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WEEKLY

UNWELCOME REFUGEES

Tension runs high between the Bhutanese
refugees and the local community



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Unsprprisingly, it extends beyond Nepal's borders.

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Special fares for January and February 2005

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Letters



“The world has to know what’s going on in Nepal”

KABIR

Missing Kashmiris

WHILE ALL OF THE NEPALI MEDIA was screaming hoarse over the Pugwash conference on Kashmir, you quietly, and brilliantly, reported of Kashmiris missing from Kathmandu (“Missing From Kathmandu,” by Satish Jung Shahi, Dec. 26). Good job. More than once, you have stood up for the minorities.

AMIR MIR
VIAEMAIL

Disappearances

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI’S “Involuntary Disappearances” was timely (Dec. 19). It came out while a number of high-profile foreigners were visiting Kathmandu, not least the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. The world has to know what’s going on in Nepal. You come across so much chilling data about Nepal these days that you lose your ability to be shocked. But one fact is still shocking, very shocking: That for the last two years Nepal has been leading the world in disappearances. I, for one, have never felt so insecure and uncomfortable as I have in the past one year. I fear for my family members, my friends, and I fear for myself, all the time.

KABIR
VIAEMAIL

Bonding with Nepal

MUCH LIKE HER ARTICLE IN YOUR Dashain issue, “Resham Phiriri and the Music Man” (Dec. 19) once again showed how much Karuna Chettri remains connected to Nepal, all this while she tries to build her new life in the

Untied States. No matters what those in Nepal would like to think, like Chettri I share a strong bond with Nepal and that will never go away. During my infrequent visits to Nepal, I hear very insensitive comments about my lost “Nepalipan,” that I have have forgotten everything about Nepal and Nepalis. Nothing can be more absurd. I don’t want to generalize but I have seen countless Nepalis living aboard turn more Nepali than they were at home. You can put me on the list.

REENA
VIAEMAIL

Sports politics

I AM A REGULAR READER OF YOUR sports page and I found your article on Nepal’s supposed preparations for the South Asian Games in Colombo in August 2005 particularly intriguing (“Colombo Countdown,” Dec. 19) Are you getting carried away by the blusters of Nepal’s sports officials? Trust me, they are like any other official: They talk big but seldom follow up on their impressive promises. Unless the private sector comes in to help, Nepal’s sports fraternity is unlikely to shake off its lethargy. There will be success stories no doubt but that’s purely due to the individual athlete’s sheer determination. Can you imagine how long the National Sports Council and the National Olympic Committee have been fighting for? Do you think they care about the athletes’ well being? The feud started months before the Athens Olympics and will in all probability continue right through the next Olympics in Beijing. I can’t see any Third World administra-

tor or politician relinquishing his position for the greater good. Maharashtra's political heavyweight, Sarad Pawar, came so close to capturing the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the BCCI, and you don't need to try too hard to find out why he wants to get involved. Indian cricket has never been so big, flushed with sponsor money, high gate collections and extraordinary levels of money to be made through broadcast rights to TV channels. These people will go to any length to serve their personal agenda. Wish they would serve sports with as much zeal once they have the job.

NARESH THAPA
VIA EMAIL

Kunal's writing

I HAVE ENJOYED EVERY BIT OF Kunal Lama's three articles on his Jomsom treks that you featured for three straight weeks. Thanks. I now have a humble, outlandish to some, suggestion to make. I would put Lama's English writings alongside the very best I have seen from Nepalis; I would as a matter of fact like to see him try his hand in English fiction. He seems to have an eye for details and an amazing wit to boot. This in fact brings me to two other articles I recently read in your magazine with much amusement—"Hope for Nepali Fiction" by Ajit Baral (Dec. 19) and a subtle rebuke to Baral the following week, "The Limits of Language" (Dec. 26) by Aditya Adhikari. Lama seems to be as fine a writer as Samrat Upadhyay who finds copious mention in Baral's article. I know comparing writers is stupid; Lama's dense prose is no less readable than Upadhyay's sparse prose, for example. I mention Samrat Upadhyay here, not to belittle his literary achievement, but because he is the only Nepali writing in English to have received some critical acclaim.

ABHISEKH RUPAKHETI
KATHMANDU

Cruelty against animals

Thank you Jagdish Aarohi for highlighting the plight of thousands of animals sacrificed in a cruel, unordered manner at the Gadimai "festival" ("Beastly In-

stinct," Guest Column, Dec. 19). You assume that this year around 25,000 animals lost their lives, but we fear that 50,000 might be more accurate. Someone should estimate how much money the over seven million "devotees" spent and how many Bara children and displaced people would benefit from this amount. Sacrifices often strengthen the vested interest of those who benefit from superstitious beliefs and rituals and drain the resources of the poor and needy.

Apart from wasting money and endorsing cruelty against innocent animals, another important issue to consider is Gadimai's danger to public health. In 1994, Gadimai, through unchecked import of thousands of livestock from India, brought PPR or Goat Plague to Nepal, affecting 63 out of 75 districts, killing an unknown number of goats and seriously affecting the health of consumers. We now have a Meat Act, protecting animals from cruel slaughter and consumers from infected meat, but how come it's business as usual at Gadimai?

Cruelty against animals harms society as a whole; it signals and normalizes insensitivity in children who can become numb to the suffering of living beings. It is also known to influence certain people to commit violence on other humans. While in Dachau, Jewish author Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, observing Nazi atrocities, wrote: "I think that men will be killed and tortured as long as animals are killed and tortured... Because killing must be trained and perfected on smaller objects, morally and technically... [If we overcome] our own trends towards smaller violence and cruelty... the day will come when it will be easy for us to fight and to overcome even the great cruelties."

How long will we have to witness the blood-stained fields of Gadimai to realize that in order to have peace, we must oppose cruelty, big and small, against any living being?

