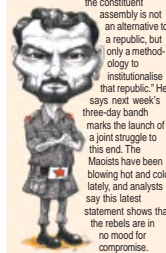


**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Headline Baburam**

Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai has hurried another broadcast at the monarchy just as analysts were saying the rebels were softening their approach. In what appears to be an effort to drive another wedge between the political parties and the king, and exploit the current strained relations between them, Bhattarai calls for unity among "democratic forces" to build on the gains of the 1990 People's Movement. Bhattarai argues that significant changes were taking place at the geopolitical level that affected the strategic balance of power in Nepal. He directs the leaders of the political parties not to be spellbound by the monarchy. "We never gave up our program for a republican state," said the architect-turned-revolutionary. "In fact, the constituent assembly is not an alternative to a republic, but only a methodology to institutionalise that republic." He says next week's three-day bandh marks the launch of a joint struggle to this end. The Maoists have been blowing hot and cold lately, and analysts say this latest statement shows that the rebels are in no mood for compromise.



**BHAGIRATH YOGI**  
Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand has been so busy launching CDs and giving speeches about the importance of art and literature for national upliftment, that he doesn't seem to have time for much else.

To be fair, Chand has been doing the rounds lobbying hard to cajole party stalwarts to lend support to his administration. But Dasain and Tihar have slowed things down, and no "untainted" politician seems eager to join his technocrat-dominated nine-member cabinet.

The public's perception is that the interim administration is off to a slow start.

The health and finance ministers did announce plans for reform: further belt-tightening on expenditure and a new health insurance scheme. But the public is skeptical about more plans, and wants to see immediate and dramatic improvements in service delivery. The one thing that has received widespread acclaim is the strong action by the anti-corruption body to send former Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka, information minister Jayaprakash Prasad Gupta and others, including the chairman of Royal Nepal Airlines, to jail.

The main focus of the government's work is: a) lure political parties into the fold, and b) bring Maoists in to talk. On both, the results so far have been discouraging. The two major political parties, Nepali Congress and CPN (UML), are still vocally defiant about the king's decision, and have refused point-blank to join the Chand cabinet. Both are mobilising the party machinery for mass meetings in the coming weeks. "The situation is forcing us towards

confrontation, even though we want to avoid it," UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal told his party paper.

Despite their tough talk, the political leadership realises that public opinion is still cautiously supportive of the king's action. And Chand's lobbying has partly paid off: he finally secured official blessings of his own party, the RPP. While he takes the softly-softly approach, Chand seems to be letting his deputy, Badri Prasad Mandal of the Sadbhavana Party, carry the big stick. Mandal is hammering political parties for not joining the government. He told a meeting in Kathmandu last week: "The government will march on even if the major parties don't join us."

# Divided they fall

One month into office, Chand government is getting little help from squabbling politicians.



Sources close to Baluwater told us Chand is wooing some big-name Congress and UML, as well as more RPP and NSP leaders. He may also add technocrats and "politically savvy" figures to help him negotiate with Maoists, the source said.

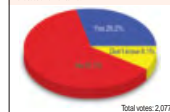
And that is Chand's biggest challenge. The Maoists have been playing good-cop-bad-cop, alternating seemingly conciliatory statements with headline ones to divide political parties and the king. Prachanda has renewed his call for a roundtable between the king, political parties and the Maoists to debate a constituent assembly and have hinted that they may accept the constitutional monarchy if the king agreed to relinquish control over the army.

However, Baburam Bhattarai this week published an uncompromising public-or-nothing statement that dashed all hopes that the Maoists were bending (See box).

While there are no signs of direct talks between the government and the rebels, sources say secret contacts have been established "at the highest level". India's role is said to be pivotal here, since the Maoists use Indian territory for training, supplies and shelter. New Delhi says it wants the king to take the political parties on board while negotiating with the rebels, but disunity among political parties and their mistrust of the king's intentions is preventing this approach.

Editorial 02  
Un-United nation

**Times**  
Weekly Internet Poll #10  
Q. Do you think Maoist leader Prachanda is serious in his latest offer for talks?



Weekly Internet Poll #10 To vote go to [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)  
Q. Which of the following offers the best solution to the present political impasse:  
an interim all party government  
constituent assembly election  
reinstatement of parliament rules of the above

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## Chandra Kumari is happy now

**RAMYATA LIMBU**  
"Mam hamrida. Very very sorry," Choi Sung Kak, a well-known South Korean writer, stood in front of Chandra Kumari Gureng in Kimche village near Pohara last month, head bowed and palms together. Choi wasn't tumbling for words to express guilt for any action of his own, he was apologising for his country.  
Chandra Kumari went to Korea to work as a labourer in 1992, a healthy and excited woman nearing 40. In 1993, she disappeared.  
A meal Chandra Kumari couldn't pay for was the start of the nightmareish six years and four months that this normal, balanced Nepali woman spent in Korea's national psychiatric hospital. After her release, Chandra Kumari, with the help of angry South Koreans, sued the Republic of Korea and Dong-san Jang, director of the Chung-nyang-ri mental hospital. "Because of the carelessness of the Korean police and state, she ended up in the hospital, where she had no business being," said Choi, who is also vice-president of Nature Trail, the Korean NGO that helped Chandra return home on 14 June, 2000.

Of the nearly 2,000 Nepalis working in Korea, 99 percent are illegal. Many have been there since they went to South Korea legally since 1991, under a "trainee program". Since that program expired, there has been no formal labour agreement between the two governments. Activists like Choi and Nepalis considering working in South Korea hope that Chandra's case will set a precedent for better labour laws for migrant workers.

When Korean police arrested Chandra Kumari she couldn't explain to them that she had lost her wallet. She had no valid papers, and couldn't communicate to the police her contact address and phone number. She just realised

she was Nepali, not Korean, and said "I don't know" in Korean to every question they asked," said Lee Seong-gyu, a journalist working on a documentary about Nepali migrant workers. With her Gureng looks she could have mistaken for a Korean. "But there's no excuse for such a devastating mistake," Lee told us.

