0.23	0.19	0.03	82.82
Nepal	0.65	0.38	0.63	0.36	0.30	0.09	74.30

All prices are in US dollars, collected from informal sources, and are only indicative.



**Unless the government acts quickly, last week's riots will have a long-term impact on Indo-Nepal trade and investment.**

*stopped. "There is smuggling but it is two way," says one FNCCI official. "The charges about dumping are totally unfounded.*

*That may help convince some New Delhi-based babus in charge of trade policy. But after last week, we may have made it more difficult for our officials to discuss the "surge" of some items that India has begun to talk about. However, the most difficult part may be pacifying companies who have put money into Nepal projects. ♦*

*Asks one frustrated FNCCI official: "How do you convince your Indian counterparts to do business here when we go about attacking them even for unsubstantiated rumours about what one Indian out of one billion may have said?" Aside from riots and Maoists, even official ineptitude discourages investors. The unnatural delays in duty drawback refunds have angered business. The law says the claims should be settled within 60 days, but some companies like Nepal Lever have been waiting for three years for the refunds. The government owes Lever Rs 163 million and Rs 170 million to another Indian investor, Dabur Nepal, in duty refunds. Says T.K. Gupta, director, Dabur Nepal: "We've already invested Rs 840 million here and sometimes*

*Nepal's hope for industrialisation lies in its ability to attract foreign investors but the government has not been following up on early successes in*

# TOYATA



# Forever Ambar

Ambar Gurung aroused nationalism and nostalgia in the Nepali diaspora with his *Naulakha tara udae*.

ABHI SUBEDI

When Ambar Gurung recorded his famous song *Naulakha tara udae* ("Nine hundred thousand stars rise") in Calcutta in 1961, it earned him and lyricist Agam Singh Giri some degree of harassment from the Indian authorities for its emotive call to the mother country. In September last year, Gurung, who is still singing and writing, released a collection of his memorable hits, including this classic, on CD. The song, which was nearly out of circulation, has now got a new lease on life. This Ambar revival is the result of a younger generation of Nepali music lovers who want to relive the passion and nationalism that characterised the birth of modern Nepali music in Darjeeling in the early 1960s, and subsequently transformed the history of music in Nepal itself. The musical nationalism of Nepalis in exile went through various phases, but

they all drew on the historical roots of the Nepali language in the predominantly Nepali-speaking hills of Darjeeling. This sense of nationalism fit snugly into Nepal's own quest for identity in the 60s and has stayed on all the way in Ambar Gurung's own music. This phase began with a fight against the source of nostalgia itself—the Nepali nation.

Subhas Ghising's criticism of Nepal for failing to help the Nepali diaspora in India realise their dream is a case in point. When the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling was at its peak in the mid-1980s, Ghising, himself a novelist, evoked Nepali nationalism through interesting references to Nepali dramatist and poet Bala Krishna Sama. But at the same time, he also forced Nepali-language writers in Darjeeling to leave their homes, or come to Nepal. Indra Bahadur Rai, for instance, had to leave his small cottage at Darjeeling's Tungsung Basti after being attacked.

Similarly, Rajnarayan Pradhan stayed away for many years.

The nostalgia that the Nepali artistic diaspora used as a weapon came to be thought of as reality in the course of time. But this imagined reality clashed with their dreams for the future, and was accompanied by the pain of disillusionment. The Indian annexation of Sikkim, the forceful eviction of Bhutanese Nepalis and the creation of a surrogate nation for them in refugee-camp towns in Jhapa district, caused another shift in the saga of the Nepali diaspora. Ambar Gurung's *Naulakha tara udae* is thus an expression of nostalgia that has assumed a new dimension today—its relevance revived by new discussions about nationalism in Nepal itself.

The loss, pain and other complex emotions of exile are seen most powerfully in the songs of Ambar Gurung and the lyrics of his collaborators. The re-release of his songs is not a beginning but the recapitulation of the tumultuous history of non-resident Nepalis. It is full of unabashed homesickness, the pain of being uprooted, the ecstasy of creation, and the challenges these conditions pose.

The title song *Naulakha tara udae* marked Ambar Gurung's association with the late Agam Singh Giri. The experience and

feelings of the diaspora in India are the dominant theme here. The conditions of the original recording were difficult—it was hard to organise an orchestral ~~accompaniment~~ there was only one microphone, and Ambar Gurung confesses there were stronger stanzas in the song that had to be dropped while recording. The words, the major and minor scales, the single microphone, the context—all its signifiers—address the tragedy of not belonging. The song is intense, and listeners react to the sombre words and the music with raw emotion.

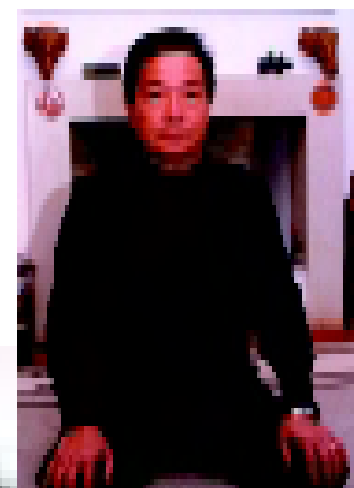
Nationalism and the question of identity have historically inspired exultation as well as caused pain to Nepalis. This nostalgia was defined by the overwhelming presence of India in shaping the feelings behind the music. The Indian nation state did not tolerate these emotions, and Nepali-Indians were unique because they were (and are) the only nationality in the union which felt the gravitational pull of a neighbouring nation that didn't have a history and memory of colonisation. Their language and identity were considered suspect since they evoked Nepali history to claim their identity. They historicised their nostalgia.

Nostalgia was the only weapon they could effectively use. And effective it was in the subsequent recognition of hill rule and the incorporation of Nepali in the Indian constitution's list of official languages. The strategy worked because the artists evoked a history in space: a geographical entity which was remote in one sense, but also tantalisingly near and immediate.

Nepali ethno-nationalism in the Darjeeling hills turned violent in the late seventies and early eighties. By that time Ambar Gurung had long left Darjeeling for Kathmandu and Agam Singh Giri was dead. Hari Bhakta Katuwal's lyrical nationalism did not have an audience in Assam, and he also came over to Nepal (although he returned later).

Ambar Gurung and Agam Singh Giri represented Nepali-Indians' resistance to a pulverised Indian identity. But when he came to Nepal, Ambar Gurung encountered another kind of nationalism here. It was founded on praise of the king, and there were territories and historical contexts different from those he knew intimately in India. Still, his songs fit the paradigm of Nepali nationalism at the time, and King Mahendra asked him to stay on. He was now in the land that had for so long shaped the fundamentals of his art. Nepalis rejoiced in Ambar Gurung's music, but for the singer it was a mixed experience.

I first met Ambar Gurung in 1968 when he was on a visit to Kathmandu, staying at the Green Hotel in New Road. I asked if he could give us Tribhuvan University students a performance. He agreed, and the concert was amazing. People



lined both sides of the road at the University's Kirtipur campus to greet him. Ambar performed to a packed Education Hall. He also sang *Sugauli sandhi* (Sugauli Treaty) which blew the minds of Nepali history students whose sense of nationalism until then had been defined by patriotic songs that came over Radio Nepal.

He worked as the head of the music department at the Royal Nepal Academy, but the academy did not give him recognition as a *pragya*, academician. He presented an amazing "choir" composition for which Ratna Sumsheer Thapa and he wrote songs, but unfortunately it wasn't recorded properly and we don't know where the tapes are now. He trained young musicians and singers. He set to music lyrics written by songwriters he met here like Thapa and Narayan Gopal. He was a guru to Aruna Lama and Sharan Pradhan. Gopal Yonjan, another disciple, also came over, married and settled down in Kathmandu. Gopal Yonjan was an avatar of the diaspora, and he also sang songs about nostalgia, identity, and patriotism, punctuated with references to the Nepalis' glorious past of selfless bravery in the 1814-16 Anglo-Nepal War.

For his part Ambar Gurung did not compromise with the nationalism of royal glorification for two reasons: he was not a sycophant and he did not identify with the glib "entertainment value" of patriotic songs as they were in Nepal at that time. Young people today see nationhood of a different order, and their interest in Ambar Gurung is itself a kind of nostalgia for a time they didn't experience. The question now is: does this generation have an Ambar Gurung to give musical expression to a new Nepal? ♦

## The Ambar Gurung CD contains the following songs apart from *Naulakha tara*:

1. *Dherai bhaishake*, (There have been many) was written by Iswor Ballabh, and addresses a woman trying to capture memories of the good old days.
2. *Bataasale jhareko* (Windfall) was written by Haribhakta Katuwal. Narayan Gopal sang Katuwal's songs with Ambar Gurung's music. He blames *karma* for every thing, accompanied by a weepy violin.
3. *Dandapari* (Beyond the mountains) by Indra Thapaliya is a purely romantic number. Ambar Gurung provides mandolin and flute.
4. *Mero behoshilai* (My carelessness) by poet Iswor Ballabh is a modernist shift from romanticism. The tone is one of assertion and confession.
5. *Ma Ambar hun* (I am Ambar) by Ambar Gurung himself is a remarkable work of introspective lyricism.
6. *Birsepani* (Forgetting) by Ambar Gurung is another song about relationships.
7. *Yo jindagiko ke kura* by Iswor Ballabh's words ruminate on existence with the music and lyrics giving it a charming authenticity.
8. *U pani ta kahi* by Ambar Gurung evokes a sense of humanism and tolerance calling on Nepalis to accept Nepalis from outside.
9. *Mana sundar* shows just how powerful a writer Ambar Gurung also is. The flow of words and poetic rhythm find fitting expression.

**Naulakha tara** (CD with 10 songs sung by Ambar Gurung), Produced by: RBA Films & Research Centre, Kathmandu, 2000, (Original recording: Hindustan Recording Company, 1961), Price: Rs 500





# A rough guide to Nepali World Music



Having nothing but stress and time on our hands these last tense, shut-down, holiday weeks, Nepali Times decided to relax with some Nepali music. It's not definitive, for few lists are. It's better than just representative, we hope. It's a "best of",

but to say that is to ignore many other equally good recordings. And, naturally, it is totally subjective. The albums have been sorted under seven broad categories, again, subjective, but helpful to understand the Nepali music scene, its history and the directions it is developing in.

All albums are available on CD in most of the large music stores around Kathmandu, especially in Thamel, and on New Road and Kantipath. Many are also available on cassette tapes, which are, of course, significantly cheaper. NT does not encourage or promote the piracy industry, so watch out for unauthorised copies.

You may hum along with traditional favourites like *Resham phiriri* and *Narou mayalu*, or imagine the mythical Kathmandu Valley through the very modern songs of a young Newari musician, Bobin Bajracharya:

*I was born in a valley  
Where the mountains are holy  
Where gods sing and clouds dance...*

You may rediscover the famous Aruna Lama song *Pohar sal khusi phatda* (When my happiness was torn last year) or a tribute to the late Arun Thapa, *Sanjha ko joonsangai* (With the evening moon), by another young experimental musician, Mukti Shakya. Much of the music available will move you to action, or at least the contemplation thereof—there's a whole genre of what we call dhyana music. At the other end of the spectrum is Robin, of Robin 'n' Looza, who is an avowed disestablishmentarian. We hope you'll be inspired to explore the wonderful, wide world of music here, and enjoy wherever you meander on your journeys through sounds.