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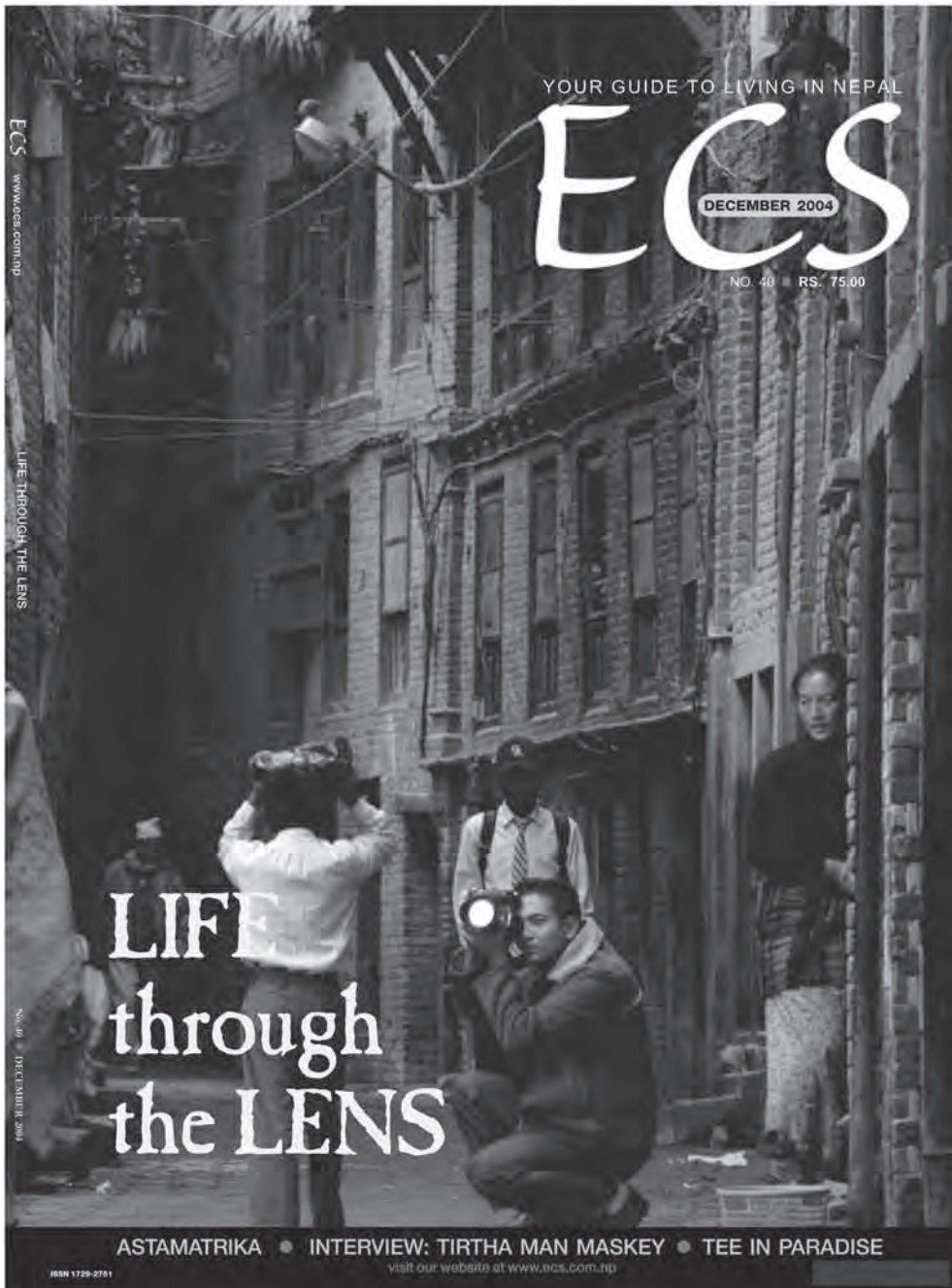
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LIFE through the LENS

By the age of nine, Kishor Kayastha was already lugging around a camera and shooting pictures wherever he went. At fifteen, he was possessed by a fiery passion for photography. Since then, he has dedicated his life to art photography.

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Picture of the Week



THE SHOW HAS TO GO ON: A Newari woman dancing to the traditional tunes during Indreni Jatra at Nagaon, Kirtipur during the banda

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



Go Listen

The prime minister should break his self-imposed exile and venture outside the Ring Road

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba should learn a trick or two from the Rajparishad. Here's what the Rajparishad did over the past year: It held regional meetings all over Nepal, including Kathmandu, to "listen to what the people wanted to say." Obviously, it has concluded that the people want an active monarch. And so that's what the Rajparishad is gearing to recommend to the Palace, backed as it were by the people's wish.

Think what you will, but you have to give the Rajparishad grudging respect for demonstrating political acumen. Its members know that their recommendation will carry more weight if it is deemed to be the wish of the people, hence the staged regional jamborees.

There is a lesson in this for Prime Minister Deuba. Though starting on a promising note seven months ago, his government has of late come to embody the proverbial lame duck. It seems stuck in a no-man's land, unable to decide on future course or strategy.

One way out of this logjam would be for the Maoists to miraculously agree to peace talks by the Jan. 13 deadline. But that hope is receding, given the Maoists' aggressive escalation of violence and repeated rejections of peace talks. The other alternative is to either revive the 1999 Parliament or call fresh elections. The prime minister has already chosen the latter, ignoring the advice of the opposition and civil society groups.

Sources close to the prime minister tell us, it's not that Deuba is loathe to advise restoration of Parliament which he himself dissolved in 2002. But he'd rather have the Supreme Court revive it, both as a face saving device, and more importantly, as a check on Article 127. The prime minister, it is said, lives in mortal fear of being dismissed again under the same article were he to recommend revival of the 1999 Parliament.

This is where the lessons from the Rajparishad come in. The Constitution may not mandate a specific political role for the body, but it also does not bar the Rajparishad from holding nation-wide meetings. Its members were simply astute enough to utilize this loophole to their advantage.

But the prime minister needs no such loopholes. The Constitution in fact envisages the prime minister as the King's principal advisor on all matters, whether it be politics, security or state affairs. The prime minister can, if he so chooses, give any advice to the King which ought to be binding on a constitutional monarch. He could, in theory, even recommend Parliament's revival.

But the prime minister's fear is getting in the way. His fear of dismissal if he were to recommend revival of the 1999 Parliament needs to be dealt with in a manner that gives both him and the Palace a face saving way out. For that to happen, however, any such recommendation by the prime minister must be seen as having the people's support.

Why not, then, hold regional "listening tours" to gauge the people's support? Just as the Rajparishad held regional meetings to hear the people, the prime minister too can hold regional or *anchal*-wise meetings to hear the people's voice.

Draw up a schedule, publicize the dates, venues and events. Break the walls of this self-imposed prison inside the Ring Road and tour the country. If the other political parties—governing or opposition—were to support the prime minister's listening tours, then there is no doubt that these tours would be a success.

If the people want an active monarchy, let the prime minister hear that. But if they want a constitutional monarchy and revival of the 1999 Parliament as opposed to new elections—which I presume most want—let him hear that too.

Armed with the people's mandate, the prime minister could then make the necessary recommendation to the Palace. The Palace will have to decide whether it wants to accept recommendations from the prime minister or the Rajparishad. Both sets of recommendations are deemed to be based on the people's wishes. But only one carries the legitimacy provided by the Constitution. Let the Palace make its judgement call.