Throughout her stay in the psychiatric hospital, Chandra Kumari was kept alone in a room. A doctor there familiar with Nepal met her, and contacted Lee Geun Hoo, a member of Nature Trail and founder of the Yei Cafe in Seoul. Lee, a professor who has been coming to Nepal regularly for 15 years, visited the hospital. The story was publicised by Nature Trail, and created an uproar in Korea.

Soon after her release from the hospital in April 2000 Korean lawyer Suk-tae Lee helped Chandra file a lawsuit demanding compensation for her incarceration, and a formal apology from the South Korean state. The court arrived at a ruling 5 November, and awarded Chandra just over \$23,500. Choi says the amount is insulting, and that NGOs and Chandra's lawyer are preparing to appeal. "Still, no amount of money can ever right the wrong that the Korean state committed against Chandra," Choi told us when in Nepal last month to hand over money that the Korean public has donated to Chandra.

"She's a totally different woman today from the one we met in Korea," says Choi. Chandra Kumari is now taking care of her elderly father. (See also *Seven years with my Korean father's*, p. 4-5.)



Chandra Kumari, left, with family and friends in Kimche.

**SEVENTEEN**

**Gem of an Engine. Jewel of a Car.**

**CIC**

**HYUNDAI**

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**HONDA**



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

Individually, we are proud to be Nepalis, but we can't seem to be collectively proud to be Nepalis. We like Nepal, but can't seem to stand other Nepalis. Especially if they are Nepalis who are doing well for themselves. It is this frog-in-the-well psyche that has kept us from getting ahead—if one frog tries to take a leap, another will drag it down. In fact, there are many examples of Nepalis who have excelled in societies where there are no other Nepalis to pull them back.

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

With misplaced pride on that scale, it is no wonder

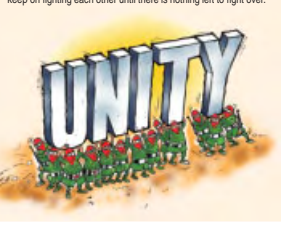
that we can't work together. Just look at our track record. Communist parties the world over are known for their divisiveness, but even by international standards, our comrades have set world records in disunity. Replicating through binary fission like amoeba, we have more communist factions per capita than any other nation on earth. Doctored candidates have done their PhDs trying to unravel the sequence, and keep track of the splits.

And it's not just politics. We have two ANFs, two PARSONS, two mountaineering associations, two film artists' associations, and at least four there were three rival political science associations. One of Nepal's most professional and successful domestic airlines split in two because of sibling rivalry (the smaller airline went by the nickname "Brother Air").

We don't know how bad it is in other countries, but it could be that this is a mentality common to poor countries, where the people are left to quarrel over small pickings. They end up fighting each other instead of those who are cheating them. Congress vs Congress vs Congress, UML vs Congress, UML vs ML, ML vs ML, RPP vs RPP, ironically, even the leftist party that called itself "Unity Centre" eventually split. Usually the reasons are not ideological, but personal envy, jealousy and pride. Somehow, the Maoists have not split yet. But give them time. They are Nepalis after all.

In the west, democracy celebrates differences of opin-

ion. There's a rule, you agree to disagree but with a point and not a person," sociologist Krishna Bhattachan explained to us. "In Nepal, people tend to disagree with the person." And because we take things so personally, we haven't been a nation been able to transform our genuine and deeply-felt sense of national pride into a unity of purpose. We can, and must, override our ingrained cultural individualism to achieve a sense of collective destiny. Otherwise we will just keep on fighting each other until there is nothing left to fight over.



by CK LAL

# STATE OF THE STATE

## The four wheels of democracy

Everything a constituent assembly can do, a sovereign parliament can do better.

Propelled by the rumours of an impending settlement between Maoist rebels and the palace, the trial balloon of a constituent assembly is again up in the air. But will such an assembly create more problems, rather than solve our existing ones, remains to be answered satisfactorily.

Controversy over the constituent assembly dates back to 1951, when King Tribhuvan proclaimed: "If being our desire and decision that our people, henceforth, be governed by a democratic constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly, elected by them..." The royal

"desire and decision", however, never got implemented. After a decade of uncertainty, political parties accepted King Mahendra's proposal to go directly for parliamentary politics.

Perhaps King Mahendra had expected that a hung parliament would give him some room for political manoeuvring. The electorate, as is its wont, threw cold water over the ambitions of the king. Voters granted a surprise and gave the Nepal Congress a two-thirds majority. In effect, this meant that the new parliament

was almost a constituent assembly—it could amend all the provisions of the constitution save its fundamental principles. Alarmed by that possibility, King Mahendra dismissed parliament and put the first elected prime minister of the country in jail within 18 months of the general elections and reneged on the solemn promise made by his father.

The demand for an elected constituent assembly remained dormant all through the years of struggle for restoration of democracy. When BP Koirala

came back from political exile announcing that the king was "joined to the rest", the constitutional monarchy became an article of faith with the Nepali Congress.

Some fringe groups on the left, particularly the Nepal Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) then running a violent campaign in Jhapa, did espouse the dictatorship of the proletariat, but most mainstream political forces had their problems with absolute monarchy, not with the monarchy as such. After the referendum verdict, BP Koirala told Bhele Chatterji of Calcutta's Sunday magazine in 1979 that the Nepali Congress was not for monarchy, but "kingship". Kingship, according to Hindu scriptures, is power held by ruler in trust—on behalf of the ruled, and with the consent of his subjects. Such a concept has no place for absolute monarchy or executive king.

Perhaps King Gyandendra alluded to this distinction when he told me earlier this year that the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal 1990 was a document of compromise between three political forces of the country—democrats represented by the Nepal Congress, communists represented by the Left Front, and the rest of the people represented by the king. There is only one problem with this interpretation of the People's Movement of 1990: how do we know whether the rest of us want the king to be our representative? The answer, as many self-proclaimed

acolytes of BP Koirala have begun to propose after 4 October, may lie in the formation of a constituent assembly empowered to debate the future of monarchy itself.