—Salil Subedi

## Nepali Aadhunik

NAULAKHA TARA UDAYE—A collection of ten selected songs by the popular musician-cum-lyricist-cum-singer Ambar Gurung. The album opens with his famous *Naulakha tara*. The tracks have been re-mastered digitally, but the album retains the original studio ambience. The hiss in the background adds to the flavour of Ambar's nostalgic melodies. (See facing page for details)

MAYA NAMARA—Ageing Nepali singer Prem Dhoj Pradhan presents his popular contemporary compositions in a digitally mastered version. Includes *Maya namara* (Don't forget my love), *Toree phulyo* (Flowering mustard), *Tara matra hauna timilai* (It is not only the stars I can bring), *Aai jauna chhabhari nira* (Come closer), *Mirmire ushama* (Simmering dawn). The songs are written by noted lyricists like Kiran Kharel, Ratna L Shrestha, Ratna S Thapa, Mina Shah. Released: 1996 Produced by: Prem Dhoj Pradhan Recording: Omniphonics Digital Recording Studio, Balaju, Price: Rs 600



EKLAI BASDA—The best songs by the late Aruna Lama, includes *Pohar saal khusi*, *Udi jaun bhane*, *Phoolai sodhen*, *Hera na hera kanchha*, *E kanchha*, *Himalsari ma*, *Aankhabharule*. Lama is accompanied by noted singers like Narayan Gopal, Mani Kaman, Deep Shrestha, Rudramani Gurung and Jitendra Bardewa in some of the songs. The musicians and lyricists of the songs on this album are extremely well known and have been credited with revolutionising the Nepali music scene in the 1970s. Released: N/A Produced by: Music Nepal (P) Ltd. Tel: 242049 Recording: N/A, Price: Rs 350



DRISHTI—DEEP SHRESTHA'S MODERN SONGS. The first release in 10 years by cult singer Deep Shrestha. Shrestha has created his own amalgam of touching lyrics and modern and older styles of singing. Includes *Hara raat sapani ma*, *Ma sunnai nasakne*, *Jhir na unira*, *Batas sangai udairahu* and *Raatko andheri ma*. Deep Shrestha composes the music to all his songs, and so he has for this album. Lyrics are available with the CD. Released: 2000 Produced by: Deep Shrestha Recording: Digital Symphonic Recording Studio, Price: Rs 500



## Folk Music: instrumental

CHAUTARI—A chautari is a resting place for travellers. It's also a popular gathering place for villagers in the course of their daily activities. This album attempts to set the ethos of a chautari to music. Includes *Banchari* (Songs of the birds), *Maruni* (a melody from eastern Nepal), *Tamang Selo* (a festive Tamang melody), and *Jhyaure* (another festive melody from western Nepal) Artists: All music composed and arranged by Pancha Lama. Pancha Bir Lama (flute), Shanti B. Royamajhi (percussion) accompanied by Anita Sherchan (sitar) and Japanese artists Nouka Tei (niko), Hiroki Minami (bass) and Riko Sato 'Gaine' (guitar). Released: 1999 Produced by: Pancha Lama Recording: Studio Warp, Price: Rs 600



JOURNEY TO NEPAL: THE TYPICAL MUSIC OF NEPAL—Don't be put off by the English titles to the tracks in this album. "Typical" here means a variety of mountain and plains sounds, sarangi, and a violin-like traditional instrument. This isn't a strictly instrumental album and as a bonus provides lyrics. Includes tracks like *My beloved*, *You and me*, *Art of Bhojpuri*, *Journey to Dolpo*, *Kantipur folk*, *Story of Majhi*, *My heart*, *My last day*, and, of course, *Resham Phiriri*. Artists: Shyam S. Nepali (sarangi), Viba S. Nepali (percussion), Raman Maharjan/ Sushil Bishwokarma (flute) and Asta Man Darshandhari (vocal). Released: 2000 Produced by: Sachida N. Rauniyar Recording: Alfa Digitech Studio, Price: Rs 600

## Folk Music: vocal

THET—A collection of "typical" Nepali folk songs, strong on the melodic aspect of Nepali folk singing. Includes famous Dohari tunes like *Narou mayalu*, *Salko pat bujaundai*, *Beli ru chameli*, *Bagunge jhyaure*, *Pashimai jhyaure*, and the inevitable *Resham phiriri*. The Jhyaure songs are improvised and speak of Nepalis who leave home to earn a living overseas. Vocals: Praveen Gurung, Lochan Bhattarai, Bima Kumari Dura, Rekha Shaha, Krishna Gurung and Khadka Bahadur Budha. Released: 2000 Produced by: Dexo Music Centre, Thamel, 423526 Recording: Namaste Studio, Price: Rs 600



HIMALAYAN FOLK SONGS OF NEPAL—A collection of 13 typical Nepali folk songs sung in local dialects. Includes *Salleri*, *Sanchi rakhe*, *Deurali*, *Kanchi ko rumal*, *Jiri ko basaima*, *Bajayo binayo*, *Nuwakote*, *Taplejung*, and, again, *Resham phiriri*. Vocals: The singers are nameless here, but they do a fine job of representing diverse folk styles. Released: 2000 Produced by: Gaurab Music, Thamel, 420917 Recording: N/A, Price: Rs 600

## Dhyana Music

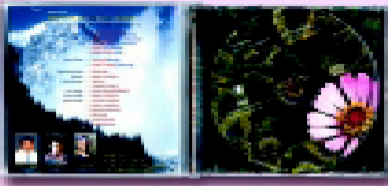
DHYANA AMAN: MEDITATION OF NO MIND—Music for meditation fusing the bamboo flute, ragas, Buddhist chants, singing bowls and percussion. Flautist Manose Singh stars. Includes tracks called *Devotion*, *Dhayana Aman*, *Mantra Yana*, *Chants of Buddha Path*, *Journey to Mustang*. Artists: All music composed by Manose Singh. Shesh N. Shrestha (vocals), Bishnu Lama (vocals), Shree Shahi (singing bowl), Shanti R. Shakya (wind bell). Special guests: Choying Drolma (Buddhist chanting), Dorjee Lama (Buddhist chanting) and Nabaraj Gurung (percussion). Released: 1998 Produced by: East Meets West Music Box, Thamel, 256411 Recording: Sangam Studio, Price: Rs 600



INTRANSIENT NATURE—Early morning music. Fusion Dhayana music, very representative of such collaborations between Nepali and foreign musicians with a semi-classical Nepali troupe and folk musicians. Includes tracks called *Intransient Nature*, *Nature at Peace*, *Mediutative Moment*, *Time in Motion and Transition* Artists: Suresh R. Bajracharya (sarod), Navaraj Gurung (tabala), Raman Maharjan (flute), Norbu Sherpa (violin), Ram Hari Gurung (harmonium), Jublee Gurung and Ranjana Gurung (tanpura). Special guests: Ben Haddon (didgeridoo) and Willow (backing vocals). Released: 2000 Produced by: Mangal Maharjan, 256411 Recording: Radio Nepal, Price: Rs 600

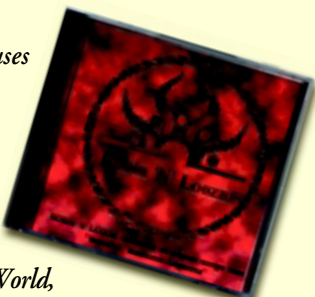
## Fusion

HEART SUTRA: BLISS AND SERENITY—Well-packaged unique blend of Nepali folk, traditional and semi-classical music with lively rhythms and beats. Includes titles called. *The Feel of Rain*, *One Night in Ghorepani*, *Peaceful Journey*, *The Road to Peace*, *In Harmonic Bliss*, *Serenity and Ensemble in Percussion*. There's good use of indigenous instruments like *murchungna* (mouth harp), though there's plenty of guitar and *tabala*. Artistes: Santosh Bhakta Shrestha (israj), Nava Raj Gurung (tabala and percussion), Sujay Shrestha (acoustic guitar), Shyam Nepali (sarangi) and Raman Maharjan (flute). Released: 2000 Produced by: Mangal K. Maharjan, Tel: 256411 Recording: Bishwo Shahi, Price: Rs 600



## Generation Next

ROBIN 'N' LOOZA—The group focuses on contemporary situations and the realities faced by young people. The album is well arranged and Robin's vocals are distinctive as always. Includes *Mero Maya*, *Heart and Soul*, *Swatantra Jeevan*, *Starry Starry Night*, *Maila Bhai*, *Free My World*, and *Adhunik Ko Aaganma and Nepal*, hits from their last album The band: Robin (vocals/guitar), Sunit (guitar/sitar), Riju (bass), Sharad (rhythm/didgeridoo) and Prazol (drums). All songs written by Robin 'n' Looza. Released: 2000 Produced by: Robin 'n' Looza Recording: Namaste Studio, Engineer: Hem Bista, Price: Rs 350



KALANKI KO JAM—Mukti Shakya and his band Mukti and the Revival fuse traditional Newari music and rock. Traditional instruments like the *madal*, *flute*, *sarangi* and *dhime* are used. Includes *Nahera malai*, *Basanta udayo*, *Dalli resham*, *Sani sani*, *Kanchi nani blues*, and *Sanjha ko joonsangai*, a tribute to the late Arun Thapa. The band: Mukti Shakya (vocals, guitars), Rabin Shrestha (drums), Binod Shrestha (guitar) and Roshan Kansakar (bass). Special appearance by the famous Nepali pianist Upendra Man Singh. Released: 2000 Produced by: Mukti & Revival Recording: Namaste Cultural Studio, Engineer: Hem Bista, Price: Rs 350



SAMSARA—Grunge, soft rock and on to "oriental rock". Vocalist Bobin Bajracharya writes: "The concept of this album is the Pure Dhamma—the truth." There are traditional instruments like *madal*, *taa*, *bansuri* and *tabala*, and also the *Swaniga Choir*. Includes *Sagan and Nepal* (instrumental), *The faceless man*, *Shamvalla*, *Question*, *Song of Love*, *Dhamma*, *Samsara*, *Black*. The band: Bobin Bajracharya (vocal, guitars, bass, tambora), Uday Bajracharya (percussion and bell), Tomoko Tamaki (flute and soprano sax), Tetsutaro Tamaki (bass). English and Japanese lyrics. Released: 2000 Produced by: Bobin Bajracharya and Tetsutaro Tamaki Recording: Sonic Bloom and Morino Hall 21, Price: Rs 600

## World Music

HIMALAYAN FEELINGS—A recording by the late Pravin Gurung exploring pure Himalayan Nepali music, especially of western Nepal where all the musicians hail from. Includes *Bihani*, *Ukali Orali*, *Sorathi* (Gurung tune), *Namche* (Sherpa's feelings), and *Chandra Graban* (Lunar eclipse). Artists: All music composed and arranged by the late Pravin Gurung. Pravin Gurung (hanzi/santoor and tungna), Khadka Buddha (percussion) Krishna Lama (flute, ghyaling), Ishor Gurung (percussion, jimbe and tuna). Various guest artistes. Released: 2000 Produced by: Dexo Music Centre, Thamel, 423526 Recording: NA, Price: Rs 600







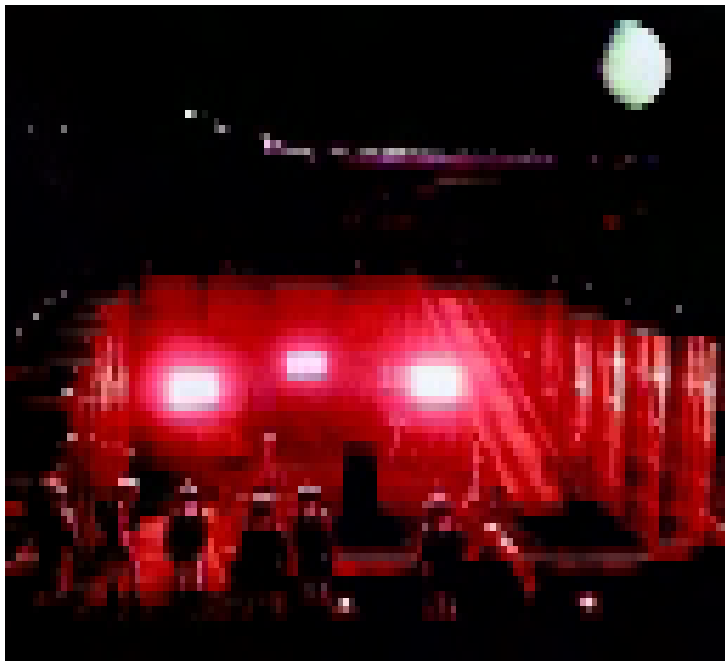
## ANTHONY BROWNE

He made his fortune from predicting the future, and his fame from getting it right. He's written over 60 books, that have sold more than 50 million. He's been nominated for an Oscar and the Nobel Prize, and won countless other awards. The world's best selling science-fiction writer has now seen his last ambition realised.

Sir Arthur C. Clarke has long wanted see in the year that made him a household name: 2001. Last month he turned 83, two weeks before the world finally turned 2001. Confined to a wheelchair by post-polio syndrome, travelling is difficult and 2001 won't be a space odyssey for Sir Arthur, more an odyssey of the ego. For a man who impresses on his visitors his boundless but remarkably inoffensive love of adulation, next year will be heavenly. Celebrations of the film and book *2001: A Space Odyssey*, are set to explode across the planet.