This may sound a little too confrontationalist to some. Forcing the Palace to choose between the two sets of recommendations is upping the ante, some might say. But that's missing the point. The people's recommendations, presented through the prime minister, can only strengthen the bonds between the Palace and the people. It need not drive them apart but rather could serve as the bridge to bring them closer. **N**



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'Thinker'
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F I N E C A R P E T S & D E C O R A T I V E A R T S





B Rai

HIGH ALERT: Security personnel took extra precautions last week during the banda called by the Maoists

Insurance growth

Insurance business has increased by 30.5 percent. Beema Samiti, a regulatory body of insurance sector in the country, said that the premium has reached Rs.4.6 billion in the fiscal year 2003/04, which was only Rs.3.72 billion in the last fiscal year. The growth is mainly in the industrial and automobile sector. Increasing conflicts and incidences like Sept. 1 vandalism have encouraged people to get their businesses and private property insured. The insurance sector contributes 1.68 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

Maoists blockade

Starting from Dec. 23, Maoists called for an indefinite blockade of Sunachuri-Hetauda section of the Mahendra highway, Nagdhunga-Benighat section of the Prithvi Highway and Naubise-Bhaise section of the Tribvhuwan Highway. Earlier, they torched 18 trucks on Wednesday, Dec. 22, at Kharanga in Makawanpur district on Mahendra Highway. The blockade led to the shutdown of transportation, and suspension of the educational

and business activities in Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Makawanpur and Chitwan.

Hydro on hold

Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) suspended the construction of Mid-Marsyangdi for an indefinite period as advised by the German consultants, Fischner. Contractor DDC-JV, another German company, stopped the construction works four months ago due to Maoist threats. Maoists had demanded that the Army deployed to guard the project be withdrawn. Construction works started in 2001 and was to be completed in December 2004. But only 45 percent of the works have been completed so far.

NRB governor

Government formed a three-member committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari to recommend three candidates for the post of Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). Other members include Dr Badri Prasad Shrestha, former finance minister, and Ganesh Bahadur Thapa, former gov-

ernor of the central bank. The tenure of the sitting governor, Dr Tilak Rawal, ends on Jan. 29, 2005.

Court verdict

Chinese news agency Xinhua reported that in the second trial the Higher People's Court of Tibet sentenced Ravi Dahal to death with reprieve, Ishori Kumar Shrestha to life imprisonment and Rewat Kumar Dahal to 10 years' imprisonment with the confiscation of all their personal properties. Earlier on May 30, Rabi Dahal and Ishwori Kumar Shrestha were sentenced to death while Rewat Dahal was sentenced to 15-year imprisonment by the Lhasa Intermediate Court after the first trial. The Tibet Police had arrested them with 29.85 kg drugs in Khasa.

Plant Bombed

The district headquarters of Bajhang has been cut off from power supply since Sunday, Dec.19 after the Maoists bombed the hydropower project at Selaghat of Bajura district. The 200 KW plant was also the only station supplying electricity to the remote areas of Bajhang. Property worth over Rs.5 million was destroyed in the explosion but there are no reports of human casualties. It was the second attack on the powerhouse.

IMF warning

International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned the government to fulfill its commitment to maintain financial discipline and pursue reforms if it wants to receive future assistance under the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) program. IMF has expressed serious concerns over soaring general expenditure, especially on security, lack of progress in privatization programs and delayed action against willful loan defaulters. The mission enquired the government about the massive financial losses incurred by Nepal Oil Corporation.

UML decision

The central committee meeting of CPN-UML decided not to withdraw from the government despite pressure from the party cadres and sister organizations. The party has urged its representatives in the Deuba cabinet to be more proactive in decision-making process. It said that the four parties in the government had agreed on the election of the constituent assembly, which has also been the demand of the Maoists, and therefore, the party should not pull out. It also said that the party is open to the prospect of the revival of the dissolved House as an alternative to finding a solution to the problem. The UML meet lasted nine days.

Royal Visit

King Gyanendra's visit to India was cancelled at the last moment because of the death of former Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Indian Embassy in Kathmandu said the new schedule would be announced at the earliest. King Gyanendra and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba have sent separate condolence messages to President APJ Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Rao died in New Delhi of heart attack. He was 83. He was hospitalized at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences two weeks ago.



A Maoist roadblock in Dolalghat, Kavrepalanchowk, on the Arniko Highway

Valley blockade

The Maoist blockade of all major highways leading to the Valley started on Thursday, Dec. 24. A day before, the rebels had torched 18 trucks bound for Kathmandu on the Mahendra Highway in Kharanga, Makwanpur. Minister of Information and Communications Mohammed Mohsin, the government spokesman, said that the government could be forced to declare a state of emergency if the Maoists continued with their indefinite blockade of Kathmandu. In response to the blockade, a Cabinet meeting formed a committee under Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari on Friday, Dec. 24, to ensure the smooth of essential items into Kathmandu and other major cities.

U.S. quotas

The U.S. government offered Nepal an extension of a bilateral agreement that gives Nepali garments and carpets duty-free market entry into American markets. The current agreement will expire on Jan. 1, 2005. The Ministry of Commerce has said that it will

answer after consultations with the concerned entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs, however, aren't happy that the agreement requires the materials used for the production of carpets and garments to be made locally or imported from the United States.

Suicide probe

The National Human Rights Commission will investigate the suicide of Sadhuram Devkota, alias Prashant, in Army custody. The 27-year-old Prashant, who was a senior Maoist leader in the Valley, was arrested on Nov. 4. He allegedly committed suicide inside his cell in the Balaju barracks on Dec. 19. Human rights groups have demanded an independent investigation into the incident.

Peace call

The U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan called for a quick end to the fighting in Nepal. Annan said that the conflict was undermining democracy and seriously hindering developmental activities. He also expressed deep concern at the continuing human rights violations. The general secretary

has called for an urgent cessation of fighting and the initiation of a dialogue between the government and the Maoists. While the rebels have said that they will participate in peace talks if the United Nations or another credible international organization is involved, the government has rejected such proposals of third-party involvement. General Secretary Annan said that he was ready to assist in such an effort to bring together the warring parties.

Mass resignation

Nearly 300 employees of the municipalities of Bharatpur and Ratnanagar and of the district development committee in Chitwan resigned en masse on Friday, Dec. 24. They relented to continuous pressure from the Maoists to do so. The secretaries of the village development committees in Chitwan had already resigned three weeks ago following similar threats from the rebels.

Arrest warrant

Bharatpur Inland Revenue Office issued an arrest warrant for Mathura Prasad Maskey, the owner of the Chitwan-based Shree Distillery. He has been charged with embezzling more than Rs.2 billion. The anti-corruption watchdog, the CIAA, had found Maskey guilty of em-

bezzlement and directed the revenue office to arrest him. Maskey has not been seen since.

Human cost

In the course of the nine-year-long insurgency, 10,832 people have lost their lives, according to Informal Sector Service Centre. Of those killed, 7,080 have been killed by the state and 3,753 by the Maoists. Over 1,600 security personnel have been killed during the course of the conflict. Since the breakdown of the peace talks in August last year alone, 3,800 people have died. The center also said that an average of eight people die due to the conflict every day.