However, in a country in the violent grips of insurgency and counter-insurgency, the idea of a constituent assembly has its own pitfalls. First, free and fair polls aren't possible when armed insurgents terrorise the countryside with impunity. Second, there is nothing to stop an engineered assembly from initiating a process of republicanism eventually leading to the abolition of monarchy.

What is perhaps needed more urgently is a sincere attempt to understand the wheeled vehicle of the democratic train back on track. We all know what those wheels are: legislative assembly constituted by adult franchise, an executive body formed by majority elections, an independent judiciary to ensure rule of law, and a constitutional monarchy as a symbol of unity of all Nepalis.

Given the history of animosity between democratic forces and the king, the restlessness among the rank and file of the Nepal Congress is perhaps understandable. But a confrontation between the two at this juncture is the last thing that we need. In fact, it was Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba who badly wounded the constitution by his midnight recommendation for the dissolution of parliament. All political parties then took their turn to rub salt over the wound. Under the circumstances, the worst thing that King Gyandendra can do is to hold elections for the constituent assembly once again.

By declaring that the state authority is inherent in the king rather than the people, King Gyandendra has virtually brought out the square wheel from the Narayanhiti attic. But that should not give an excuse to a galaxy of constitutional experts and political scientists like Bishwanath Upadhyay, Daman Nath Dhungana, Narhari Acharya, Lok Raj Baral, Krishna Khanal and Krishna Hattechhu to get engaged in the pointless task of reinventing the circular wheel.

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Given the current economic and political turmoil, it is our moral responsibility to try to break the impasse by looking at solutions. What compromise will result in the greatest public good?

Given the near-consensus on commitment to constitutional monarchy and the multiparty system, a compromise strategy can emerge around the notion of the Constituent Assembly. Such an assembly of elected representatives to draft a new constitution can, if properly handled, serve as a common denominator to bring all the parties together.

There, they can address the anomalies that have contributed to this chaotic system: institutional corruption, regional imbalances, lack of separation of power, unstable governments, centralised decision making, lack of transparency in governments and politics, grand voices of political and ethnic minorities in public policy debates, and missed opportunity to exploit our vast natural resources for the benefit of the millions.

An election for a constituent assembly is based on an election just like a parliamentary election. Recently, countries like South Africa, Namibia, and East Timor have successfully used this democratic process to form constituent assemblies to write (or rewrite) their constitutions. After ratifying the document, the constituent assemblies have then been converted into parliamentary assemblies.

These constituent assemblies used a more inclusive electoral method—proportional representation, where seats are allocated based on the percentage of the popular parties. Our current method of election is the winner-take-all Westminster model.

Going from historical experience downwards, a constituent assembly in

# Shock therapy

Nepal can also be expanded to include the members of the Upper House to make the process more inclusive and if necessary the chamber may be reformed through fresh election. An all-party interim government may be needed to ensure fairness during the election process.

An exercise in forming a constituent assembly must take advantage of this opportunity to set the following agenda: empowerment, separation of powers, and a code of conduct.

The grassroots must be empowered by devolving decision-making powers through a system of decentralised regional governments. These new constituencies should then clearly define the tasks of the three layers: village, region, and center. A proportional representation system would also allow a higher level of representation from the smaller parties and provide a voice to the minorities, and force dominating parties to be more inclusive.

Most genuine democrats have given up the first past the post Westminster model for proportional representation. Put simply, this system puts half its representatives based on the current single constituency winner-take-all method, and the other half are elected based on the percentage of the popular votes that each party receives nationally or regionally.

The meaningfulity of royal powers and responsibilities need to be clarified to avoid future conflict between the constitutional monarchy and parliamentary forces. This separation of powers would not completely remove royalism, especially during the general election. Similarly, a direct election of the Prime Minister, as in Israel, would make the executive hard to replace to the benefit of the royal power. The king would have to appoint or dismiss the prime minister. By allowing the premier to pick cabinet

# A Beautiful Mess

Nobel Prize winning mathematical genius John Nash, in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, goes to a bar with his friends, and upon seeing four women including a blonde he observes the following: "If every one were to go after the blonde, the chances are that everyone would go all home without the pleasure of female company. The best solution is to reduce this non-cooperative competitive situation into a cooperation game by changing the strategy by agreeing to ignore the blonde, thereby increasing the chance of going home with the other less attractive beauties."

The lesson for Nepal is that competitive non-cooperation with a potentially disastrous outcome can be avoided by following a cooperative game that results in a better outcome for all concerned.

members, with approval of the House, would not reduce conflict of interest. There also needs to be an agreed code of conduct: the nation, government, and government resources belong to the people. Through elections, political parties can only temporary outposts. We must therefore demand from them internal democracy and transparency. Irresponsible behaviour by the rank and file can lead to non-formation of people of questionable characters, and the whole nation suffers.

The current rift between the king and democratic forces has turned what was once a two-party game into a three-way contest. Even the Maoist leadership has now acknowledged this tripartite power struggle.

The king has the backing of the Royal Nepal Army. The Maoist command is a well-defined cadre base. The political parties may be foundering at times, but they do have a grassroots base and can campaign on the banner of democracy. This position may seem stable, but it is a static equilibrium because there is no incentive for anyone to change their course. We could linger in this limbo for a long time.

The army will require a significant

increase in resources to crush the rebellion, but not without a stable human hand. The Maoists will remain relatively elusive but will not be able to overrun the country to establish one-party communist state, especially since India is now on their trail. The political parties, because of their own shortcomings, are not likely to muster much people's support to replace 1990 Part Two. But they will remain vocal, increasingly united, and influential.

The country has thus been stagnant for the last seven years, with a deadly outcome that has decimated the economy and resulted in more than 5,000 deaths. What will be the next best move that will bring everyone closer to a solution acceptable to everyone so that the nation can be spared from this mindless carnage?

The current stalemate in Nepal can be broken with shock therapy, and that could very well be a constituent assembly. It requires a sacrifice principle, but that may be the only way. ♦

(Alok K Bohara, PhD, is professor of economics of the University of New Mexico, USA.)