In his house in the centre of Colombo, he describes his favourite room as his "ego chamber", covered wall-to-wall in

# 2001



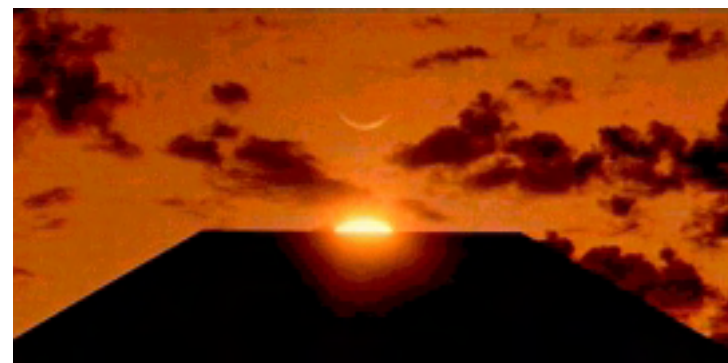
**In an 83-year odyssey, Arthur C. Clarke has predicted satellite communications and the landing on the moon, and written 60 books. Now he'll see the big party in 2001.**

photos of him with the Pope, Prince Charles and Neil Armstrong, books dedicated to him not from VIPs but, he insists, VVIPs including Buzz Aldrin and Buckminster Fuller, and videos

paying homage to him. In 2001, the whole world will be his "ego chamber". Public excitement started in November when it was revealed that Sir Arthur is collaborating with the British

computer entrepreneur Joseph de Saram to launch the Clarke Omniputer, a mass-market reincarnation of the artificially intelligent HAL-9000 computer, the real star of the film. (See box)

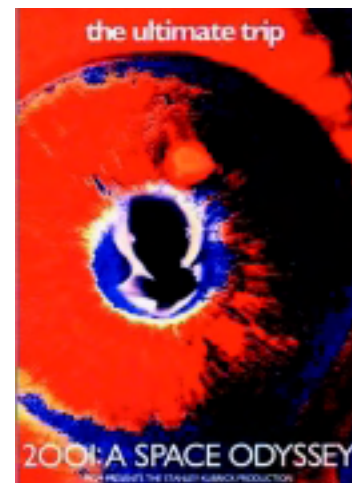
The global adulation of Sir Arthur is a world away from his undistinguished origins on a farm in Minehead in Somerset, where his mother ran the local post office. His only memory of his father, who died when he was 13, was when they were riding a donkey cart, and Clarke elder passed young Arthur a cigarette card with a picture of a dinosaur on it, sparking his interest in science. An engineer uncle gave him electrical fittings to play with, and when he wasn't attempting to fire moon-bound rockets from his garden, Clarke spun stories for his school friends. When the war broke out, he joined the RAF and worked with an American team on a top-secret radar project. At this time he made the prediction that established him as a visionary. Before there was anything global about communications, he wrote a paper suggesting that 'geo-stationary' satellites (in orbit above fixed points on the Earth's surface) could be used to bounce radio signals instantaneously around the world. His paper, 'Extra-Terrestrial Relays', published by the magazine *Wireless World* earned him just £15 but launched an industry worth hundreds of billions. After the war he attained a first in



Kubrick's apartment. Staring at the bright full moon, they saw a light move into the star-spattered night-sky and stop above them. They checked the *New York Times*, which listed the movements of satellites. There was nothing. "Then, a little shamefacedly, we called the Pentagon, and they admitted that it had been a satellite. It seemed a good omen."

The film—provisionally entitled *Journey Beyond the Stars*—was based on his short story, *The Sentinel*. The director and the author co-wrote the screenplay, while Clarke simultaneously turned it into a novel. The two remained friendly until Kubrick's death last year, but it was a fractions working relationship, with Kubrick particularly frustrated. When asked about Clarke, Kubrick joked: "Isn't that some nut who lives up a tree in India?" Clarke retorted with a limerick: "For MGM did Kubrick Stan/A stately astrodome decree/While Art, the science writer, ran/Through plots incredible to man/In search of solvency."

The 1968 film provoked a mixed reaction, but became an instant sci-fi classic. Its depiction of the HAL computer (each letter one place before IBM in the alphabet) sinisterly trying to kill off the crew of the spaceship, *Discovery*, and then pleading for its life has haunted more than one generation. Clarke followed 2001 with a *2010: Odyssey Two*, which was released as a film in 1982, and then *2061: Odyssey Three*. Then a few years ago came *3001: A Final Odyssey*. In that book he predicts the 'soul-catcher' micro-chip that can accommodate the essence of humanity, immortalising human life and downloading it from computers at will. Such predictions—he calls them extrapolations—would be easy to scoff at if Clarke hadn't been right so many times before. He predicted the moon landings to



within a year, as well as the method of landing—having a mother ship circle the moon, sending a smaller pod down to the surface. He predicted vast space stations circling the earth decades before the International Space Station that is currently being assembled in orbit.

His personal life has been as unconventional as his professional one, but more mysterious. His only public relationship was a failed marriage in the 1950s that lasted less than a year and was finally dissolved in 1964. He is widely thought to be gay, although he has never publicly acknowledged it. When directly asked the question, he jests he is "merely mildly cheerful". The answer presumably lies in his journals, which are to be sealed until 30 years after his death because they might contain "all sorts of embarrassing things". Clarke says he was severely hurt by allegations in the *Sunday Mirror* two years ago that he paid young boys for sex, which he vehemently denied. However, the controversy, which flared up just before a visit by Prince Charles to Sri Lanka, led to a postponement of his knighthood, which he finally received early last year.

He lives in his technopolis compound in Colombo with business partner Hector Ekanayake, his family, and a one-eyed Chihuahua called Pepsi. With a coterie of staff, he jokes that he is living the life of the "imperialist running dog". He's had an operation for prostate cancer, his frame is collapsing, and he has to rest every afternoon. There's one prediction he must wish will come true quicker than others: immortality. But even if it doesn't, he's still fulfilled his ambition of seeing in 2001. ♦ (The Observer)



Maths and Physics from King's College in London, and in 1956 moved to Sri Lanka, enticed by the scuba-diving and warm climate. He spent many years relatively unknown, but writing. "I never thought I would be successful. Writing was always an enjoyable hobby," he said recently.

Then, a short story and a collaboration happened. He met Stanley Kubrick in Trader Vic's bar in New York to talk about a project. Stanley told Clarke that he wanted to do "the proverbial good science fiction movie". They decided to make 2001 after spotting a UFO from the roof of



## Son of HAL lives

### ANTHONY BROWNE

IT COULD think for itself, lip-read, scheme and murder. Now HAL-9000, the infamous computer in 2001: A Space Odyssey which turned on its operators and tried to kill them, is being brought back to life by its creator.

Sir Arthur C. Clarke, the author of 2001, is backing a colourful British computer entrepreneur in his bid to launch a mass-market version of HAL under the brand name the Clarke Omniputer. It will be the first time that Clarke, now 82, has given his name to an electronic device on the market.

The Clarke 1 Gigahertz Omniputer is being dubbed as the most advanced personal computer in the world, verging on artificial intelligence. "For the first time, it gives high-quality architecture at low cost, opening the door to handling speech recognition and lip-reading. It will start off addressing issues of consciousness," said Joseph de Saram, the 28-year-old chief executive of Clarke Omniputers, the Luxembourg-based company behind the project. "We're on the verge of going off into artificial intelligence. HAL is back."

The Omniputer has 15 patents on the motherboard alone. It is operated by a touch screen display, and so won't need a mouse. Clarke Omniputers say they already have 60,000 orders for the computer, manufactured in China, and hope to sell 350,000 in the first year alone. The price of the computer will be under £2,000.

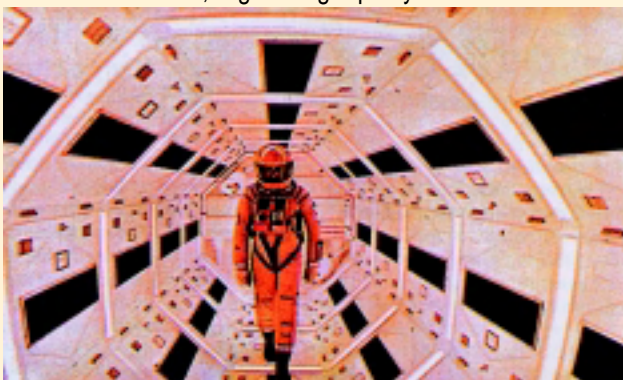
In the film 2001, HAL was the onboard computer for the spaceship *Discovery* on a trip to Jupiter. It could hear and see almost everywhere on the ship and, in a famous scene, lip-read a conversation between crew members hiding in an escape pod. HAL managed to lure his operator, Dave Bowman, into space and tried to lock him out. Bowman was eventually able to break back into the spaceship where he removed HAL's chips one by one. HAL begged for its life before being disarmed and turned off. Like HAL, the Omniputer will, its backers claim, have an instinct to protect itself. "If user errors start, and files get deleted, it will start to repair itself, just as cells repair themselves," said De Saram. However, it is thought unlikely that it will try to kill its owner.

The Omniputer was originally going to be called HAL, but there was an objection from the estate of Stanley Kubrick, the director who co-wrote the screenplay of 2001 with Clarke. That obstacle was overcome, but the backers decided that the name sounded too like the word 'Hell' and that it wouldn't have much resonance with younger customers.

The launch of the Omniputer was planned for 1 January 2001, but suffered a setback last week when a British court ordered that De Saram's other company, Rhodium, which he set up in 1995, should be wound up because of £1 million debts.

De Saram, now living in Sri Lanka, was last year on the *Sunday Times* under-30 Rich List, living a millionaire's lifestyle with several homes and a Ferrari. He insists that he can easily pay the debts but that he relocated to Sri Lanka because his life in the UK was made intolerable by MI5 and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. He claims he was being harassed because an advanced new encryption programme he devised would make it difficult for the security services to snoop on emails.

The launch of the Omniputer would be put on hold until the legal issues have been resolved. ♦ (The Observer)



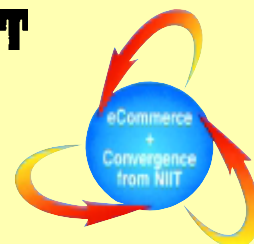
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# Milosevic's legacy remains

VEDNA PERIC ZIMONJIC

BELGRADE - Serbia and Yugoslavia face tough times ahead as they try to rebuild the country from the devastation inflicted during the 10-year rule of Slobodan Milosevic which ended with the Serbian parliamentary elections on 23 December.

"It would be wrong to say that everything caused in this country by Milosevic simply ended on December 23," analyst Milan Milosevic said. "That was the day that marked the new beginning. The doors to painful recovery are open now."

Serbia and Montenegro, which make the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), conducted parliamentary elections on 23 December. As predicted, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) won a landslide victory. In the 250-member parliament, DOS will have 176 MPs, Milosevic's Socialist Party 37, while two ultranationalist parties—Radicals and Serbian Unity will have 23 and 14 seats respectively.

The victory in Serbia cemented

DOS's power at all levels in FRY, finally ending Milosevic's undisputed dominance. He was president of Serbia from 1990 to 1997, when he pushed himself to the post of president of FRY. He lost the federal presidential elections to DOS candidate Vojislav Kostunica in September, while his Socialist Party lost the majority in the federal parliament.

But fighting the legacy of Milosevic's regime will be an enormous effort. In FRY, the federal president and federal government deal with foreign policy, international cooperation and defence. Economic development and functioning in all the other areas of life is within the jurisdiction of the governments of republics, Serbia and Montenegro. Yugoslav President Kostunica has practically ended the years of isolation of FRY. Since October, FRY has been re-admitted to the UN, the IMF and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) after an eight-year gap. Diplomatic relations were renewed with the United States, Great Britain,

## The new government of Serbia and Yugoslavia must now deal with the fallout of the last decade.

Germany and France. They were cut when the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO, air raids started in March 1999. Diplomatic relations with all republics of the former Yugoslavia that broke down in the early 90s were re-established.

DOS leader and future Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic said the new "transparent government of Serbia will fight corruption and abuses first." The Milosevic-controlled administration was notorious for its corruption and abuse of funds. Milosevic's aides became enormously rich by breaching international sanctions and exerting a virtual monopoly over the country's remaining businesses. Over four billion US dollars were siphoned out of the country by Milosevic and a few aides in the past decade. Djindjic said that one of the first tasks will be "to bring the guilty to justice. There will be no reprisals, but no amnesty either."

The new interior minister-designate, Belgrade human rights activist and lawyer Gradimir Nalic, wants a thorough reform of the repressive police, that used to be one of the pillars of the former regime. He said, "First of all, the reform of the police will turn it into a force that protects the people and does not go against it. Second, the police will be prompt into the investigations that could bring all the members of former regime, who abused power, into the hands of justice."

In the past decade, unemployment reached 40 percent in Serbia and salaries fell to \$40 a month. In the 80s Yugoslavia was the most developed country in the Balkans, and average salaries were 10 times higher than today. Severe economic sanctions and almost a decade of isolation brought the economy to a standstill. Djindjic says that the reforms of the country's judicial, police and

economic system will be his priority.

The worst situation is the Serbian economy, devastated by several rounds of international sanctions, imposed by the UN and Europe due to Milosevic's role in wars in neighbouring former Yugoslav republics. Additional devastation came with 11 weeks of NATO air raids in 1999. "I would not define the economic reforms as a shock therapy," Djindjic said. "Serbian economy is already in a state of shock and there is no magic wand that can bring it back to life. With the help of international investors and through our own efforts, we must be engaged in hard work in many years ahead of us."

Statistics show that the overall production in Serbia is only 43 percent of the production in 1989. Foreign debt, unpaid for 10 years now, has reached \$15 billion. UN officials say Yugoslavia urgently needs some \$800 million in aid to

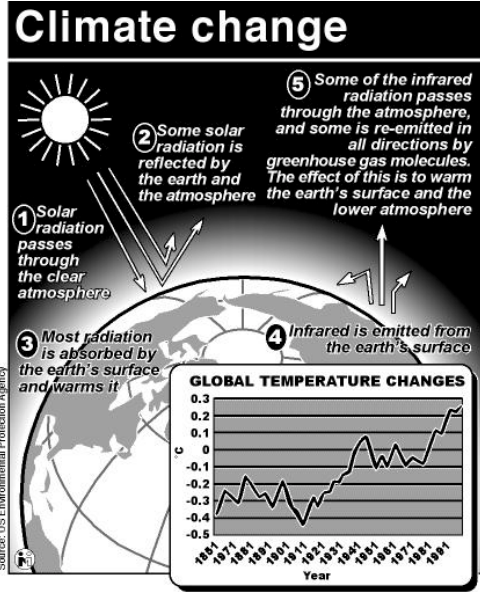


Zoran Djindjic, Democratic Opposition of Serbia leader and the next Serbian Prime Minister

get through the winter, and the country needs between \$1.4 and 1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance for the next six months. Belgrade can cover about half of this.