Football tournament

The six-team San Miguel International Football Tournament featuring teams from Nepal, South Korea and India kicked off on Friday, Dec. 24, in Dasharath Stadium. The tournament features two top Indian clubs, Mohun Bagan and East Bengal. In the opening match, Nepal Blue, one of the two Nepali teams participating in the tournament, beat Hannam University of South Korea. Mohun Bagan is playing in Nepal for the first time since 1980 while this is East Bengal's second visit to Nepal since 1996.



BP in BBC

BBC online in its South Asian edition put Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, Nepal's first elected prime minister, among the region's 16 greatest leaders. On its three-day long online poll that ended on Dec. 23, a total of 33,5422 votes were cast.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding president of Pakistan, won the poll with 39 percent of the votes, closely followed by Mahatma Gandhi from India who got 31 percent. Other South Asian leaders listed among the 16 were Atal Behari Vajpayee, Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subash Chandra Bose from India; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia Ul Haq from Pakistan; JP Jayawardene, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Sirimavo Bandaranaike from Sri Lanka; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman from Bangladesh; and Ahmad Shah Masood and Zahir Shah from Afghanistan.

The list had at least two representatives from all other chosen countries, except Nepal. BP Koirala—who was responsible for the ouster of the Rana oligarchy in 1951—was chosen as Nepal's first democratically elected prime minister in 1959. BP was apprehended and imprisoned only a year later when King Mahendra took over absolute power and banned all political parties. He was also the founding president of Nepali Congress.

Koirala, also a litterateur, has written several books. Tara Nath Sharma has recently translated "Sumnima," a literary classic, into English. Among BP's other acclaimed works are "Jel Journal" and "Atmabritanta." The former is an account of his life behind bars after his arrest in 1960, and the latter his autobiography. Koirala died of throat cancer in 1982.



CHITWAN FESTIVAL

Chitwan Festival is being organized in Narayangadh from Jan. 9 to Jan. 16. The eight-day festival aims at promoting tourism in the district. It also hopes to explore the market for agro-products and boost the local trade. 300 stalls with a wide range of products will cater to an estimated 200,000 visitors. The festival will also feature cultural programs and animal exhibits. Around 80 million rupees is expected to be generated during the festival. Narayangadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, District Development Committee of Chitwan, Ratnanagar Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Bharatpur Municipality are jointly organizing the festival.

NBL MOVE FLAYED

Industrialists and the business community have criticized the latest attempt of Nepal Bank to recover bad debts from the black listed 'willful defaulters.' The bank's decision has been reproached by the industrialists who believe the action will further deteriorate the investment climate and slowdown other economic activities. The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry has also strongly condemned the new step.

AAAN CHANGES NAME

The Advertisement Agencies Association of Nepal (AAAN) will now on be known as the Advertising Association of Nepal (AAN). The tenth general meeting of the organization agreed on the new name. The change has been made to incorporate within the advertising community more people and stakeholders, directly or indirectly concerned with advertisements, Bhaskar Raj Karnikar, the president of the association informed. The organization also announced the launching of a Tele Award



that will felicitate the people and agencies involved in the development and promotion of advertisements on television. The award ceremony will be the second biggest program of ANN after the Crity award.

PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS

S. R. Drug Laboratories, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in Nepal, has introduced a new line of drugs in the market. The company manufacturers cardiovascular, diabetological and sychotropic medicines; along with the conventional anti-microbial, gastro-entriological, anti-spasmodic and hematological drugs. The company has 50 drugs in the market but is preparing to unveil 40 more.

LAXMI BANK AND NT TOGETHER

Account holders at Laxmi Bank will now be able to pay their phone bills with ease. The bank has made an agreement with



लक्ष्मी बैंक लिमिटेड
Laxmi Bank Limited

Nepal Telecom to allow its customers to pay telephone bills through their individual accounts in the bank. The bank will make monthly payments for its customers on appropriate dates and will deduct the amount charged from the individual accounts.

BUTWAL TRADE FAIR

Butwal Chambers of Commerce and Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce are jointly organizing Butwal Trade Fair, 2061. The 10-day fair will get underway on Dec. 24. There will be individual stalls for agricultural products, automobiles, consumer goods, cultural artifacts, handicrafts, information technology items, food stuff and leather apparels. There will also be a tourist information center and an art gallery with paintings depicting different life stages of Gautam Buddha. The local hotels and restaurants will provide a 10 percent discount on food items and a 25 percent concession on

lodging during the fair. This is the fifth Butwal trade fair; the first one was organized in 1999.

PASHMINA EXPORT

Pashmina industry saw a 35 percent hike in the export of its products in the first three months of the current fiscal year. Sales for the same period last year were around Rs.16 million while export this year has brought in Rs.21 million. Pashmina is the primary export product of Nepal. Only 5 percent of



pashmina products are utilized inside the country. The United States alone accounts for 20 percent of the international sales. Countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, France, Italy, and Japan are other chief importers of Nepali pashmina.

SHAKYA RETAINS POST

The 16th annual general meeting and the first national convention of Nepal Gold and Silver Dealers' Association, NGDSA, has re-elected Tej Ratna Shakya as its president. Professor Subarna Shakya administered the elected president the oath of loyalty. Gyanendra Shakya, Buddhi Bahadur Gahatraj and Buddhi Bahadur BK have been elected the Regional Vice Presidents for central, western and mid-western development regions respectively.

IRD PRIZES

The Inland Revenue Department has collected 38,533 revenue bills in the last five months under its 'Consumer Conscious Program'. On Dec. 22, it also announced a lucky draw winner for the month of Mangshir. The revenue department has allocated prizes for the people submitting revenue bills to the government on time. The first prize is worth Rs.100,000. The prize program is an effort to encourage people to pay revenues on the products they buy.

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WEEKLY

THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.

The reinstatement of the Parliament is now widely viewed as the least difficult exit toward resolving the political crisis. The prime minister and Palace remain strongly against it.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE Pratinidhi Sabha in 2002 caused the present political brouhaha: Wouldn't reviving it end the crisis? That's what an increasing number of people think. Everyone agrees that elections would be the best—though the

hardest—way to go about resolving the current crisis.

The political parties, whose consent to and participation in polls would be crucial to their success, doubt the government's ability to hold elections. So the revival of the Parliament is being hotly debated. Some, notably the Nepali Congress, claim it's the only way to end

the crisis. The government has resolutely refused to discuss the issue, but even those who don't relish the prospect think that it may be the only option left that would be acceptable to all—that is, except the Maoists and the King. Would reinstatement really work, and how could it happen?

"There is no provision in the Constitution for the reactivation of the lower house," says former speaker and member of the constitution drafting committee, Daman Nath Dhungana. "But such an arrangement can be made through a political settlement." There's a little hitch. The lower house has outlived its mandate: Its five-year tenure expired early this year. Any

HOUSE REINCARNATION



nv/ss

reinstatement would hinge on extending its term, also clearly extra-constitutional. Even so, steps that would not be legally correct could be politically popular. Even legal eagles are in favor of reviving the lower house; the concerns for constitutional niceties are almost secondary.