# LETTERS

## COMMON SENSE

And so it goes on. The seemingly endless spiral of murder and mayhem. Amidst all this we have to bear witness to the inexorable extension of all that we hold good: faith, basic human decency, wisdom and compassion.

The sickening squabbles amongst these panths of politics hold the entire nation in its hostage. They brandish the constitution as a fig leaf to explain away all their shenanigans and in the meantime everyone lives in abject terror. The countless deaths become nothing more than "collateral damage", the citizens suffer from viewer fatigue and readers like us, who enjoy the relative luxury of life in the US, can safely take angry, bombastic pot shots at the Maoists and the politicians from this distance.

Meanwhile heroes like Mohan Khatri and Krishna Saksika die everyday, and all we can do is what I can't do to show my respect and gratitude for these selfless martyrs who have laid down their lives for the greater cause of life and liberty. Right from day one, your paper has always espoused the democratic and common sense that King Gyandendra has asserted himself, within the framework of the constitution, to address the grievances of long-suffering Nepalis? They know the political

The solution will not be painless. I just say it is not too late. T Sherpa, Seattle, USA

What political parties' responses to King Gyandendra's move has shown is what Nepalis have known all too well all along: that the parties have neither the political will nor the stomach to confront the myriad crimes that have beset the nation. As you have pointed out in your editorial ("Common sense in uncommon times"), political parties were given a free hand for 12 years, they had the chance to attempt to solve the problem of Maoist insurrection, the rampant corruption in the highest echelons of government, rampant lawlessness and a languishing refugee crisis screaming for attention. Instead what they did was to let the Maoists and the politicians from this distance.

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parties have utterly and ruthlessly failed. The confrontational approach, using language loaded with thinly veiled threats against the king being adopted by the political parties and their refusal to join the government have demonstrated how completely vacuous, out-of-touch and morally bankrupt they have become. The real threat to the security, dignity and sovereignty of the Nepali people does not emanate from Narayanhiti, but is the past 12 years have demonstrated it comes from the lies of King Koirala, Madhav Nepal, Baburam Bhattarai and their ilk.

Bishwa Basnet, by email

## CK LAL

If Mahakali is dancing, it's CK Lal who's keeping the beat. How disappointing to see Lal's moving tribute to Major Khatri ("The purity of pure despair", #117) degenerate into laudatory pontifications on the death of his old friend. He mourns the death of hope in the country, but at I've heard since 4 October is that there is some. And now there is little hope. The king is getting mired-eyed about the passing of "the sovereignty of the people" when the pretend-democracy at play in Nepal for the last 12 years clearly gave birth to no such thing. Their indifference to political thought and action and their quite invincible complacency, moreover, has qualified the Nepali people for an adventure

into people power in the first place. They have tolerated not in their air, water, and streets, what reason on earth was there to suppose that they would not also tolerate it in their government? The hard truth is that the Nepali people, whom I love dearly, have deserved every long and cruel they've kept in King in Singhra Druk. In the king they have neither, consequently, the hope.

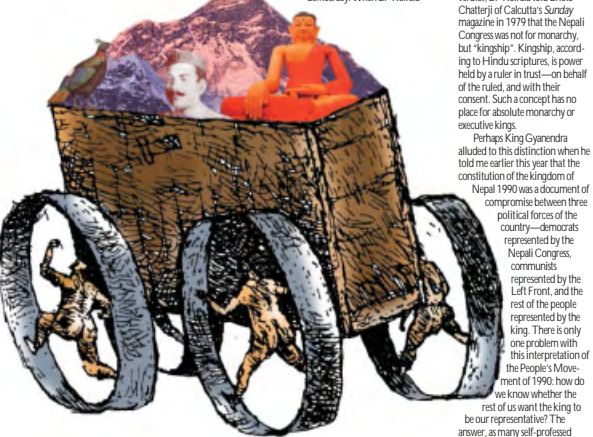
Lal is contemptuous of the "sanctimonious judgments" of donors (the writer in his familiar xenophobic mode), but that begs the question why it is not the business of donors to set their largesse safely to its destinations, or pass judgement on the success or failure of its arrival. Doesn't his resentment sell the larger problem of Nepal's failed democracy? Is aversion to accountability? The contradiction in Lal's thought mirrors the paradox of Nepal's commitment to democracy. Both support when and if the dust settles, it will be on the backs of thousands of people with his character and dreams that the country will pick up the pieces. God bless his family.

## MOHAN KHATRI

Thanks to Kunda Dixit for his appreciation piece on Major Khatri, despite the unnecessary underhanded jab at the RNA. ("The villagers' support kept me going," #116) Major Khatri, by all accounts, lived a life of challenge—translating his rugged dreams into reality with money saved from his army days. He is one of many unsung Nepali heroes: an entrepreneur that helps himself and others through productive activity and then extends his benevolence to the community. He was a capitalist caught between politicians with the mentality of hyenas (no offense to hyenas) and individuals pursuing a pathetic and defunct ideology that has unleashed an incredible evil on this land. His work seems to have ended too soon. How many others like him have been wasted by this mess? I hope people remember this man someday because when and if the dust settles, it will be on the backs of thousands of people with his character and dreams that the country will pick up the pieces. God bless his family.

P Rana, by email

As someone who has been fortunate enough to have had the chance to visit your lovely country, I was deeply saddened and shocked to read about the





# Seven years with my Korean fathers

**A first-person account of Pasang Sherpa's quest to support his family, tracking years of backbreaking work in South Korea, his deep friendships, and deception.**

On 28 January, 1992, I left Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport to go to Korea to work. My family shed tears as they placed a khada around my neck. As I walked toward the aircraft, I looked back and saw my mother and aunt crying and waving to me from the balcony of the airport. I when to Korea.