Branko Dragas, economic advisor to Zoran Djindjic, says Serbia's losses in GDP in the past 10 years have reached \$216 billion. "Serbia waged wars, suffered from international isolation, marinated in mafia-style economy led by the mighty people," Dragas said. "We are deeply in red and the only way out is the total reform of the economy. That is where Serba is heading to, painfully and slowly, in the future." ♦ (IPS)

# Heavy weather



## The world witnessed extreme weather and scientists made dire predictions for the future of the planet last year.

Climate Change (IPCC) was leaked to the New York Times. The report, compiled by hundreds of the world's most respected climate scientists, argues that greenhouse gas emissions have already "contributed substantially to observed warming over

thunder and lightning for the first time—a by-product of a warming planet.

The new rush of melting has also hit mountain ranges across the world. The European Alps have lost over half their glacier mass during the last century. Glaciers in the Andes and the Himalaya are disappearing at an alarming rate. The loss of glaciers in the Himalaya is particularly worrying, because the great Indus, Ganges, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow rivers all rise from the mountain ice fields and could dry up once the snows melt.

The human toll of extreme weather was also cause for mounting concern in 2000. A Worldwide Fund for Nature report quoted insurance industry calculations that economic losses from floods and storms between the 1970s and 1990s jumped to \$399 billion from \$74.5 billion, even factoring in inflation and population growth.

There were floods and a heat wave in Europe, but the most destructive weather last year was in Asia and Africa. Monsoon floods in India during the summer killed nearly 3,000 people and left 2.7 million homeless. Countries along the Mekong river—principally Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos—suffered their worst floods in 60 years. In total some 35 million people were affected.

At the same time, much of the rest of Asia was parched by a relentless drought that affected more than 60 million people across Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India and Iran. In Tajikistan a million people are on the verge of starvation because of the drought which has destroyed 90 percent of

the republic's agriculture. In Afghanistan half the population has been affected. A chronic lack of rain has also gripped the Horn of Africa, leaving millions in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania threatened by famine.

Ironically, heavy rains doused South Africa and Mozambique in November. Mozambique was still recovering from devastating floods earlier in the year.

Low-lying South Pacific island nations like Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands are also on the front-line for climate-related oblivion. Two small islands belonging to the island nation of Kiribati have already sunk beneath the waves. Papua New Guinea's government announced in late November that 1,000 people will be forced to evacuate the nation's Duke of York islands because of rising sea levels.

The world struggled to make sense of such issues at the Climate Change Conference. Low-lying nations, represented by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), pushed for action saying rising sea levels may drown their countries. Trinidad and Tobago's representative Kishan Kumarsingh joked that by 2100 his nation wouldn't be represented at climate change talks—it would no longer exist. The conference fell apart and most blame the failure on the US. Absent from negotiations was any consideration of equity—the quantity of greenhouse gases each country will be allowed to produce in the long term. Equity is a key demand from India, China and the rest of the G-77 group, who point out that each American produces as much greenhouse gas emission as 19 Indians, 107 Bangladeshis and 269 Nepalis.

Developing countries argue it is unfair for the rich North to continue to enjoy the fruits of over a century of fossil fuel-driven economic growth. With economic growth rates the highest in the so-called developing world for many years now, now they want the same. ♦ (GEMINI)

## Agency with a death wish

Nairobi - When it started work New Year's day, 1951, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had just 300 staff, a \$300,000 budget—and a mandate to go out of business in three years. Far from downing its shutters, 50 years on, the agency has grown in tandem with the number of refugees.

The UN General Assembly created UNHCR as a short-term project to help Europe's post-war refugees return home or start a new life elsewhere. Fifty years later UNHCR has some 5,000 staff and a \$1 billion annual budget. The agency now faces numerous challenges in protecting some 12 million refugees, including the safety of refugees and humanitarian staff, dealing with budget cuts, and the growing problem of internal displacement.

Security has moved higher on the UNHCR agenda in 2000, after four of its workers were killed in September alone, three in West Timor and one in Guinea. "This is because we are increasingly working inside conflict areas, in places where even peacekeepers won't go," says Redmond. "So you've got unarmed humanitarian workers trying to help the displaced, when displacement of civilians is increasingly the objective of conflict." This is happening at a time when the agency's funding is falling short of its requested budget by as much as 20 percent. The agency has been forced to seek money from the private sector and even borrowed to cope with the shortfall in 2000.

Although donor nations overwhelmingly responded to the Kosovo emergency in Europe, they are less willing to provide funding for long-lasting refugee crises, such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Burundi. Yet those crises typify the world's refugee problem far more than Kosovo. The vast majority of the world's refugees are African and Asian. And although the flow of asylum-seekers into Europe and North America generates domestic controversy and media attention, poor countries like Tanzania, Pakistan and Guinea host vastly larger numbers of refugees.

But, according to UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond, the top challenge is safeguarding the very principle of asylum in a climate of diminishing government sympathy toward refugees. Despite the cash crunch, there are growing calls—from people like Richard Holbrooke, the American ambassador to the UN—that UNHCR should also take on responsibility for internally displaced persons (IDPs), estimated at more than 20 million. It's unclear whether UNHCR can or will take on such a task, since the UN operates on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Much will depend on the tone set by Ogata's successor, former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, who took over on 1 January, 2001. ♦ (GEMINI)



Refugee camp in western Uganda

MARK LYNAS

LONDON - Today's doomsayers are researchers like the meteorologists from Britain's Hadley Centre who revealed in November that within 50 years our forests and soils that absorb carbon dioxide could start releasing it, dramatically accelerating global warming.

After 2050, if carbon dioxide emissions continue to increase, the Amazon rainforests will turn to desert and savannah and the planet's average temperature will soar six degrees higher. The earth would be the warmest it's been since the extinction of dinosaurs. The North Polar ice sheet would be reduced to a few large floes, parts of the Antarctic could collapse, pushing up sea levels and inundating major cities like London and Bangkok.

In 2000, such dire climate change predictions became commonplace, fuelled by drought, floods, storms, heat waves and other violent weather patterns that battered the world. The United Nations' Climate Change Conference, held 13-25 November in The Hague, Netherlands, heightened the world's concern.

In September, a report by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on

the last 50 years". The report doubled the worst-case scenario estimate of what might happen if no action is taken to stop the release of greenhouse gases. Carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are now higher than at any time in the last 420,000 years. This has already warmed the planet by up to 0.8 °C, making the 20th century the warmest in 1,000 years, with the highest temperatures on record occurring during the 1990s.

Evidence from around the world indicate a changing climate. In August, scientists aboard the Russian ice-breaker Yamal were astounded to find only open water and sea gulls flying overhead when they reached the North Pole. The vessel had to sail another eight km before they found any ice. Studies confirm the Arctic ice sheet is melting, its overall thickness reduced by 43 per cent in the last four decades. The ice covering Greenland is melting at a rate equivalent to the annual flow of the Nile.

Canada's Inuit people spoke from personal experience last year about the changes in their arctic environment. They've seen thinning ice, the arrival of new bird species and damage to buildings and roads as frozen ground begins to thaw beneath them. They also saw



# Bangladesh bandhs

**TABIBUL ISLAM**  
DHAKA - The new year is likely to open with another bout of crippling anti-government street protests across Bangladesh by opposition parties, ahead of national polls later in the year. However, rivals of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina may find that far from forcing the government to step down, their strategy may cost them popular support. Political observers agree that most people in Bangladesh, one of the world's lowest income nations, are tired of the four-and-a-half years of unending street protests by the opposition which have caused great economic loss to the country. Though still immensely popular, Hasina's arch-foe and former premier Khaleda Zia is hurting her main opposition party's credibility by teaming up with right-wing religious parties and former dictators.

Bangladesh is due to elect a new 300-member parliament after the five-year tenure of the ruling Awami League ends on 13 July next year. Under the constitution, the prime minister will then have to make way for a caretaker administration which will supervise the polls.

However, opposition parties want Hasina to step down straight away. The anti-government alliance led by Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP) is busy chalking out a strategy for street protests starting early this month. "By intensifying the street movement, we will destabilise the government of Sheikh Hasina and compel it to step down," said a top BNP leader, who did not want to be identified.

The opposition alliance includes former authoritarian ruler HM Ershad's Jatiyo Party and the religious groups, the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikkaya Jot. Political analysts here say that the BNP committed a big political blunder by choosing a tough street agitation programme to oust the government from the day it took office in June 1996.

The opposition also boycotted parliament for long stretches, virtually



Bangladeshi PM Sheikh Hasina (left) with Bangladesh National Party Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

**The BNP may pay a price for street protests and allying with religious hardliners and ex-dictators.**

depriving the country of a legislature for most of this period. The street protests and public strikes, not only caused immense business loss to rich and poor alike, but also put off foreign investors. Many issues on which the protests were launched, had little appeal for ordinary people say analysts. As a result, the government was more often able to take the moral high ground during such protests.

Even the leaders of the opposition alliance now realise this and not all favour such a strategy. At a strategy conclave in December, hardline BNP leaders spoke in favour of several spells of three to four successive days of countrywide street protests. But moderates opposed the idea saying this would add to the sufferings of the people and alienate voters.

The BNP has also come under fire from different quarters, including its supporters, for its electoral alliance with Ershad's party. The former president, toppled by a popular upsurge in the late 1980s, is widely accused of corruption and abuse of power during his nine years of authoritarian rule. "It was the (then) BNP government which had

put Ershad behind bars for five years and filed as many as 15 corruption cases against him," said a BNP activist, who didn't want to be identified. He added that the people of Bangladesh would "surely question the wisdom and rationale" of the BNP's alliance with the Jatiyo Party of Ershad, who was ousted by a campaign by all major parties, including the BNP and the Awami League.

A sizeable section of professionals and academics, who are strong critics of the Awami League and favour the BNP, are also unhappy with the BNP's hob-nobbing with the Jamaat-e-Islami. The religious party had opposed the 1971 "Liberation War". The Jamaat was accused of collaborating with the Pakistani army, which was charged with carrying out a genocide in which some three million Bengali people in the then East Pakistan were killed. "How can the BNP enter into an alliance with the Jamaat, which is yet to reconcile itself with the independence of Bangladesh?" asked an angry academic, who did not want to be named. The pro-opposition

English weekly, *The Dialogue*, warned in an editorial: "If the BNP sheds its moderate image, it will become a peripheral party like Jamaat-e-Islami and the Awami League will rule the roost."

Sheikh Hasina has announced that she will begin her party's poll campaign in March. Political observers say that the prime minister has some impressive achievements to show voters. She can claim credit for ending an over two-decade-old, violent tribal insurgency in the south-eastern Chittagong Hill Tracts, and signing the historic Ganga water-sharing treaty with neighbouring India. Bangladesh is also said to have achieved near self-sufficiency in food production in the past four years, reduced its population growth rate to 1.6 percent annually, and kept inflation way below double digits. Raising Bangladesh's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate to five percent and reducing dependence on foreign aid are said to be the other achievements of the Awami League government. Hasina's government also won some praise at home and abroad for its handling of the disastrous floods two years ago.

However, voters have enough reason to be unhappy with the government, which has been widely criticised for the worsening law and order situation and failing to tackle corruption among public servants. According to the latest estimate by the global anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International, corruption drained away some two billion US dollars of government funds in the first half of last year. "Corruption has been retarding the progress of the nation," says top Bangladeshi economist Muzaffar Ahmed. ♦ (IPS)

## Love, not war, in Jakarta

JAKARTA - After months of being away from the public eye, General Wiranto, Indonesia's former military chief, re-emerged last month to launch an album of love songs to raise money for a cause.

He was not contemplating a career change, but raising funds for Aceh refugees and the victims of earthquake in Bengkulu province. The album once again pushed Wiranto into the limelight, and many believe he was trying to repair his tainted image after he was booted out of the Wahid Cabinet in February. "Violators of human rights in this country continue to feel respectable. They can show up and sing on TV without any embarrassment," remarked Todung Mulya Lubis, from the Centre for Study on Human Rights (Yapusham). "And much of society doesn't see them as culprits because rights abuse is not a crime (here), although it is a serious crime against humanity," he said.

Wiranto is not among the 22 high-ranking military officers under investigation for the violence following the East Timor ballot in August 1999, which favoured independence from Indonesia. In the 1998 attack at Trisakti University where seven students were shot dead, not a single police or military officer has been accused. The student-led protests triggered multi-sector demonstrations which forced Suharto to step down after three decades in power.

Human rights have not improved during the "reformasi" era, activists say. The Committee for Victims of Violence and Missing Persons (Kontras) reports that last year there were 1,216 cases of rights violations across the country. 2,119 people died as a result, two-thirds while in government custody. The police are the top rights violators, added Kontras, followed by the military. The Indonesian Attorney General initiated the inquiry into the East Timor violence primarily due to international pressure, some say.