A delegation from the Nepal Bar Association met the Chief Justice Govinda Bahadur Shrestha recently, apparently in an effort to lobby him to give the pending petition for reinstatement a speedy hearing. "All parties should come together and restore the dissolved Parliament to revive a political process," says Nepal Bar Association President

Shambhu Thapa. The association has been advocating reinstatement. Its argument is that the Parliament is the only legitimate institution that can discuss the core issues of constituent assembly and a new constitution raised by the Maoists.

Proponents of reinstatement believe that once the lower house becomes functional again, a clause could be inserted in the present constitution to allow for the election of a constituent assembly. Even the framers of the present statute see this as a possible outlet to the crisis, one that has the potential to resolve the Maoist problem. "Parliament is the only legitimate institution to strengthen political force," says Nilambar Acharya, one of the drafters of the 1990 Constitution, "and it must be restored to initiate negotiations with the Maoists."

The clamor for reinstatement is most certainly gaining momentum, and not just among the political parties. The international community is also articulating it. British special envoy for Nepal, Sir Jeffery James, clearly said that reviving the house could be an alternative. The European Union's Troika is said to have thrown their weight behind Sir James' suggestion. The international community has, so far, been divided on their policy towards Nepal, but their positions are converging. The motivating force is that it is becoming increasingly nervous about the situation here; the early hope that a strong Army could put the Maoists on the defensive is now tampered with caution.

The international community is most anxious to see democracy put back on track through elections but realizes just how hard it will be, given the fragile security situation on the ground. Sir James' circumspect comment will carry a lot of diplomatic weight.

But the political parties still need to work out some kind of consensus on how to proceed. Proponents of reinstatement still do not have a common plan. Indeed, many who agree on the subject are barely on speaking terms. The CPN-UML, a partner in the governing coalition and now increasingly in favor of revival, wants the Supreme Court to do the job. But few legal experts think that the apex court will go so far as to issue a politically correct but legally indefensible verdict.

"There is a legal difficulty," says Bharat Bahadur Karki, professor of law at the Nepal Law Campus, "but let's wait and see how assertive the judges want to be."

High-powered political figures say there is another way out if the court declines to order the reinstatement. A political conference of all parties to the conflict can bring the lower house back to life, says former Speaker Dhungana. But, he argues, this has to be for a specific purpose and a limited period.

Not everyone agrees, and even such a limited session could be problematic. The most important question is what role the King would play in such a situation. Could a parliamentary session without legal standing bypass the monarch? Doing so would assert the supremacy of the elected representatives but might spark a deeper crisis, if the King has greater political ambitions. Analysts say it all depends on whether the King is clear about confining himself to the walls of the 1990 Constitution. There are serious doubts, though.

Defiant Deuba


For its part, the Deuba government has resolutely refused to consider the reinstatement issue, perhaps because of the King's position against the idea, and also because Deuba loathes seeing Girija Prasad Koirala return to a position of strength. "The prime minister has already said," says Minister for Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Tek Bahadur Chogyal, "that there is not going to be any reinstatement."

Some analysts, who otherwise support the idea of putting the political parties in the front seat, wonder how a revived Parliament would be any different from those that existed prior to the dissolution. The parties, after all, failed for years to get a handle on the Maoist problem. Even so, an increasing number of people now believe that having a Parliament of any sort is better than having none. Unfortunately the discussion is generating more heat than light; confusion still abounds. Unless the Supreme Court rises up to the challenge, that is unlikely to change. **N**

TION?



UNWE REF



The presence of a large number of Bhutanese refugees is still a sensational national issue, but the social and economic repercussions at the local level are not. They should be. BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI IN DAMAK

WELCOME TO UGGE



It's five in the evening. The blowing dust has barely settled down in the streets of Beldangi-II as Rup Narayan Timilsina, an 18-year-old refugee perched on a straw mat outside his dilapidated hut, spins a heap of cotton into thread. "This is a boring task," he says, while his mother Hari Maya Timilsina roasts maize indoors. A little later she comes out to find out who is quizzing her boy. "They don't pay us much," she says, referring to the local traders for whom the Timilsinas make the thread. "It comes to just Rs.60 per kilogram." It takes more than 20 hours to make a kilogram of thread, she says. She hates the low wage, though she wishes she had more of the work to earn a few extra rupees for her family.

So do many of the local people. But their complaint is more about the refugees than the employers. Residents of Damak and villages adjoining the camps feel that the refugees are robbing them of their work and rightful wages. A local normally would charge Rs.80 for a day's work, but refugees can be hired for as little as Rs.40 to do the same work. Often, the tension between refugees and locals comes to a head, culminating in violence. But this longstanding feud has received little attention in the national media; local leaders say there has been no serious effort by the agencies taking care of the refugees to address the issue.

Though Nepal-Bhutan bilateral politics almost always hogs the limelight, the economic and social side-effects of the refugees' presence, in particular the

growing animosity between the host and the refugee communities, doesn't seem to be part of the national discourse on refugees. Both refugees and locals point out that the presence of so many refugees—there are roughly as many of them as there are local people around Damak, Jhapa's largest municipal center—makes problems inevitable.

"The refugees are taking away all our work," says Prem Bhandari, a teacher at the local Dhukurpani High School, which lies barely four kilometers away from the Beldangi camps, the largest refugee shelters. "Our people who eke out their livelihood as wage-earners have been displaced."

People from Damak Municipality, which houses three camps with more than 50 percent of all the Bhutanese refu-



FENCES, SEEN AND UNSEEN: UNHCR insists that refugees should not work outside the camps



GIVE AND TAKE: Refugees trade locally



gees, have left home to work as laborers, says Govind Kattel, a local. Though there are no statistics available on the labor flight, the degree of displacement of these low-skilled workers from areas that have hosted refugee populations is alarming, according to Dhan Prasad Tiwari, district secretary of the All Nepal National Free Student Union. The problem is that refugees equal or outnumber the host population. These refugees, who are also supported by the UNHCR and other aid agencies, are willing to work for lower wages. Locals are then left with only two choices: To accept the lower wage or go elsewhere. This harsh choice faced by the locals doesn't make the refugees particularly welcome, especially among the low-income groups.

When asked, a UNHCR official says his agency is aware that refugees are working outside the camps but is not

sure how many. "It would be in everybody's interests if refugees are allowed to work in certain areas," although he insists that "refugees are not allowed to work under the rule." A local politi-

'Patience Thinning Out'

After almost one and a half decades of diplomatic stonewalling by the Bhutanese, Nepal's patience is "thinning out." Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat vented his frustration at the lack of progress in the Nepal-Bhutan bilateral process intended to resolve the refugee stalemate. "The process has been torturously slow," he said. The minister was uncharacteristically undiplomatic when he spoke at a UNHCR seminar in Kathmandu earlier this month: Mahat unequivocally blamed Bhutan for the delay in repatriating the refugees. But the minister refused to say when Nepal's patience would completely run out. "I will let you know when that situation comes," he said.