When we landed at Kimpo airport, I walked quickly to the immigration counter. The broker had told us to stand in line behind workers, if possible, so that the inspection would not be very thorough. But everyone in the line was South Asian. My legs were trembling and my heart was pounding. If I couldn't get a visa, I would have to return to Nepal. I had borrowed Rs 70,000 to go to get a job in Korea. After the interview, which was easier than I thought, I received a visa for a 15-day stay. It seemed that what the broker was right, it was better to give short answers. Almost every time I received the visa without problems.

We took a taxi from the airport to Taewon Street, which is similar to Thamel. There were many Nepalis, among the swarms of foreigners there and we felt at ease. There we met a man called Raju Thapa, who was responsible for finding us jobs. On the

subway to Uijongbu, Raju said that we must not stare at young women on the train, as it would cause a big problem. For two hours we stared out of the darkened windows, like idiots. I was really worried about whether or not I would be able to make a living in this country.

Raju took us to the home of the company's owner, Mr Yoo, in Uijongbu. I had heard he never knew foreigners before and were curious about all sorts of things. We didn't have much of an appetite for Korean food, so we ate bread and milk. Raju told us Mr Yoo would give us 100,000 won, and that our salaries would gradually increase. We didn't even think to check that. The day that we arrived at 00 Steel's sales outlet in the town of Taesangji, Kwangju, in the province of Kyunggi, it was raining. I had suddenly come to this snowy country and was really worried about living here.

The first day was really hard because of the language barrier. I used body language, my hands and feet. Outside, the snow was piling up and it was very cold—ten degrees below zero. For the first time in my life I was so far from home. I was used to living here? Fortunately, one of the labourers who worked with me loading and unloading goods from the

truck spoke a little English. Ja Gil Kim was about my age. Thanks to him, I learnt to speak Korean quickly. He taught me the work too. Whenever he worked, we sat on the packing boxes and studied. I am still grateful to him. Employees of Mr Yoo's personal service company, we provided services such as loading, unloading, and transporting metal furniture such as file boxes, clothes cabinets, lockers, desks, chairs, etc. for 00 Steel's sales outlet.

My name is Pasang Sherpa. I was born in the village of Lunglung, eastern Nepal, at 1,500 m in the foothills of Kangchenjunga in 1971, the oldest of three sons and two daughters. I attended high school in Lelep town, about an hour and half's walk away. I was the only one in my high school class to pass the university entrance exam. My mother laughed and prepared a large goat and held a party for the whole village. It was natural for my mother, who only has a third grade education, to be elated about the fact that her son could enter the university.

In 1990, I entered the Peoples' Campus college in Kathmandu. I lived in Chitragad with my aunt, who made longba. My aunt and I worked busily from 4 PM to midnight. We made longba from more than 100 kg of milled every day. It wasn't easy. You have to clean out your hands and feet were when they got wet. I went to school at 6 AM and took classes for three hours. I continued this for two years, and during that time I kept hearing about college fees and longba to earn money. I too began thinking about working overseas. I then met the broker and left my native land.

Soon after, I was pinned by another Nepali, Sri Ram. Mr Yoo told us not to refer to him as the owner,

but to call him father. We did just that. We worked for 'father' Yoo for over three years. We went to his house in Uijongbu for rest and relaxation every Saturday. We played cards, ate barbecued pork, drank soju (clear, hard Korean liquor), and went to karaoke. His wife treated us well, preparing delicious food for us, even giving us clothes to wear.

But the first year I was lonely and cold every day. The fear of deportation was the biggest fear for foreign workers who were staying in Korea illegally. Once, a policeman entered our workplace. Sri Ram hid in a container of dyed fabric, and I, with my small frame, hid in the closet. It's funny now, but at that time it made my hair stand on end.

For a while, I could only think of my home and family. Sometimes I cried. Soon thereafter I learned to speak a little Korean, how to do the work, the names of the products, and my skills in loading and unloading goods increased, and the work gradually became fun.

We had to unload 27-ton containers from the 00 Steel factory in

Taejeon, and three 8-ton trucks, and put their contents in the warehouse, and then load more than ten 2.5-ton trucks and more than twenty 1.5-ton truck loads of goods. I really worked hard. We also completely changed the work methods. Instead of moving goods on a wagon, we carried them on our backs, shoulders, or heads. We cut down the unloading time of a large container of goods from three hours to one hour.

Since we didn't even spare our own bodies in order to do the work, everyone from the outlet and the company as well as the main company praised us. Mr Yoon Kiwon Ho, an assistant manager consoled us by buying alcohol for when we were sad or when times were difficult for us, and also slept with us at the hotel. I'll never forget him.

I respected my many fathers in Korea, but Father Kang was the only one of them who really treated us like his own children. We ate and slept with father for five years. I can still hear his voice calling: "Wake up, kids! It's time to eat!" Sometimes he insulted us too, but he enabled us to

experience a parent's love in that far away land, so we were able to forget the difficulties of living such a hard life there.

We referred to the men in our village as 'cousin'. We especially liked one of them, a taxi driver whose house was in far from Seoul. There was a lady at the Tae Ung supermarket, where we were regular customers, where we cannot forget. She prepared a bible full of food for us when we were hungry. We lived in Taesangji like this for six years, and developed strong bonds with our neighbours. I became just like our homelands.

Father Kang also did construction work and we worked on projects with him over the weekends. After our first project, Mr Yoo congratulated us and gave each of us 10,000 won, about \$11. If we used that money to buy at the public bath house/sauna and have Chinese noodles at a cheap restaurant, we would be left penniless. If Korean labourers did that kind of hard work, they would receive several tens of thousands of won. However, if I worked in Nepal, I wouldn't



BACK HOME: Pasang Sherpa with his friend, Sri Ram, after both returned to Kathmandu. Pasang with Korean friends (left, center) and his aunt, who he now helps run a small noodle and longba shop in Kathmandu.

have even been able to receive even that much. We continued to do construction work on each of our days off for five months, increasingly dragging the weekends.