President Wahid had vowed political reforms, including a tough campaign against corruption and human rights violations, but this has been an uphill battle. In promoting human rights, the biggest problem is changing the mindset of people. "Indonesians have a long-established view that the king and his circles can do no wrong," said Lubis. "To many, human rights is a concept of the West, who in turn press weak countries in order to show their hegemony and supremacy," he added. Many Indonesians who embrace the concept of human rights don't want foreigners investigating the Indonesian military even for rights promotion. A rally against the UN outside the House of Representatives in Jakarta last month protested the involvement of the UN in the investigation of 22 suspects in the East Timor violence. And human rights isn't a "bread and butter" issue. "In villages, people still think that the only right they possess is to work hard in order to be able to get food," said Wardah Hafidz, chairperson of the Urban Poor Consortium. With no acceptable solution in troubled places like Aceh, Maluku and Papua, more cases of rights violations will occur, and Wahid's pledge to improve the country's human rights record will continue to be unfulfilled. ♦ (IPS)



General Wiranto and his CD of love songs

# Euphoria to amnesia in East Timor

**KALINGA SENEVIRATNE**  
SINGAPORE - The realities of rebuilding a shattered economy are prompting East Timor's leaders to turn to pragmatism in dealing with the territory's neighbours as the countdown to full independence begins. "We are starting from absolute ground zero," Jose Ramos Horta, Cabinet Minister for Foreign Affairs of the East Timor Transitional Authority, told a seminar at the Institute of South East Asian Studies here last month. "For the next two or three years, we will have to rely on generous international assistance," added the Nobel Peace Prize awardee.

Ramos Horta indicated that he attaches special importance to repairing the relationship with East Timor's former ruler, Indonesia. He added that an independent East Timor would like to become a full member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). East Timor will probably make a formal application for ASEAN membership after full independence in December 2001. "Joining ASEAN is of strategic importance," he said, adding, "it would also provide a security



**Jose Ramos Horta, Nobel Laureate and key East Timorese political figure, sees caution and reconciliation in the country's future.**

umbrella, far more reliable and credible than having an army."

This is a far cry from comments he made in a similar address in Sydney last year, where he argued that East Timor was part of the South Pacific group of nations and not part of ASEAN. At that time he indicated a preference for East Timor to join the South Pacific Forum, whose members include Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and 13 small island nations of the South Pacific. In contrast, ASEAN's 10 members are Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Burma,

Cambodia, Laos, and Malaysia. The change in his remarks indicates a realisation that East Timor will need both political and economic support from its neighbours. Ramos Horta took up the issue of East Timor joining ASEAN with Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew during his visit here. The two leaders advised him to delay joining, because if East Timor joins ASEAN too quickly, the EU and the UN would say that ASEAN should support East Timor and withhold some aid. They pointed out that

ASEAN has limited resources and could not help much.

"It is very pragmatic advice and we take it seriously," said Ramos Horta, who attended last year's annual ASEAN meetings in Thailand as an observer. East Timor will use this period before formal independence to gain acquaintances and build trust and sympathy in neighbouring countries. East Timor will open its first diplomatic mission in Jakarta soon. Ramos Horta was in a conciliatory mood when asked about Indonesia's hesitation to bring to justice those accused of war crimes in East Timor before and immediately after the independence vote. "We will wait. We don't want to make life difficult for them, but if they fail to deliver, then there can be no other option (to a UN tribunal trying them)," said Ramos Horta.

After the ASEAN informal summit here last month, Indonesia's President Abdurrahman Wahid accused Singapore of acting in a selfish manner in rejecting his proposal to admit East Timor and Papua New Guinea—an observer—into the regional grouping. He threatened to

form a West Pacific Forum (WPF) which would include Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines—but not Singapore.

Australia and New Zealand have responded positively to the idea. The two countries' foreign ministers said last month that they would start drawing up a framework for the new body. Ramos Horta said that East Timor would be interested in joining such a forum "as long as that does not mean exclusion from ASEAN," which he called "irreplaceable".

While Australia in particular seems very keen on Wahid's West Pacific Forum—probably seeing a chance for Canberra to finally link up formally with Asia—the proposal has been criticised in Indonesia and Singapore. The Indonesian daily *Kompas* reported that a seminar in Jakarta of academics, government officials and legislators rejected the West Pacific Forum proposal as a "wrong time to propose a new forum." They criticised Wahid for proposing it without prior consultation with Parliament.

Quoting an unnamed senior Indonesian foreign ministry official, the *Strait Times* said Wahid's main aim in proposing the West Pacific Forum was to manage and contain an independent East Timor, by keeping it within the Southeast Asian circle and not in Australia's shadow. "He does not want Australia to be the only country deciding development there," the official said. "His preference was for ASEAN to rope in East Timor, so that Indonesia, as one of the member states, could watch over it. Having failed to secure this, he had to come up with this West Pacific Forum idea," the same official added.

Jakarta is worried about Australia pumping so much money into East Timor. In addition to economic projects, Canberra has also offered US\$8.5 million to develop East Timor's defence capability. "Australia figures prominently in Mr Abdurrahman's foreign policy calculus," observed *Strait Times* analyst Derwin Pereira. "The pact (WPF) would allow him not just to watch over East Timor, but also to keep tabs on Australian initiatives in the area." ♦ (IPS)



# Bam Dev refuses to accept Hrithik denial

During last week's protests against rumoured comments by Indian film actor Hrithik Roshan, BBC Nepali Service's Rabintra Mishra interviewed Bam Dev Gautam, General Secretary, Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), and Ishwor Pokhrel, member of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist). Excerpts follow:



MINI BAIRACHARYA

**Bam Dev Gautam:** I think the reaction in Nepal and Kathmandu is natural and correct. Whatever is happening now is the feelings against Hrithik Roshan's wrong, damaging and insulting comments which has now taken the shape of a nationalist wave. The government tried to impede the expression of the nationalistic feelings of the people by firing at the protestors, and that has left four innocent people dead.

**BBC:** You say these reaction was natural and appropriate but do you have any proof that he had actually made the comments?

**BDG:** No, I don't need to give proof about whether he said it or not. The Nepali people have already done that. If I were to say anything I would say he should not have made such things.

**BBC:** It's different to say he should not have said it but when students close to your party and others are protesting, all we are asking is whether you have any proof at all?

**BDG:** How can you take Hrithik Roshan's side when you are staying in London? His remarks were heard on television channels, it was in the papers. Just because Hrithik Roshan has denied ever making such comments today and so on, can we say that is true? Can you give proof of that? Therefore whatever you have heard is wrong. The insulting things done against Nepal and Nepalis by some Indian artistes are very saddening, shameful and worth protesting. Does it suit you, a Nepali living in London, to ask for proof of whether he said it or not? Let's not talk about that. He definitely said it. For proof you have the TV channel.

**BBC:** When we contacted the television channel it was not confirmed, and Hrithik Roshan has issued a statement denying he ever said that and has said he loves Nepal and Nepalis.

**BDG:** That is what he is saying now. How can you reach any conclusion on what he has said now?

**BBC:** I am not making a judgment. I don't even have that authority I'm only trying to question you by staying in the middle...

**BDG:** You should first find the facts and say that he has not said it at all. He said it but now denies doing that. The channel that broadcast it may have tried to erase it but there must be some proof of what has already become public. It was on the basis of that proof that the sentiments of the Nepalis were hurt.

**BBC:** If he had said it many people may consider the reaction as natural but is it right to stage protests which has caused so much damage and even loss of human life without having solid evidence? Don't you need solid proof to base your protests on?

**BDG:** He has definitely said it. He has definitely insulted Nepalis and Nepal. The Nepali people poured their sentiments against that insult and that should have been allowed. But the government—which is used to wagging its tail in front of Indian rulers—this time too crushed the protests, shot them...

(BBC tries to interrupt)

**BDG:** What do you want? Only things you want (to hear). Take what the Nepali state now needs. Today the Nepal government, the Nepali Congress government has shot and killed four innocent, unarmed people for what? For saying that the Indian actor should not have made those insulting comments against Nepal.

**BBC:** Many may agree with that aspect but on something which you passionately feel about, when so many journalists have not found solid proof, how did you find it?

**BDG:** We found it in the Star Channel and on that basis newspapers published the reports...

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**Ishwor Pokhrel:** The public have reacted to what Indian cine artist Hrithik Roshan's said. I am not aware of any political party giving much importance to the issue to make it the main reason for protest. What our party feels is that the remarks, which we've been told of, are not appropriate and can affect the relationship between our two countries. But the government's action to crush the protests, where shots fired even killed people in their homes is a very irresponsible and condemnable act. What we are saying is that the Home Minister should resign immediately to take responsibility for these acts.



MINI BAIRACHARYA

**BBC:** We'll talk about resignation later. You say Hrithik Roshan's statements were irresponsible, do you have any basis to say that he actually said it?

**IP:** From what we have learnt...you might ask whether I heard it myself or whether I watched the interview but we've heard about the people that heard it, official institutions. Even the government has officially denounced his statement saying that until he apologises for the irresponsible statements his films will not be screened in Nepali cinemas. That also proves that his statements are true, it does not matter if I heard or watched it or not.

**BBC:** Hrithik Roshan has issued a statement saying he's never said that and he loves Nepal and Nepalis. And that his competitors may be doing that to damage his image...

**IP:** If he has said that then we need to take it into account, it could be true. But I have not read his statement or heard about it, but I have heard about his denial in the media.

**BBC:** Do you think it was right to stage nationwide protests without confirming if the statements were made or not?

**IP:** I should contradict you here and say that there were no nationwide protests to counter what he said. Some students had expressed their resentment against the statements, protested it through statements, some people, unorganised as they were, went to cinema halls to ask them to stop screening his movies, that is what we have come to know. We are also surprised by the way the situation has been provoked, the type of people involved in the protests, the way they are attacking other people, the way the protests have taken a communal angle, launch an attack against the democratic system itself, this is really suspect and we are observing it seriously.

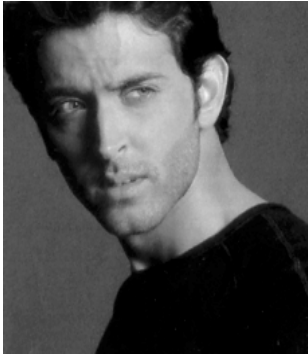
**BBC:** What will your future reactions be? Are you in favour of the Home Minister resigning?

**IP:** At the moment we are not thinking of the long term. Our focus now is that killings has taken place, the home minister should take moral responsibility for it and resign, one thing, secondly action should be taken against those that were responsible and the injured should be treated and families of the dead have to be provided compensation. And a powerful, high-level commission needs to be formed to investigate the whole issue.

## More on Rhithik...

We fully support those brave students who are protesting, and appeal to all patriotic Nepalis, republican and leftists to help us unseat this government of Koirala.

—Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) statement reported in Jana Awaz, 29 December



Nepalis may not have anything or know anything but they are very patriotic and are nationalists to the core. They are not prepared to hear Indian artistes say that they do not like Nepal and Nepalis time and again. If any Indian artiste says this, Nepalis respond with statements and burn posters and effigies of that Indian artiste. This seems to be the only way in which Nepalis can express their patriotism and nationalism.

—Kishor Nepal in Naya Sadak, 27 December

Hrithik is the grandson of Roshan, a great musician. His uncle, too, is a good musician. Knowledge cannot be passed down through generations. In an interview Hrithik had bad-mouthed Nepal. In response, the Nepalis burnt his posters, his effigies and have decided to boycott his movies. This is also a warning to all who have bad intentions against Nepal and the Nepali. For this the country had to pay a great price. This is because the present government is inefficient.

It is because of this attitude of the Indians, that Nepali sentiments and nationalism are forced to survive by protesting against India. This is not a mirage. We are between two big nations, both have large areas and big populations, but we have never been troubled or humiliated by our northern neighbour. It is always our southern neighbor which troubles and humiliates us. That is why all Nepalis grow up with an anti-Indian feeling.

By boycotting Hrithik, the youth have done a good job. The danger is that this boycott may fizzle out. The Indian side has always been able to give one explanation and they are

giving it now too. It is that India is a democracy, and people can say what they want to. This reasoning has no logic to it now. A larger democracy than India, the US, does not give any visas to people opposed to it. In the same way, Nepalis should be alert and give a befitting reply to all who have evil intentions about Nepal.

—CPN(UML) spokesman, Pradip Nepal in Naya Sadak, 28 December

The ministry of communication had issued a directive that none of Hrithik's movies should be shown in Nepal until and unless he apologises publicly. It seems some of the officials in that ministry themselves do not know about this directive. At 6 in the evening, when the streets of Kathmandu were on fire, the home ministry released this directive on behalf of the communication ministry. The communication ministry insisted, Hrithik, who had earlier stated that he does not like Nepalis, should now publicly apologise and declare that he likes Nepalis.

—Budhabar, 27 December

In an interview to the Star Plus channel a couple of days back, Indian artist Hrithik Roshan stated that Nepal is a wretched country and that people living in Nepal don't have any brains. It is in response to this and against the flow of Hindi movies into Nepal that we have burnt his posters and effigies, said Ghan Shyam Bhattarai, general secretary of the students' union of Sapt Gandaki College, Chitwan.