Privately, Nepali leaders have given up hope that any significant number of refugees will ever be repatriated. Although UNHCR officials still say publicly that the bilateral process must take its course, they also seem eager to discuss the other two options: local integration or third-country resettlement. "Let's get done with the bilateral process first," says a foreign ministry official.

Meanwhile, also in early December, a coalition of half-a-dozen international human rights and humanitarian organizations asked major donors to Bhutan and Nepal to take immediate and decisive action. The coalition wants Bhutan to be held accountable for its international obligations and also to ensure that the refugees are able to return to Bhutan with full citizenship and other accompanying rights. New York-based Human Rights Watch, along with other organizations, has asked the donors to reconsider their support for Bhutan. **N**



All photos B Rai

HARD LIFE: Refugee children at Beldangi II camp

cian told Nation Weekly, “We provided the refugees with space and assistance on humanitarian grounds, but it’s now posing serious economic and social problems for us.” He asked not to be identified, an indication of the sensitivity of the issue and his own ambivalence over the presence of the refugees, all ethnic Nepalis.

When the first batch of refugees arrived here in November 1989, it was the local residents who took the initiative to help them settle along the banks of the Mai River. “At the beginning it was really hard to provide assistance to them,” recalls Narad Muni Ghimire, former deputy mayor of Damak Municipality, who rushed to the aid of the desperate. “They were fleeing persecution, so it was incumbent on us to help them,” he says. Many



UNCERTAIN FUTURE: The debate over the fate of the refugees continues



All photos B Rai

of the children didn’t survive the cold nights of the first year, he recalls.

Later, the UNHCR stepped in. Many locals still hold a grudge against the U.N. refugee agency and the Nepali government officials; the residents of the neighborhood were never consulted when the refugee camps were set up in their midst. In 1993 they did protest against the large refugee resettlements in their neighborhood. They feared that the presence of tens of thousands of refugees would strain local resources. After assurances from the UNHCR and government officials of proper funding to build and renovate the local infrastructure, the overt opposition to the refugees receded. But the issue never went away completely; tension continued to brew slowly. Three months ago, the locals rallied outside the camps in Beldangi calling for an effective ban on refugee movement outside the camps. The protest came about after officials of the Humse Dumse Community Forest that borders the camp were attacked by a group of refugees who had sneaked into the forest to collect wood. When forestry officials confronted the refugees, the refugees attacked them as well. The police arrested some of the offenders, but this failed to placate the locals.

Refugee Aid

ECHO, the European Commission’s Humanitarian Office, recently provided two million euros to feed the Bhutanese refugees. The World Food Programme, the WFP, has already procured food, and the first few consignments have already arrived in its food depots in the refugee camps. The WFP says the food will be sufficient to feed the refugees for four and a half months. “ECHO has been one of the major donors to the refugees,” says a WFP official. And its assistance is crucial in running the whole refugee operation. It provides more than 35 percent of the total assistance. The funds from ECHO will enable the WFP to supply almost 5,000 tons of rice, 700 tons of pulses, 300 tons of vegetable oil, 1,200 tons of fresh vegetables and almost 400 tons of other food commodities. Nepal provides \$100,000 every year for the refugees. **N**



diseases,” says Govind Kattel, a health worker. “There is so much pollution that it could spread to the neighboring villages.”

But not everyone is unhappy with the refugees. Many feel that they have contributed to the local economy by providing cheap labor and that they are after all ethnic Nepalis. “The presence of refugees has been very helpful for development activities in the region,” says Abhiraj Dulal, a resident of Dhukurpani, just outside the Beldangi camp. “One can see so much construction work going on. This would have been different if the labor costs were still high.” Many like Dulal feel that refugees have given a lot of business to the local residents and

has been covering the refugee issue for a long time, says, “Locals feel that refugees earn their livelihood without doing anything, while they have to earn their living through sweat and blood.” More than anything else, it is this perception that fuels discontent among the locals.

“There is conflict,” admits a UNHCR official, “but there is also communication.” Though the officials from the U.N. refugee agency seem confident that the conflict will not get out of hand, they are worried. A little more attention to the issue might help, but health worker Govinda Kattel laments that the policy makers and the national media have given scant attention to the local dynamics. “They are obsessed with the political cause-and-effect cycle,” he says.

The number of criminal complaints filed at the Area Police Station in Damak has gone up steadily over the last few years. Locals attribute the rising crime rate in areas near the camps to the free movement of refugees. Pick-pocketing, burglary and even incidents of arson and murder have become commonplace. Most of those arrested turn out to be refugees, say police officials, but often the brains behind the crimes are members of local criminal gangs.

The locals offer a laundry list of complaints against the refugees; many of them sound like barbs between two neighbors whose relations have gone sour. Some locals claim that refugees have caused environmental degradation and pollution. They blame the camp inhabitants for rapid deforestation: The issue has been one of the most contentious points between the two communities. UNHCR officials have had to frequently step in to maintain calm. These officials accept some of the allegations but insist that they have been encouraging both the refugees and the locals to resolve the dispute through talks rather than violence. The UNHCR wants both communities to resolve their differences, but the list of complaints runs long. “People living in the vicinity of the camps are vulnerable to the spread of communicable



RETURN TO NORMALCY:
With Dashain, the camps
are abuzz with activity

that the injection of funds in running the camps has had positive effects on the local economy. “It’s not that everything is down and out,” says former deputy mayor Ghimire. “A lot of development works has taken place.”

While that is true, the refugees are unlikely to find again the warmth of the early days among the locals here. The love-hate relationship has, in fact, been further complicated due to fears that the refugees may wind up settling here permanently. There is a general feeling that refugees are getting special treatment: From the outside, the camps often look like privilege islands. Gopal Gadtoula, a journalist who

After 14 years, Kathmandu and international agencies responsible for the welfare of the refugees still skirt the issue of the socio-economic fallouts of hosting a large number of refugees on the local population. And how the refugees themselves are feeling the pinch. Both communities certainly deserve better.

The irony, however, is that political rhetoric on the country’s most enduring foreign policy crisis never ceases to make the headlines. “We have been put on alert by some of the clashes [between locals and refugees],” concedes the UNHCR official. So where is the national attention? **N**

The five-year tenure of the members of National Human Rights Commission will end soon. Political parties are calling for their terms to be extended. Donors agree and are also in favor of raising the commission's profile.