After we had worked for three months, Mr Yoo indicated to us, using hand gestures, that our salary would increase by a certain amount, and would do so every six months. We didn't know by how much it would increase, but we worked even harder. Mr Yoo didn't pay us our salaries every month. "I'll give you your salaries, you'll spend it all at once. I'll save it for you and then give it to you one lump sum in the future when you need it," he said. But he only gave us \$400, or 375,000 won

per month, for 27 months from February 1992. Only for the last five months did he give us 500,000 won per month. And he withheld 1 million won of my salary. I was dumbfounded.

We talked to Mr Yoo: "We trusted you like a father, and continued to work, thinking that you had been saving our money for us. You told us many times that our salary would increase, so why did it remain the same as it was in the beginning?" He simply replied, "Shut up!" and "Be quiet." We were in the country illegally and so couldn't complain. We had worked with Mr. Yoo for three years like this. The 00 Steel company had about 20 agencies in Kyunggi province alone and we went

to deliver goods to each of them. Most of the people there were kind. I feel grateful to those who treated us so warmly.

Our work was difficult, but we were able to do it, but Korea. One time, our driver was tired and drove by mistake until we arrived at the army checkpoint. We had to submit to questioning and a body search by the military police. They said they had no way of knowing whether we were from Nepal or North Korea. After half an hour of searching, we were released. It was a very heavy blow to everyone, including foreign labourers like us. It seemed that it was time for us to go home to our

hospital and was treated. I never got my pay. After consulting with the doctor, my vertebra and body frame had become twisted.

One day, we saw an article in the morning newspaper about a demonstration by foreign workers in Myungdong. The company president said, "Those sons of bitches! If they go to another country to earn money, why don't they just earn it and leave! What are they demonstrating for? And that goes for you too, if you do that you'll end up with nothing. Understand?"

We replied, "Oh no, we don't plan to leave here for the rest of our lives. If we want to demand our rights, we'll go back to our country." But we didn't feel indifferent to their plight. I had read articles about other foreign workers who had come to Korea to earn money like me, but who ended up losing their hands or feet in accidents, or didn't receive their pay, or were deported from the country, or even worse, who committed suicide. We spent one or two months like this.

One-and-a-half years passed without us receiving our salaries, then the IMF crisis struck. The cost of living rose, the number of people out of work skyrocketed, factories went bankrupt, and the government was looking unstable. It was a very heavy blow to everyone, including foreign labourers like us. It seemed that it was time for us to go home to our

country. We started saying goodbye to the people who seemed like family to us. Everyone was melancholy, and we couldn't help crying the last time we met.

We worked until five days before our departure on 1 April, 1998. The company president owed us back pay from January 1997 to April 1998. The day before we left, he told us that he had no money then, but he would soon bring it to us in Nepal. We felt as if the whole sky had just collapsed on top of us. He gave us 2 million won (\$1,100). We went shopping and got one suit, one mini CD, a small automatic camera, an airplane ticket, three pairs of pants, a travel bag, a backpack, three pairs of slippers, four fashion watches, and 10 T-shirts on sale.

It felt like we had fallen from a great height. The son in the family, who had gone away to earn money, was returning for the first time in seven years, penniless. I felt depressed thinking about what my relatives would say. And I hadn't been able to send money home for a long time. I had already called my family and told them that I would bring some money back with me. Of course, my parents would just say to have me back, with or without money. But I had earned that money with my blood and sweat, it was very precious to me.

My mother and cousins were waiting for me at Tribhuvan International Airport. We took a taxi to our house in Kathmandu, where my mother said, "This is the house we built through your suffering. How do you like it?" The next day, I was with great difficulty that I informed my mother that I had returned with only \$100. She didn't get upset about it. I believed in the company president. I believed that he'd bring us the money when his situation

improved. But October passed. By April, the money still hadn't arrived. When I called his house, I got a recording saying that the number was no longer in service. After that, I called the business department of 00 Steel Company. I got the same message that time, too.

Meanwhile, two Koreans had started to frequent my aunt's restaurant before I returned to Nepal. One of them was a woman. I told them what had happened, and they agreed to help. Thanks to the efforts of Mrs Jeong, the woman, I got a phone call from the company president. You have no idea how happy I was. He asked me to return to Korea. He said that first, he'd send money for a plane ticket through Mrs Jeong, and to come quickly. A few days later, she received about \$600 for me. The company president called five or six times a day to tell me to buy a plane ticket with the money and return quickly.

I wanted to go back. However, I was not in good health, and had no way to get a visa. I told him that, and never heard from him again. When I rang him, I heard, "This man is no longer in service!"

I've been studying Korean hard for several months. I had already learned to read and write while I was in Korea, but the reason I was studying so hard now was because I wanted to write about the seven years I spent there. From the age of 20 to 27. As I continue to write, vivid memories of Korea come back and my eyes become moist with tears. And I still believe in our company president, who I called Father. ♦

(Translated by Kim Hong Sung and Millicent Thapa from the Korean original by Pasang Sherpa, aka Pinzo Lama.)

## HERE AND THERE

# Last stand

T onon Maoists, perhaps the most famous words ever spoken by Chairman Mao Zedong were in 1949, after his forces had chased the Kuomintang of Marshall Chiang Kai Shek from Beijing and almost all of mainland China. "The Chinese people," he said, "have stood up." It was the most stirring line ever by a successful revolutionary leader, simple, powerful and truthful. The Chinese people, for hundreds of years bent under the yoke of both domestic and foreign oppression, had stood up. No one could deny them their moment of triumph—those tens of millions who had followed Mao through a generation of war and the Long March. Centuries after died oppression Mao, and during various Great Leaps Forward and Cultural Revolutions but those are other stories.

I have a simple suggestion for Nepal's current non-Maoist leaders. Take a lesson from Chairman Mao and the Chinese people and stand up. Stop lounging in comfortable chairs, being chauffeur-driven to endless all-party meetings, endlessly spitting hairs about political semantics or plans of (in)action. Stand up and lead the people you claim to represent. At the very least, stand up being photographed while flopping in those chairs at meetings. Call the photographers in when you're on your hind legs and taking individuality to each other about the problems of the country. And for goodness sake, stop taking huge long holidays for Diwali, Tihar, or whatever. The country is burning. There's no time for its leaders to sleep late, drink too much and enjoy the festival.