—Jana Astha, 27 December

## ...Also Manisha

Poet Bhupi Sherchan's description of Nepal as a 'country of rumours' has come very true in what took place recently. It all started with a report published by Chitwan Post—a Narayanghat-based daily, about a protest rally in Narayanghat denouncing the statement made by the famous Indian actor Hrithik Roshan against the Nepal and Nepali in a 'satellite television channel'. A week after the report was published, all the national dailies were suddenly flooded with similar reports.

As events snowballed out of control, none of the dailies nor the rioting student's unions made any effort to verify and confirm the so-called statement made by Roshan. As a result, the country was consumed by flames. If that was not enough, the

revisionist and reactionary government forces added oil to fire. The government responded with a police force that targeted innocent lives in the name of controlling the mob. This plunged the country into a serious mess.

The Nepali Congress government, which had never been sensitive about the Nepali people's sentiments, suddenly reacted and banned the screening of Hrithik's films through a directive from the communications ministry.

The ban triggered more riots and violence in the country. But all this turned out to be a farce when the actor denied making any remarks against Nepal and the Nepalis. The Indian embassy also made a similar statement representing the Indian government.

To be led by rumours is typical mob psychology. But for a government body itself to be so led is not typical. The knee-jerk reaction from both the government and the so-called patriotic political parties has placed Nepal in a very embarrassing situation in the international arena.

Had the young star made such remarks and his fans here rejected his films and started hating him that would have been a different matter. But it cannot be an uprising against another country because Hrithik's does not represent the Indian government nor its people nor is he an official of the Indian bureaucracy or the government. Whether someone likes or dislikes any person, place or object is of his or her personal interest, just as there are many Nepalis who don't like the Indian government and its interventions.

The ban on Hrithik's films by the Nepali government has now affected the famous Nepali Bollywood actress Manisha Koirala. Indian students have begun demanding a ban on Koirala's movies. The National Student's Union of India in Madhya Pradesh recently rioted in Indore to cancel the premier of *Champion*, Koirala's new release, and the local magistrate complied.

—Dristi, 2 January



## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

When a bullet is fired, the bullet cannot differentiate between a minister and a child. A bullet is a bullet and the policeman who fires it remains a policeman...A bullet does not have eyes.

—Nepali Congress Central Committee member and former water resources minister, Laxman Prasad Ghimire, speaking to Jana Astha, 3 January, defending the police firings of 26 December.



हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 December, 2000 to 13 January, 2001



ABOUT TOWN

MOVIES

Movie ticket bookings online at <www.nepalshop.com>

EXHIBITION

❖ **Angkor.** A black and white photography exhibition by Jaro Poncar from Prague. The focus of the exhibition is the temple complex Angkor Wat regarded as one of the architectural wonders of the world. December 20—January 20. 8 am to 6 pm. Indigo Gallery, Naxal.

MUSIC

❖ **Jazz** Jazz by Cadenza at Upstairs Restaurant, Lazimpat. Every Saturday 7:30pm—10pm.

❖ **Rock and Blues** Robin 'n' Looza play rock, blues, soul, and Nepali tunes at The Bamboo Club, Thamel. Every Friday evening.

❖ **Live Shows** Various bands at The Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat. Every evening. 416071

❖ **Chakra** The Piano Lounge at the Yak & Yeti Hotel. Every evening 7 pm onwards. 248999

❖ **Unplugged** Syabru Lama plays guitar at the Coffee Shop, Hotel De l' Annapurna. Everyday 7:30pm – 10pm. 221711

❖ **Classical Guitar** Kishor Gurung plays classical favourites at the Chimney, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Everyday 8pm onwards. 248999

❖ **Classical** Musicians from Nepal and abroad at the Kirateswore Mahadev temple, Pashupatinath. January 9 from 4pm—8pm. Free entrance, but charges may apply for special guest appearances. Organised by Kirateswore Sangeet Ashram. 492139

DANCE

❖ **Classical Nepali Dances** based on Buddhist and Hindu epics and the Tantric pantheon at the Great Pagoda, Hotel Vajra. Every Tuesday, 7pm onwards. Rs 300. 271545

❖ **Ballads and Dances of Old Tibet** performed by Tsering Gurmey and Tsering Paljor at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra. Every Thursday, 7pm onwards. Rs 400. 271545

THEATRE

❖ **Dr. Knock, or the Triumph of Medical Science.** A Nepali adaptation by Kalpana Ghimire of the French play by Jules Romain under the Nepali title: Dr. Kanak. Performed by The Royal Nepal Academy and Arohan Sanibar. Reserved invitation. Children under 10 not allowed. Royal Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi. Monday, January 8. 4.30 pm.

EVENTS

❖ **Ekata Diwas** Birthday celebration of King Prithivi Narayan Shah. Government officials and citizens gather early morning in front of the statue of the king outside Singha Durbar. Also a national holiday. Thursday, 11 January.

FESTIVAL

❖ **Swasthani Fasting** The annual festival of Nepali Hindus, *Swasthani Barta*, begins Tuesday, January 9 and extends till Thursday, February 8. This month people gather and read the story of Swasthani in their homes. While listening to the story, devotees make offerings of flowers and food to the holy book. It is believed that even hearing the story releases one from bad omen.

MARTIN CHAUTARI

❖ **Classic Nepali Discussion Series 2: Indra Bahadur Rai's 'Aaja Ramita Chha'** Sangeeta Pandey and Asutosh Toward will lead the discussion forum. Tuesday, January 9. 5:30 pm. Unless otherwise noted, presentations are in Nepali. Write or call for directions: [chautari@mos.com.np](mailto:chautari@mos.com.np), 246065



For inclusion in the listing send information to [editors@nepalitimes.com](mailto:editors@nepalitimes.com)



Vacancy Announcement  
German Agency for Technical Cooperation  
Health Sector Support Programme

The GIZ supported Health Sector Support Programme (HSSP) invites applications from qualified Nepalese citizens for the following positions in the Primary Health Care Component (PHCCP).

1. District Manager
2. Social Development Officer

Duty station for both positions will be Chitwan.

The overall objectives of the "Primary Health Care" component of the HSSP are to strengthen the institutional capacity at different level of the national health system and supporting the development of a decentralized district health system.

1. District Manager

Major Responsibilities of the Position

Assist and support District Health Office (DHO) and District Health Development Board (DHDB) to strengthen the District Health System in Chitwan by providing management and technical support to the District Health Office. The District Manager is responsible for planning and co-ordination of the HSSP activities. He/she will supervise the district team in coordination with HSSP team at national level.

Qualification and Experience

- Master's degree in Public Health
- Excellent writing and communication skills in both English and Nepali
- Experience of working at district level preferably with DHOS
- Post working experience in a reputed organization
- Demonstrated skills in documentation and monitoring
- Familiarity with computer skills

This is a senior position with challenging duties & responsibilities. The position demands dynamic and creative person who has the strong personality.

- Excellent inter-personal communication skills.
- Willingness and ability to work in a team.
- Experience in personnel management and leading complex fields of activities.

2. Social Development Officer

Major Responsibilities of the Position

The Social Development Officer is responsible for the conceptual need based strategy development to promote the health of the population. He/she will facilitate, assist and support the District Health Office and communities including the mobilization and coordination of the activities in the field of social development (family and gender, poverty alleviation, community development).

Qualification and Experience

- Bachelor's Degree in Social Science/Health Science
- Minimum of three years working experience in community development programmes
- Knowledge of decentralized district health system
- Knowledge and experience in participatory approaches
- Knowledge and experience in community learning schemes and resource generation
- Excellent writing and communication skills in English and Nepali
- Familiarity with computer and documentation skills

The position demands dynamic and creative person who has the strong personality.

- Excellent inter-personal communication skills.
- Willingness and ability to work in a team.
- Willingness to work with communities in remote areas.

Salary and conditions will correspond to GIZ standard rules for locally employed staff for both positions.

Women are encouraged to apply.

Please send complete application with CV (including passport sized photograph) to: Health Sector Support Programme, GIZ Office, P.O.Box 1467, Kathmandu (marked "Application for the opening given in the top of page 50")

Deadline for application is January 18, 2001. Only short listed candidates will be contacted for interview. No phone calls will be entertained.

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

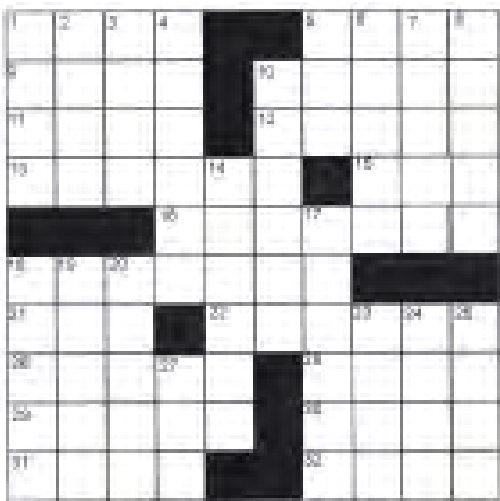


The huge masses of ground fog over North India (seen above) are caused by the moisture brought in by this weekend's rain. In Nepal, the first precipitation of the season brought snow down to 13,000 ft. All caused by a cyclone in the Arabian Sea that pulled in water vapour to Nepal from Central and West Asia. Now, patches of cloud layers are looming over the southern foothills of the Himalaya. Conclusion: more clouds which may bring snow in the Western and Central Himalaya. Sunny days in the hills may be interrupted by these cloudy patches. Kathmandu will have clear days, but expect cold and foggy mornings. The unusually balmy temperatures of the early part of the week will give way to a drop in the mercury.

KATHMANDU

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
22-02	20-04	21-03	21-02	20-03

QUICKWORD 14



Across

- 1 Pass to take a bath (4)
- 5 Hold the horse command (4)
- 9 Headless beach (4)
- 10 Lo-cal eggs: boil, poach, or\_? (5)
- 11 Resoundingly successful car
- 12 Member of Antisthene's
- 13 Sophisticated boombox (6)
- 15 Sloe-eyed or \_-eyed? (3)
- 16 Former dog-slaughterhouse (2,5)
- 18 False move (7)
- 21 Mormon's drop their h's
- 22 Peripheral remarks (6)
- 26 Poe's bird (5)
- 28 Bubbly sweet (4)
- 29 Notify of vigilance (5)
- 30 Tampa, mostly (4)
- 31 Greek instrument (4)
- 32 Erap's times (4)

Down

- 1 Eyeballs (4)
- 2 Agree to compact (4)
- 3 Sir Andrew Aguecheek's
- 4 Holds up the beaches (6)
- 5 Child's eternal question (3)
- 6 Fundo to the south (5)
- 7 Betelgeuse's family (5)
- 8 The shape triumphed, in the
- 9 past (5)
- 10 Checks out scientific
- 11 instruments (6)
- 14 Not quite extinct (6)
- 17 Religion to the masses (6)
- 18 Wall art (5)
- 19 Vespucci sailed from? (5)
- 20 For screens, and in discount
- 21 stores (5)
- 23 Expensive form of
- 24 address (4)
- 24 Excuse me, mother,
- 25 informally (2,2)
- 25 Soaking subsidies (4)
- 27 Bard's past (3)

Terms and conditions

- 1 The contest is open to everyone, except employees of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd and Infocom Pvt Ltd.
- 2 In case of more than one correct entry, the winner will be decided by lucky draw.
- 3 Entries have to reach Himalmedia, by 5 pm, Tuesday.
- 4 The winner will be announced in the coming issue.
- 5 The prize has to be collected from Himalmedia within a week of the announcement. Please come with an ID.

QUICKWORD ANSWER 13



Out of four correct entries the lucky winner is Alan Etherington



To send in your entries, please fill in the details below and fax to 977-1-521013, or email to [crossword@himalmedia.com](mailto:crossword@himalmedia.com). Entries can be dropped off at Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur.

Name.....  
Ph.....email.....



# In the heart of eternity

At the centre of Patan is its Durbar Square, a massive living museum of architecture and art that is endlessly wondrous. For here, treasure is heaped on treasure. Palaces and temples stand harmoniously together as if the builders of many centuries were following a plan conceived when the city was young—a time unhesitatingly described as when gods walked the earth. Historians have the city rebuilt by King Veera Den in the year AD 299. It was a flourishing city when the Emperor Ashoka visited it in about 250 BC, and an impressively large one as measured by the stupas that Ashoka had raised at its cardinal points. The city was apparently built in the shape of a *chakra*, one of the sacred emblems of Vishnu. The planning of its streets and its water and sewage system were ahead of the times. For sheer beauty it was unrivalled. To this day, one has only to stand at the entrance to the Durbar Square to gaze upon Eternity Itself—a description of the city so aptly given by Tibetan traders of olden times.

Along one side of the far reaching square is the Royal Palace, apparently begun in the fourteenth century but almost certainly resting on older

foundations. What an incredible pile it is—of brick and carved wood pierced with golden doors and exquisite windows. Pagoda roofs, many of them gilded and with golden finials, tower one above the other to culminate in the seven-storeyed temple of Taleju, the royal goddess. Opposite the palace, almost filling the square, are temples in stone, brick and wood that are each a masterpiece of its particular age and style. Two stone *shikara* type temples, both dedicated to Krishna, commemorate two widely differing events. One, the sati of eight queens, the wives of King Yoganarendra Malla whose golden statue sits atop a stone pillar in the square, and the other a king's romantic dream. The latter temple tells, in exquisite stone carving, the entire stories of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. It is built on the spot where King Siddhi Nara Singh Malla dreamt he saw Krishna and his consort Radha making love. Before it, on a high lotus pedestal, sits the most beautiful of *garudas* with luminous crystal eyes.