BY BISWAS BARAL AND KOSHAJ KOIRALA

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission, the NHRC, will soon complete their five-year term, which they say has been extremely difficult but rewarding. The commission was set up in May 2000 amid worries about a fast-deteriorating human rights situation. Since then the five-member commission has done a fine job of documenting and highlighting human rights abuses by both the Maoists and the security forces. There are now worries about how new members will be nominated. The three-member committee that selects them has a missing link itself: Without a sitting Parliament there is no leader of the opposition, who is supposed to serve on the selection committee with the prime minister and the chief justice.

Political parties and human rights workers are all for extending the tenure of the incumbents for a second term. "In the absence of Parliament, the executive body of the government can exert undue pressure on the nomination process," says Sushil Pyakurel, a member of the commission himself. "This poses a valid question: 'Can the selection be impartial?'"

The commission has come down heavily against rights abuses, and the government has been on its receiving end on more than one occasion. In 2004 the commission investigated 20 serious cases of rights violations by the security forces. The political parties seem especially pleased with the commission's performance and most worried about who would appoint new members.

"The members of the NHRC were selected by an elected parliament," says Amik Sherchan, president of the Jana Morcha Nepal. "No one, therefore, has the authority to dismiss or appoint the members except an elected parliament. The best option before us is to let the old members continue until there is a new Parliament."

According to the Human Rights Act 1997, the commission is accountable to the Parliament, which receives its annual report. "In the current state of affairs, extending the tenure of the incumbents is the only way out," says Nepali Congress spokesman Narahari Acharya.

Human rights workers fear that the rights situation would take an immediate nosedive in the absence of a reputed body that commands wide respect for its impartiality, both inside and outside the country. There are widespread apprehensions that the government would handpick the new commissioners with the intent of defeating the very purpose of having a human rights watchdog—to watch the government.

The donors are all for strengthening the commission and raising the profile of the human rights regime in the country. The U.S. Senate recently approved an appropriations act that lays out con-

STAY PUT



ditions, mainly based on human rights issues, for providing aid to Nepal.

The EU team that visited early this month made no attempt to hide its displeasure over the poor human rights situation in the country. It reminded all sides that they have obligations under both Nepali and international law. It said that it was urgent that both sides to the conflict should sign human rights accords as a first step toward curtailing the indiscriminate and arbitrary violations. It voiced solidarity with the NHRC and the human rights movement in Nepal, and it made a point of emphasizing that recent intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders were unacceptable. "The EU attaches importance to the continued independence, effectiveness and legitimacy of the NHRC," it said in a statement.

The EU also welcomed the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Nepal and the United Nations

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, stressing urgent, targeted and concrete measures to address the systemic culture of impunity and to implement the government's human rights commitments made last March, when it guaranteed to provide its citizens a wide range of civil and political rights. "The National Human Rights Commission must be given free and unhindered access to all places of detention without the need for prior notice," the EU said.

Despite all the outside support for the commission, some rights activists allege that NHRC has not done enough to probe certain issues. They charge that NHRC has repeatedly yielded to government pressure, for example, when it failed to bring out an impartial report in the case of Hem Narayan Mandal, a CPN-UML worker who was allegedly gunned down by the security forces in Siraha. The investigation was later handed over to the police.

But the government has been the sharpest critic of the NHRC, often accusing it of being soft on the Maoists. Former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand even established a separate human rights body, the Human Rights Promotion Center, to counter the NHRC. At a Human Rights Day function early this month, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said, "Our human rights activists are only critical of the state. They do not dare to speak against the violations by the Maoists, out of fear."

Analysts say the prime minister's wrath is natural given the dismal record of human rights of the security forces. Reports say that many arrested under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Punishment and Control Act, now turned into an ordinance, are detained in Army barracks and subjected to repeated torture. The Army vehemently denies the allegations. Incidents like extrajudicial killings and involuntary disappearances have increased during the last two years. The NHRC and other human rights organizations have found it difficult to get access to the detainees and to monitor the situation inside the detention centers.

Since the dissolution of the Parliament, about 60 ordinances have been promulgated. Most of them are related to security, and activists believe they are chiefly to blame for gross violations of human rights in the country. Fearing that the situation would spin out of control, the NHRC issued a call in November 2003 for U.N. rights experts to visit the country. But under U.N. rules, its representatives can visit a country only when the concerned government signs a memorandum of understanding with it. The Nepali government recently did so; this paves the way for the NHRC to seek technical assistance from U.N. human rights bodies.

Early this month, members of the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances were in Kathmandu to assess allegations of human rights violations, particularly involuntary disappearances. Warnings of three prominent international human rights organizations—Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Commission of Jurists—about rights violations perpetuated by both the government and the Maoists followed. "We want the NHRC to have a high-profile presence," says a western diplomat. "This is important to stop Nepal from going on a free fall." **N**



A GREAT VIEW, BUT IS IT SAFE?

Dharahara is finally opening for the public, but can its 176-year-old foundation withstand the load of thousands of visitors? Its new managers are confident.

BY DHRITI BHATTA

THE GREEN, SPONGY GERMAN grass blended with more than 25 varieties of shrubs and trees inside Dharahara offers a fresh look. It's four in the afternoon and Amar Bahadur Thapa, the security guard, is busy explaining to walker-bys that they aren't allowed in. Meanwhile, 11 workers with shovels, spades, hoes and peaks are busy unearthing a bare muddy ground. Ritu Nursery has been contracted for the maintenance of the 25,000-square-foot garden inside the Dharahara compound.

After years of wrangling, Kathmandu Municipality has finally leased the Dharahara premises to the private sector. Controversies aside, the Dharahara premise is destined for a new look. According to Sanjeev Tuladhar, the chairman of Sidewalker's Traders, who have just closed a 20-year lease on the property, a total of Rs.15 million will be invested on the renovation. The sum will also cover the embellishments and the building of tourist restrooms. The Sundhara Water Sprout will also be renovated. During the construction local residents and tourists will be allowed to enter the premises and also climb the nine-storied monument from January 2005.

But the big question is: Can Dharahara, with its 176-year-old foundation, withstand the visitors?

General Bhimsen Thapa built Dharahara, also known as Bhimsen Stamba, in 1825. But, after an eight Richter earthquake in 1934, the nine-storied Dharahara collapsed leaving behind only five stories. Two years later, the erstwhile

Rana prime minister, Juddha Shumshere, reconstructed the 203-foot monument, with a circular verandah on its eighth and a *shivalinga* on the top floor.

Formerly, a *bigul* was played to transmit military signals and other official information. And people gathered there during important events like the death of a high-ranking official. Hence, basically meant for military use, Dharahara was never opened for the general public until 2007 B.S. After the end of the Rana rule, Dharahara opened for the first time to the public.