It begins with action. As Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and George W Bush know very well, modern political leadership is all about conveying a coherent and attractive message to the people. The people must take an active role in their own development. The message sent by endless front-page photos, as in this newspaper last week, of politicians addressing a crisis by sitting down in foam-filled and dreadful. What about a photo of a politician leading a drive to raise money for victims of violence, visiting front-line



areas where people are suffering. When did any of them last go to a distant Village Development Committee office, either one that was blown up by the Maoists or displaced by the political folly of the late Douda government? To his credit, the UML leader, Madhav Kumar Nepal, has made a few speeches outside the capital. But not nearly enough, not nearly enough. The prime minister told me in an interview two weeks ago that the country's problems can be solved if the political leaders and the government "sit down together." With respect sir, it's only when you stand up together that you can appreciate and begin to alleviate the suffering of the vast majority of population. Action is required, and almost any action will do. British Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien—on his recent visit here—spoke of the need for "quick fix development." It raised more than a few hackles in the aid community but the minister is an aid politician. He

by DANIEL LAK

# Time for our politicians to stop just sitting around.

realised instinctively that it was essential to get out of Kathmandu and into the neediest and potentially most dangerous areas: not just with sacks of rice and vision goggles and helicopters, but also armed with guns, guns of night and job creation programs. The sheer novelty of a major political party leader wielding a sword will probably have a discernible impact on the situation.

This is a Hindu kingdom, so I suggest a foray into Bhagavad Gita as well as the speeches of Chairman Mao. The ancient texts of Hinduism advise that the path of action should always be chosen over inaction. When there's a choice between doing something or just waiting for things to happen, just do it. Long before Nike, the wise ones who wrote the Gita understand that importance of standing up. How Hinduism has since got a reputation for inaction is a debate for historians or theologians. I'm more concerned with applying the eternal wisdom of the past to the agony of the present. If the Nepali people are fed up with politicians, even with democracy, it's because they see little of the benefits getting beyond Kathmandu. It's the behaviour of political leaders that's causing the problem, not politics on its own. It is the implementation of democracy, or the lack of it, that's spreading cynicism and encouraging Maoism, not democracy itself. Time to learn from Chairman Mao, who also said that if the people aren't on your side, nothing matters. So let's go...let's stand up.

All together now, flex those knees, arms on armrests, 1,2,3...push upwards...be careful, don't get dizzy. I know it's an unfamiliar position. There, that wasn't so hard was it? ♦

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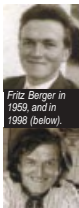
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# Then and now

Between 1962 and 1987, Fritz Berger worked on rural development projects in Nepal for what is now Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). In his book *Gespiegelte Zeit: Wie Menschen sich wandeln. Begegnungen in Griechenland, Nepal und Pakistan* (Mirrored Time: How people change. Encounters in Greece, Nepal and Pakistan), Berger writes: "In the villages and on the farms, I always carried my camera. What interested me most was the people, their work, their festivals, their clothes and, most of all, how they lived. I discussed it with people before I photographed them. In Greece and Nepal, they were always happy to be photographed, and loved to choose their poses. ... They were always pleased when I showed them a picture of themselves or ran a film in which they saw themselves."



Fritz Berger in 1959, and in 1998 (below).

In 1996 and 1997 I returned to my project sites to further research this book, which provided me my focus earlier. Before I photographed them anew, I showed them a picture I had taken of them a decade or so earlier. As soon as they remembered, memories came tumbling out, and they spoke spontaneously of their work then, where they lived, how they lived, and about all illnesses, their material difficulties, the project, their colleagues."

The book cover (above) is a remarkable picture of Thuli Tamang in Dandapokhar, in 1975. It shows Thuli harvesting wheat. The inset shows Thuli at 45, with her grandchild. "I gave my three children only the breast. I certainly couldn't afford baby food," she told Berger on meeting him again. He also learns that Thuli's husband served in the army for seven years, and has since then received a small pension, which the couple used to build a new house with a corrugated iron roof.

(*Gespiegelte Zeit: Wie Menschen sich wandeln. Begegnungen in Griechenland, Nepal und Pakistan*, Fritz Berger. Die Lese Bibliothek, Bonn, 1999)



Laxmi Devi Lama, Kalichaur. Laxmi, with her twins, Bango and Laxman (left), 1975. Laxmi tells us: "We were very poor and I opened the tea-shop in Piple, as my husband, a labourer, earned too little." Most of Laxmi's clients are porters and others who work on the project (nearby). After the opening of the street, the customers stay here too, and Laxmi has to keep tabs on her tea-shop in the Lamosang bazaar. Her husband recently left her.



Bhakta Bahadur Shrestha, Kharidhunga. Bhakta Bahadur in Dandapokhar, 1975. Bhakta Bahadur is the first farmer to plant the new vegetables under a farmer's training program. But no one in Lamosang wants to buy his large radishes. Later Bhakta Bahadur will fell wood in the high forests and transport it to the project's building sites.



Gunja Master Nepali, Megachaur. Gunja, front right, 1980. Together with three fellow tailors, Gunja regularly visits the weekly market in Kavre. Tailors, like blacksmiths, are at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy in Nepal.



Bhakta Bahadur, 57-years-old now, with his second wife. He has ten sons, six daughters, and so far, 32 grandchildren. Bhakta Bahadur loves to sit in front of his house and watch the traffic go by. "This road has changed our lives," he says. In the last ten years schools and a police post have been built. Many traders have opened shops, and there is also work in the magnesite mine.



Soma and Lal Bahadur Tamang, Berna. Soma and Lal Bahadur, 1973. The mother and child are on their way home after shopping in a neighbouring village. Soma remembers: "We were always hungry, and so my husband went to work in India." And after a long pause: "In the early years, he would still send me money. But he's never returned."