The present contributes pulsating life to what could be an intimidating square. A modern breed of curio dealers spread their wares under huge guardian stone

lions and elephants on tiered temple plinths or on platforms designed for public *durbars* and public entertainment. I have often watched heroic dramas being performed in front of the Taleju temple by petromax lamps and erratic electric lights. By day, huge tourist coaches force the square and camera-laden foreigners are almost as numerous as locals. About the sati temple hill people invariably congregate in a riot of uninhibited colour. The women wear bright beads and coin necklaces. Saucer-sized gold earrings. Flower-shaped nose rings. Gaudy head shawls. Vivid waist bands. Men sport jaunty caps and rough woollen jackets, their song and laughter prompted both by a warming drink and the intoxicating atmosphere of Patan.

The other, more splendid Krishna temple of the royal dream, is as surely thronged with devotees from south India, mostly solemn, often garrulous. Children well versed in the ways of modern tourists and speaking a smattering of several languages pose happily for photographs after the inevitable introduction of 'Hello, one rupee'. This salutation is not to be confused with begging. It is a mere thrust into the great unknown world of the outside and is invariably followed by a conversation something like this:

You where from?

U.S.

You American?

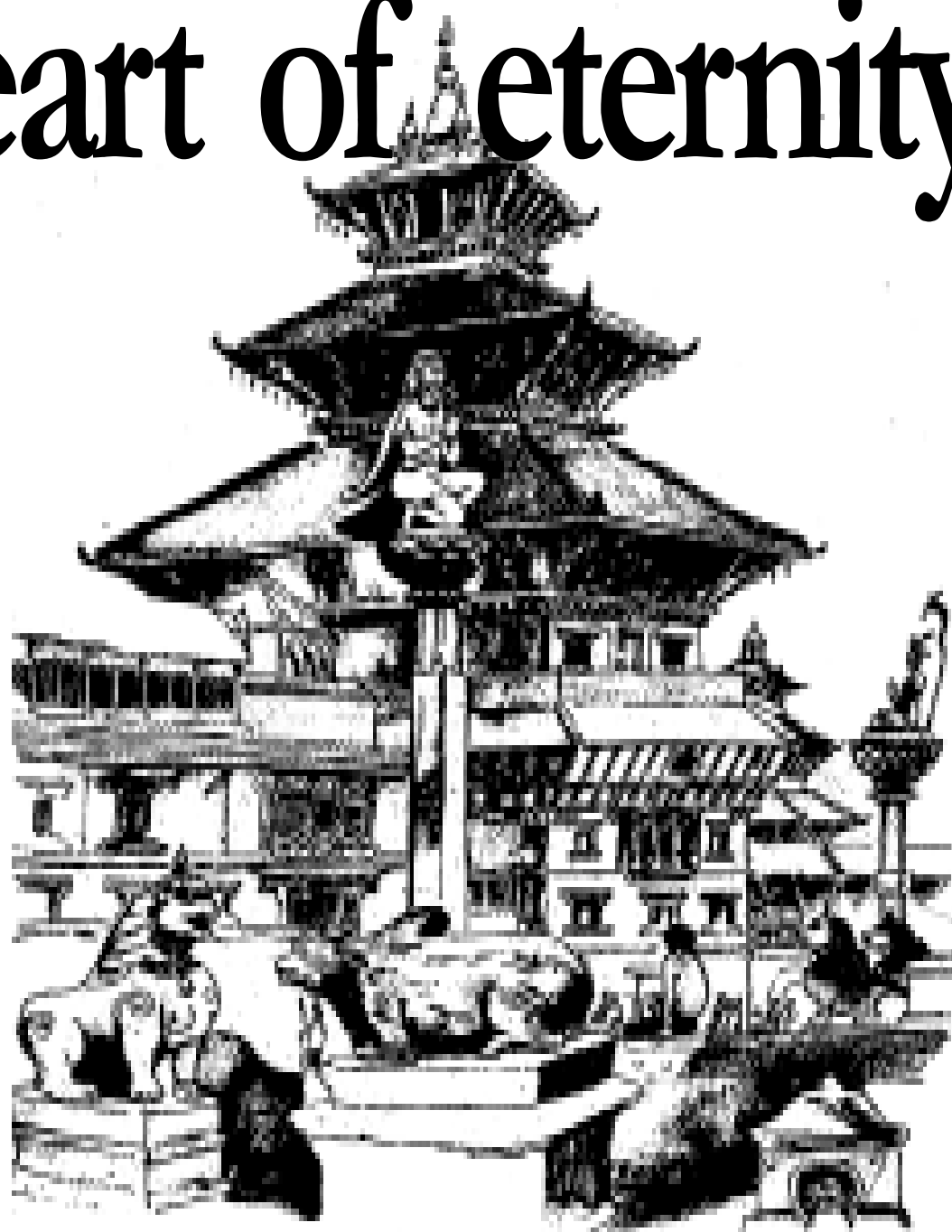
Yes.

Capital Washington D.C.

Right on.

Okay, bye bye, one rupee.

I stood in the shadow of two temples to do my sketch, one dedicated to Narayan and the other, the royal love temple, dedicated to Krishna. In no time I was surrounded by the curious but my view was well guarded by



**Patan was a flourishing city when the Emperor Ashoka visited in 250 BC, and an impressively large one.**

a large Nandi that was from time to time used as a grandstand by children. Ahead of me, in golden silhouette against the tall rise of the Taleju temple, was the lovely Garuda, kneeling reverently in prayer, hands and wings folded, serpents poised about his face. Beyond him, also on a lotus pedestal, was King Yoganarendra Malla, shaded by a rearing serpent. On the head of the serpent sits a bird and thereby

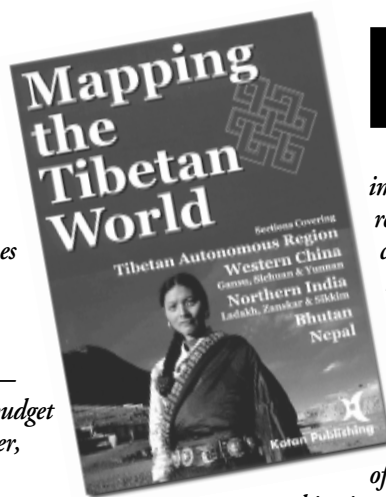
hangs a tale worth telling. The king, tired of his royal living, decided to go into retreat in some distant place from which he never returned. But legend has it that before he left his sorrowing court and people, he promised he would return so long as the gilded bird perched upon the gilded serpent. A window of this palace is still kept open against his return and until a few years ago his bed and hookah stood ready for his instant use.

A bamboo scaffolding begins to spread across the face of the old palace, giving a welcome assurance that this treasury of Newari art is being restored. If the bird knew where to go, it might fly wildly away to tell the old Malla king the good news. And return again to add its romantic tale to a wondrously romantic square. ♦

(Excerpted with permission from In the Kingdom of the Gods, HarperCollins, 1999.)



Durbar Square today



It is surprisingly rare for the content of a book to live up to its enticing title, but *Mapping the Tibetan World*, published in December 2000, does just that. This beautifully produced and quality guidebook to the "Tibetan Cultural Region" (their chosen term) brands itself as being suited for the "budget" traveller, but this claim is unduly modest—anyone interested in exploring the Tibetan world, budget backpacker to five-star organised tour group member, would do well to have this volume in their pocket.

There are various features of the guide which deserve both special attention and praise. First of all, the writers and editors have masterfully tackled a notoriously difficult geopolitical issue: who defines what Tibetan culture is and how far does it stretch? In the Message from the Publishers on page 4, the framework is clear: "We have included all of the areas that can be classed as being within the 'Tibetan Cultural Region', a classification that cuts across 'national' or 'geopolitical' boundaries and encompasses the areas where the people share a common ancestry, culture and religion." As a result, along with carefully thought-out route descriptions of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), there are sections on Western China, Northern India, Bhutan and Nepal.

Second, in the process of addressing the "what counts as Tibet?" conundrum, they have offered judicious presentations of both the pro-Chinese and pro-Tibetan points of view. From page 30 to 34, two competing histories of Tibet are offered side by side, from the Chinese and Tibetan viewpoints respectively. This approach is to be applauded, not least because the editors make it clear that their attempt may have been a "reckless one for a guidebook" (page 30). In fact, despite a veneer of

## Mapping the Tibetoid World

impartiality, the whole book is distinctly pro-Tibetan. This respect and appreciation for Tibetan culture that rings loud and clear in the writing may make it difficult for tourists to consult the book in the open when travelling in Tibet proper, even though there are no explicitly pro-Tibetan political statements.

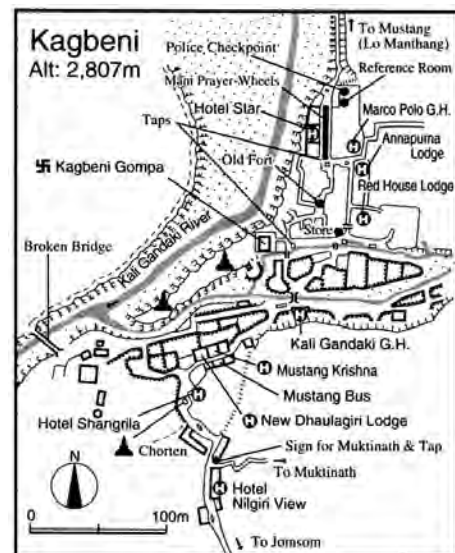
The introductory cultural and historical sections of the guide are well written and beautifully illustrated. Although short, the editors have managed to pack a generous amount of valuable cultural information into very little space without making it seem overcrowded. The few pages charmingly entitled *Unravelling the Thangka Message* are truly insightful and offer an excellent schematic representation of the various elements of Tibetan Buddhist iconography with which one is so frequently confronted when travelling in the Tibetan Buddhist world.

Whilst Nepal does feature in the guide, it is only present in as much as some parts of the country are distinctly and ethnically Tibetan. The section on Nepal opens with the Tibetan word for Nepal, *bal-yul*, superimposed on a photo of the stupa at Boudha, and the short section entitled *The People of Nepal* explicitly lists only the groups of "Tibetan descent", under which the editors include "Gurungs & Magars" (page 319). Throughout this section there is the slight feeling that Nepal is worth visiting because it is an important element of the Tibetan periphery, not because of the antiquity of the Tibetoid way of life which falls within its borders. As a result of this Tibeto-phile and Tibeto-centric perspective, readers of the guide coming to Nepal or India for the first time would be forgiven for wondering where all the Hindus came from.

A welcome touch, and a sign of good sense and humility on the part of

the editors, is a short section on *Other Guidebooks*. Rather than arguing (absurdly) that this guide is the only thing a traveller needs, the pros and cons of six other Tibet guides are listed.

The single most notable and unique feature of *Mapping the Tibetan World* is the abundance of beautifully-drawn line maps. Credit must go to Shozo Tominaga for the precision and artistic simplicity of the 280 maps in this guide, embodying the very best of Japanese graphic design. This guidebook is a perfect travel companion for anyone journeying in the Tibetosphere. It can be purchased from Amazon.com and Snow Lion Publications ([www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com)).



*Mapping the Tibetan World* Kotan Publishing: Reno, NV and Tokyo, Japan. 424 pages, 21 colour photos, 286 black & white photos, 32 illustrations, over 280 maps. \$27.95, £17.95, Japan ¥2,940. ♦

(Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist writing a grammar of the Thangmi language spoken in Dolakha and Sindhupalchowk.)



# Free fall

SALIL SUBEDI

**B**ungy jumping might be the ultimate high and you don't have to go too far to do it. The bungy jump platform above the Bhoite Kosi along the Arniko Highway is only a three-and-a-half hour drive away from Kathmandu. The setting is perfect with its views of the gorge you'll soon be plummeting down, the narrow bends in the river and the dark-brown cliffs cleaving the blue sky.

The waiting is the worst part of the ordeal. It takes the two jumpmasters 10 minutes to secure the cords, hooks and safety paraphernalia like leg-locks (hey, it's a weird sport) to the jumper. The jumpmasters are good and try to put jumpers as much at ease as is possible for someone about to jump off a cliff. And as you step out on the platform, lift your hands high. There are, of course, plenty of ways to do it, but this stance

**Imagine a bridge over a 160m (500ft) tropical gorge with the Bhoite Kosi, one of Nepal's wildest rivers, raging below. Now jump.**

is particularly popular. You can either jump to the countdown of the jumpmasters or have your own little chant going. It's best to jump when you're ready for the dive yourself.

Once you've hurled yourself off the platform, if you're still thinking, it may cross your mind that you're passing through a high momentum time warp. The full gravity pull lasts only about 20 seconds as you drop down to the full extension of the Swiss designed safety factor four bungy cord which weighs 80 kg. You don't need to worry about the bridge collapsing—it has a high load factor, about 4.5 tonnes.

You're almost 200 m away from the bridge. This isn't the end of the madness. The second thrill is the jerk and the up-thrust. When the cord is first extended to its limit, it jerks and you move upwards—against gravity—with the same speed you came down. Now's the time to relax and keep your eyes open. There are about five cycles of this up and down movement before you finally come to equilibrium, and it's quite soothing actually. Then, the jumpmasters on the bridge slowly lower you down, and you wonder what if the foot-locks break? People in the bungy-jumping business and enthusiasts will tell you time and again that safety isn't an issue. Jumping



doesn't require a particularly high level of physical fitness, but you shouldn't do it if you're pregnant or have high blood pressure, vertigo, dislocated joints or epilepsy.

The Ultimate Bungy managed by Last Resorts is the only bungy-jumping operation in Nepal and some say it's one of the most spectacular on the planet. The drop is the longest free-fall in the world. The whole set-up is designed, constructed and operated by experienced Kiwis to international standards. The operation is taking a break right now and will re-open in March. But, if you can't wait to fling yourself off a cliff, just give them a ring (439501). Nepalis get a 60 percent discount (Rs 2,500) on the normal rate of US\$160. This includes transportation between Thamel and the jump site, one jump and lunch. There's also a go-and-just-gape offer for voyeurs (Rs 700). ♦



and



and

BRITISH AIRWAYS

and



and



and



and



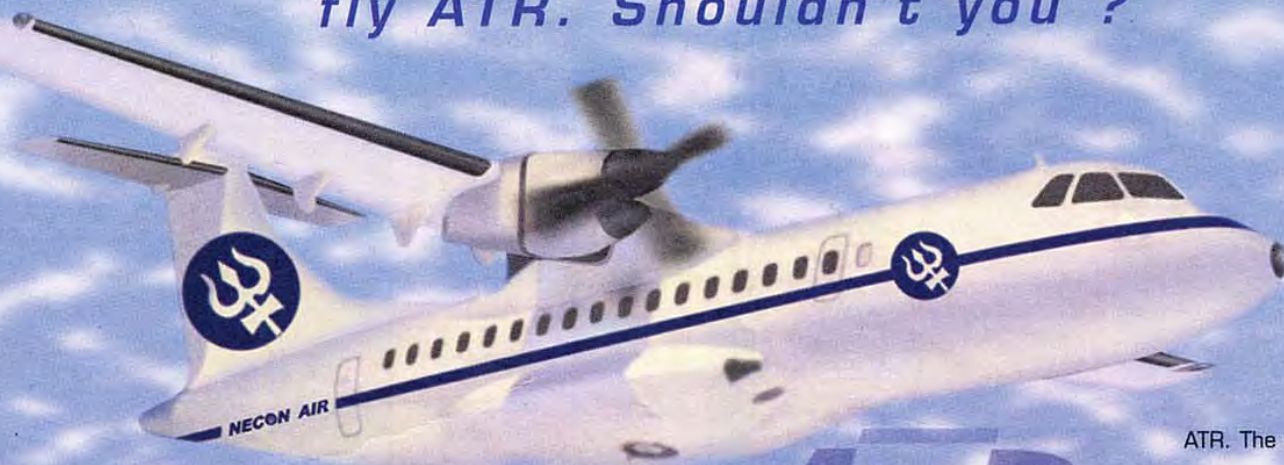
and



and

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# Ram Mandir facelift



The Ramchandra Mandir at Battispatali, north-east of Kathmandu, was crumbling, mismanaged, surrounded by concrete blocks and a haven for junkies.

In 1992, Dr Govinda Tandan of Battispatali formed a nine-member restoration committee with Rs 64,000 contributed by local residents. They repaired the leaking roof, laid a new marble floor, built a staircase to the temple from the main road and wired the structure for electricity. The temple now receives 100-odd devotees daily. During festivals like Nawaratri, Sita Jayanti and Bibaha Panchami, the temple is second only to Janakpur's Janaki temple in popularity, with over 7,000 visitors.

Built in the 19th century by Sanak Singh Tandan "Lahure Chhetri", an army colonel, the temple has five life-size granite statues of Rama, his brothers, and Sita, and a

statue of Hanuman guarding the temple outside. There are numerous murals based on the *Ramayana*, and 10 of the original 32 terracotta butterfly-nymphs set in the walls. Legend has it that 32 butterfly-nymphs carried the throne of King Vikramaditya and dropped it on the hill where the temple is situated, giving it the name Battispatali (*battis-32, putali-butterfly*).

There's an interesting story explaining why Sanak Singh Tandon "Lahure Chhetri", the brother-in-law of Jung Bahadur Rana made the temple on top of the hill. It is believed that he initially wanted the hill to be removed as it obstructed the view of the Valley from his residence nearby. But during excavations he found three pots of gold coins. After receiving permission from the government to spend the treasure any way he



Clockwise from far left: The main Ramchandra Temple as it looks today; restoration work being carried out on the pilgrims' guest house (satal); the satal prior to the restoration; the satal today, partially renovated.



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yo Mann Maagchha **more**

Thompson Nepal 0247900

## HAPPENINGS



HONORARY JYAPU: Prime Minister Koirala receives tika from Hisila Maharjan of the Rajamati Jyapu Mahaguthi at a function on 25 Dec in Basantapur.



ART SHOW: Exhibition of paintings by Pramila and Sumila Bajracharya at the J Rai Gallery on Durbar Marg on 24 December. Looking on is academic Bijay Thapa.



OPEN HOUSE: Women cutting elephant grass for thatch inside the Chitwan National Park during the annual "open house" last week.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

The year has got off to a flying start with two Nothing Doing days already. This bodes well for 2001, and Nepalis can now look forward to an easy-going new millennium in which there will be plenty of lazy days that can be devoted to cleaning up our nooks and crannies, something we have no time for in the mad rush of a normal office day. There will finally be time on our hands to extract wads of lint from inside our belly buttons which can be sold in bulk as raw material for our nation's dollar-earning pashmina industry, we can use matchsticks to mine for globs of wax from deep inside our ear shafts, and we can at last gain access to hard-to-reach blackheads and squish them before they are ripe for eruption.

I don't know what you did on January 1-2, but I did nothing. I was bunned. Doing nothing is finally going to save our landlocked Himalayan kingdom of high mountain ranges, beautiful natures, and much floras and faunas from self-destruction. We mess up everything we do, so not doing anything lessens the chances of doing something wrong. In the same manner, the chances of our rulers doing the right thing are so remote that the leftist opposition thinks it is a much better idea to have them just sit at home and not lift a finger. That way the likelihood of someone somewhere wrecking something is reduced. Through trial and error over the past 50 years we have finally hit on the right formula for governance in our country: it is better to allow our rulers to goof off than to have them actually rule. For example, if our Minister of Rumour and Miscommunication had stayed home to exhume ear wax with a matchstick instead of trying to declare war on India, this country may still have some spare tyres left. What a relief it was, therefore, that on Monday and Tuesday we could snore



away in the comfort of our own homes, snug and cosy in the knowledge that nothing was going to go wrong, because not one person in this glorious land of ours was actually doing anything.

It should therefore be every Nepali's patriotic duty (not just the patriotic duty of the nine bums) to find creative new reasons to declare bandhs in 2001:

February: Old Diesel Bus Owners will protest the rising concentration of oxygen in the Valley's air. The capital's residents demand their normal daily dose of diesel soot particles in the 5-10 micron range.

March: An alliance of seven student unions threaten to declare a Valley Bandh to demand that the government make available more tyres for their flaming

street barricades.

April: Hotel guests throughout Nepal go on a week-long strike to demand that their right to tip waiters and staff be restored. They threaten to stay on in Nepal indefinitely so that hotel occupancy will be 100 percent for the rest of the year.

May: Petrol-pump shutdown to demand right to dilute diesel by adding pure Himalayan spring water.

June: Journalists pen-down to protest increased workload caused by Congress infighting.

July: The Rotary Club of Chapagaon (Revolutionary) declares a three-day bandh to demand more bandhs because Rotarians don't have enough time to keep their nooks and crannies squeaky clean, and the drop in the number of Nothing Doing Days is seriously affecting the pashmina industry. ♦

ambassador  
whisky

NEPALI SOCIETY

LIZ

Who was the first to climb the South Face of Lhotse alpine style? In which year was Dhaulagiri climbed for the first time? Who was Alex McIntyre's climbing partner during his attempt on Annapurna in 1983 in which he died? For answers to these questions and many, many more, just ask Elizabeth Hawley, Nepal's walking encyclopaedia on mountaineering in Nepal.

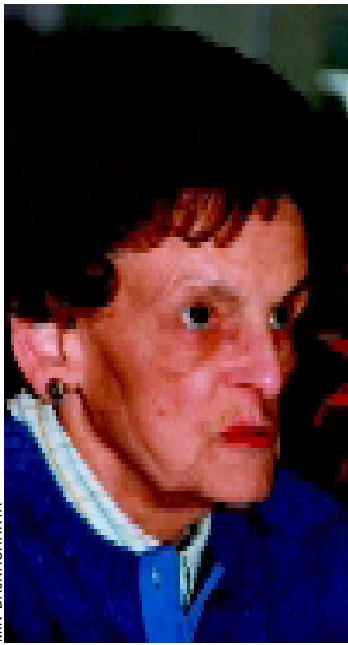
When she first arrived in Nepal in 1959, five years after the first tourist came to Kathmandu, Liz Hawley never thought she'd stay so long. Forty years later, she has firmly established herself as a legendary chronicler of mountaineering. She has been living in her bungalow in Dilli Bazaar for most of the time here driving her trademark blue 1963 Volkswagen Beetle to and from the airport to interview mountaineers as they flew back from expeditions. It has become a mandatory ritual for most climbers in Nepal to meet and brief her on their expeditions.

Says Liz: "Sometimes it's as boring as hell. If there are 29 teams on Cho-Oyu you get bored with it. But fortunately now, I don't have to meet all of them. New routes, new attempts, something new is always happening."

Word has got around among mountaineers and others in Kathmandu that Liz does not suffer fools. She can be blunt, brusque and impatient. After all, she has a deadline to meet. Today, Liz employs two assistants to meet expeditions, there is just too much happening during the mountaineering season. But at a sprightly 77, Liz still does many of her interviews herself.

Liz Hawley's database of mountaineering is the product of a lifetime of meticulous interviews, reporting and collection. Much of this information, plus original statistical analyses of trends in climbing in the Nepal Himalaya will be published in a book that Liz is working on along with fellow American, computer expert and climber, Richard Salisbury.

"We have no idea when we will really finish—we hope



It has become a mandatory ritual for most climbers in Nepal to meet and brief Elizabeth Hawley on their expeditions.

possibly by the end of the year. But I'm not sure, I wouldn't hold my breath waiting," says Liz. She says the growth in the number of expeditions in Nepal is due to a freer political climate in Eastern Europe, the easy accessibility of foreign currency, and to increasingly more affluent societies like Japan and South Korea.

Seated in her study, surrounded by books, journals and reference works on mountaineering, Liz acknowledges the guidance of climber and explorer Colonel Jimmy Roberts, who enabled her to become an authority on the Nepali Himalaya climbing scene without ever setting foot on a mountain. "I like mountain scenery, I think it's great, I just don't need to climb them," she adds. Liz enjoys Kathmandu's climate ("Kathmandu is not under a foot of snow like New York is at the moment") and it's easygoing lifestyle where it is possible to live comfortably and frugally.

When she first came to Kathmandu she had quit her job as an editorial researcher for Fortune magazine in New York and had travelled extensively through Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, the West and South Asia. "I came back on purpose in September 1960 because I thought it would be interesting to see how Nepal was going to cope with the 20th century," she says. A year earlier, BP Koirala had become Prime Minister under a democratic constitution promulgated by King Mahendra. This exercise in parliamentary democracy was short-lived and 19 months later Koirala was put in jail. Writing about it began Liz's career as Kathmandu-based foreign

correspondent for Reuters and Time.

Her reporting spanned the Panchayat years, the subsequent political upheavals, the death of King Mahendra, King Birendra's coronation, and through it all hundreds of successful mountaineering expeditions and tragedies on the mountains. Liz gave up political reporting for Reuters after her stories on the 1985 bomb blasts raised hackles in the government. But she still reports on mountaineering and writes for climbing journals in nine countries. She also continues to manage Sir Edmund Hillary's charity, the Himalayan Trust and serves as the Honorary Consul for New Zealand in Nepal.

"Nepal is still experiencing growing pains with parliamentary democracy. Things aren't so rosy but then this kind of problem occurs when you have a combination of great poverty and an enormous number of unemployed youth who have nothing to do but to throw bricks," she says.

In 1994, the American Alpine Club, of which she is a member, presented her its literary award. And in 1998 she was awarded the King Albert Medal of Merit presented by a Swiss foundation to "persons or institutions who have distinguished themselves in some way in the mountain world". The rapid growth in satellite technology and the live coverage of climbing exploits on the web may have undermined her role as a mountaineering correspondent, but it doesn't seem to prevent Liz from always having the definitive last word. "I am getting scooped. But my reports give an assessment, quite often, of the significance of a climb. They put it in perspective." ♦

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