Kharka Bahadur Karki and Maya, Petku. Kharka Bahadur and Maya on their wedding day in Sanepokhar, in 1976. The bridegroom put his bride in a closed palanquin to take her to Patku. The author captured the procession and the accompanying musicians in the documentary film *Hami Haru*. This film, about the lives of the farmers there, was repeatedly screened in Dandapokhar, to the great delight of the viewers when they saw themselves on the screen.



Bachman Thami, Alampu. Bachman, 1978. Bachman lives in Alampu village, where the famous stones from Biju are broken. "We work for Lal Bahadur. He was the big man of Alampu, and got wealthy by selling the stones to the project."



Soma, now 60 years old and Lal Bahadur 30, in the square of Berna village. Lal Bahadur is married and has a daughter. He manages the family's small farming business. "When the Kharidhunga mines are open, I can earn something additional." Soma values the new road, and also the water and electricity supply. "They make my life easier, especially now, when I am older."



Kharka Bahadur is now 45, and Maya 39. Both manage, together with Kharka Bahadur's father, the largest business in the area. Many different kinds of vegetables grow in Maya's garden. Even the fruit trees are unusually well cared-for. On the way to the young cardamom plantations, Kharka Bahadur narrates a dream in which Christ came to him. On the second floor of his large house, he has rigged up an assembly room richly decorated with Christian posters. "We are already eight families who gather here for services."



Bachman, now 73-years-old, brading bamboo. "After democracy we divided the use of slate slabs to all Thamis. In the 1991 revolution, Lal Bahadur fled to Kathmandu due to the oppression of the people. Bachman's wife died ten years ago. He has two sons and a daughter. "The time to die is here, as I can't walk anymore since I fell while herding sheep."

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**NEPALI WEATHER** by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The first westerlies of the season are here. This satellite picture on Thursday morning shows the first wisps of cirrus already over central Nepal. But these clouds have been wrung dry as they travel all the way from the Mediterranean over the middle east to the subcontinent. So not much rain there. But there are others where this one came from, and the next frontal system is already over Iran. These are fast-moving systems so they will not linger. The winter haze from the Indo-Gangetic plains will slick around because the winds are still from the southwest.

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**Under My Hat**  
by Kunda Dixit

# Jello Journalism

Over the holiday period the reading public has been deprived of information of vital importance to their daily lives because some of us in the media business were just too lazy to bring out newspapers.

Serves the reading public right. Don't they have anything better to do? Anyway, as a result of this serious deprivation much that has happened in our country has fallen between the cracks and been lost forever. As a journal of record, therefore, it is our duty and responsibility to bring to public notice events which would otherwise have been consigned to the dustbin of history and geography. The fact that none of these items below are actually based on fact is besides the point, the point is that as journalists it is our solemn obligation to publish and be damned. The public in a democracy has the right to know, and we have the right to break every rule in the book.

**Commercial Break:** Today's News Bulletin is brought to you by Kangaroo Brand Steel Rod. "So strong, no one can take your house away from you, not even the Judicial Commission to Investigate Ill-gotten Wealth, by Fishtail Condoms. "Nepal's first branded prophylactic, mix your business with pleasure," and by 24-Carat Noodles. "Switch to new gold-plated noodles and instantly improve your credit-worthiness."

And now, the news in brief:

**Country Closed Till Xmas**  
By Our Staff Reporter  
**KATHMANDU** - The Ministry of Inertia and Lethargy has finally announced that, since Christmas is around the corner, the current holidays will be extended till December.

The news was received with much jubilation at government offices which had reluctantly opened after the holidays. "Work was piled up so high, we didn't

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**AND OUR NATION WILL STAND**

A charismatic (and tattooed) extreme sports performer into stunts (he videotapes himself pulling dangerous and sometimes illegal stunts, then sells them on the black market), Xander Cage (the new heartthrob Vin Diesel) is a James Bond-like hero with the personality of a rock star. Cage is recruited by a government agent, Gibbons (Jackson) to infiltrate a Russian crime ring. Anarchy 59, led by a mysterious figure called Yorgi (Cokoski), which plans on unleashing a lethal substance in the rivers of Europe, which sends him racing through a series of adventures. Also noteworthy are Samuel L. Jackson and the smoking Asia Argento.

**XXX**

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**Under My Hat**  
by Kunda Dixit

# Jello Journalism

When the 30-year-old Puskar Shah set out on his bicycle to see the world in 1998, his mother gave him a 100-rupee note. He didn't have any sponsors, or big-name backers. All he had was the determination to take his message of peace to all corners of the world on a bicycle.

Today, after crossing 88,000 km, Puskar's journey is only a third complete and he is back home for a rest and to take part in a peace rally being organised by the World Cyclist Foundation in Kathmandu in January.

Born in the tiny village of Makabari in Dolakha, Puskar lost his father at the age of 17. He served in the Indian army, and was killed by militants in Assam. During the pro-democracy movement in Nepal in 1991, Puskar was among many student activists who were arrested and tortured by police.

"Nobody really inspired me to go around the world on a bicycle. It just came out of my own conviction, that I should take the Buddha's message of peace out to foreign capitals."

Last year, his bicycle was stolen in New Zealand, and he had to beg to feed himself. Luckily, Sir Edmund Hillary came to his rescue and bought him a new bike and paid for logistics. And wherever he has run into the Nepal diaspora, they have taken him in and treated him like a hero.

So far, Puskar has



At home in Dolakha

pedalled through South Asia, South-east Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China and on to Central America and the Caribbean. By January 2003, he'll be on the road again to begin the fourth leg of his trip in Mexico and go down to South America. After that, there will only be Europe and Russia.

An amateur singer and lyricist, Shah pens verse whenever he's lonely and homesick on some dark desert highway on the other side of the planet. Back home, his mother, wife and four-year-old son are fully supportive, if sometimes a bit worried when they don't hear from him for a while. And for good luck, Puskar still carries in his pocket the Rs 100 note his mother gave him four years ago.

Puskar in St Kitts

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# Peddalling for peace

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**Puskar in St Kitts**

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