"It was a chilling windy day," recalls Geeta Krishna Kharel, a resident of Gyaneshwore who entered the monument with his friend, Gaganendra Bahadur Singh, around 46 years ago, at the age of 14. "We had to pay around 20-25 paisa at the door before entering the tower along with five or six other people." After scaling each floor, Kharel remembers looking out of the circular openings on the walls, and getting scared seeing himself up so high from the ground. But the scariest part of the climb, Kharel says, came when he entered the verandah. "I was very scared to look down," says Kharel. "The Kathmandu Valley looked beautiful from such a high altitude, but, the fast blowing wind hitting on my face left me terrified."

Although there is no written evidence, hundreds of visitors like Kharel must have entered Dharahara during its opening for the 10-year period. The reason behind closing it again, irrespective of the public enthusiasm to enter the monument, remains undiscovered. However, according to many

elderly people, the vulnerability of the old structure must have been the primary reason behind the closure. "After people were stopped from entering Dharahara, there was a hue and cry about its foundation being weak to



hold visitors,” says 90-year-old Sarada Prasad Sharma. Unlike the modern buildings built on pillars and with cement, this Neo-Classical monument is basically made up of bricks and *bajra*, a mixture of lime; *surkhi*, powdered brick; and the binding agent, *chaku*.

But ask Nhuchhe Narayan Maharjan, a structural engineer, who has been engaged in the field for more than eight years, and he will immediately come up with his own mathematical reasoning showing how Dharahara can still withstand a group of 15 people of about 65 kilograms at a time. Maharjan’s Consulting Struc-

tures Engineer is the official firm looking after the feasibility of the structure. “Before all the feasibility tests, even I was quite unsure about whether the old monument can carry hundreds of people,” says Maharjan. “But after carrying out more than a month-long observation on the structure of the monument, we are now convinced that it still has the capability to entertain a large crowd.”

According to Maharjan, other than the outer three-inch plaster, which has worn away a bit, perhaps due to the rain and sun, the inner foundation of Dharahara, is solid.

Even with such convincing details, however, Safalya Amatya, the former director of the Department of Archeology refuses to trust that Dharahara’s foundation is strong. “This is just trying to commercialize Dharahara,” says Amatya. “How can a tower that was only meant to hold a few military officials carry thousands of people today? Dharahara unlike the Kutumbminar of Delhi and Eiffel Tower of Paris, which were originally constructed to let in people for scenic viewing, was constructed only for military purpose.”

Also Gyanendra Tuladhar, the former adviser of the Culture, Heritage and Tourism Department under the Kathmandu Municipality is against privatizing a cultural site such as Dharahara and staking people’s life without proper verification of the details presented by the lessee. “If the Hanuman Dhoka can be properly

maintained by the municipality itself then why not Dharahara?” asks Tuladhar.

Navin Pokhrel, a research officer at the Nepal Tourism Board, though also skeptical about the structural constraints of Dharahara, is happy about the monument being leased to the private sector and opened for general public. “I certainly would like to know how it feels to enter the monument that I’ve grown up seeing,” says Pokhrel. “Structural dilemma aside, opening Dharahara will mean a boom in domestic as well as international tourism.”

An official at the Department of Archaeology who doesn’t want to be named is pretty optimistic about the opening. “If the lessees don’t go against the norms of the Archaeological Department and verify the structural feasibility accurately, then using Dharahara to earn money for the country should not be a problem.”

For now, Sanjeev Tuladhar and his team, including engineer Nhuchhe Narayan Maharjan and architect Navin Tuladhar are confident about what they have concluded through their studies. “When it comes to natural phenomenon such as earthquake, we can’t predict anything,” says architect Tuladhar. “But as for our findings we are confident.” In order to win the confidence of the general public, the Sidewalker’s have already insured Dharahara for Rs.100 million. In addition with the tower, the National Life and General Insurance has also insured each individual entering into the tower for Rs.100,000. That’s a good beginning. **N**





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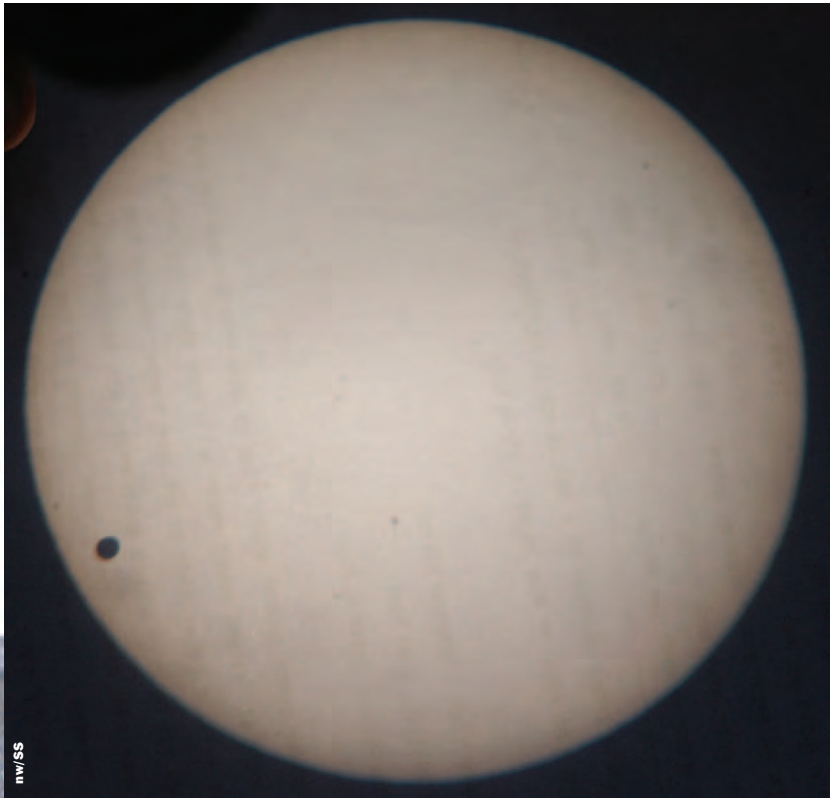
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Matrika Yadav, a senior Maoist leader, was arrested in Lucknow on Feb. 10



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The killing of 12 innocent Nepalis in Iraq resulted in an uncontrolled expression of outrage in Nepal. On Sept. 1, a day after the news of the killings broke out, people vandalized mosques, manpower companies, public and private properties leading to an enormous economic loss and a four-day curfew in the Valley.



Paandyun, Kailali: Some 300 Maoists were reported killed in encounters with the security forces on Nov. 22



nw/SS



▼ The infamous international criminal Charles Sobhraj was sentenced to life imprisonment on Aug. 12



▲ Around 40 students from Shree Krishna Secondary School at Chhaimale, 20 km south of Kathmandu, were released on July 20 after two days in Maoist captivity



▲ The World Buddhist Summit was held in Lumbini from Nov. 30 to Dec. 2

▲ In September, Sangina Baidya (taekwondo) became the first Nepali to qualify through the competitive rounds in the Olympics



▲ The first domestic jet flight in early October

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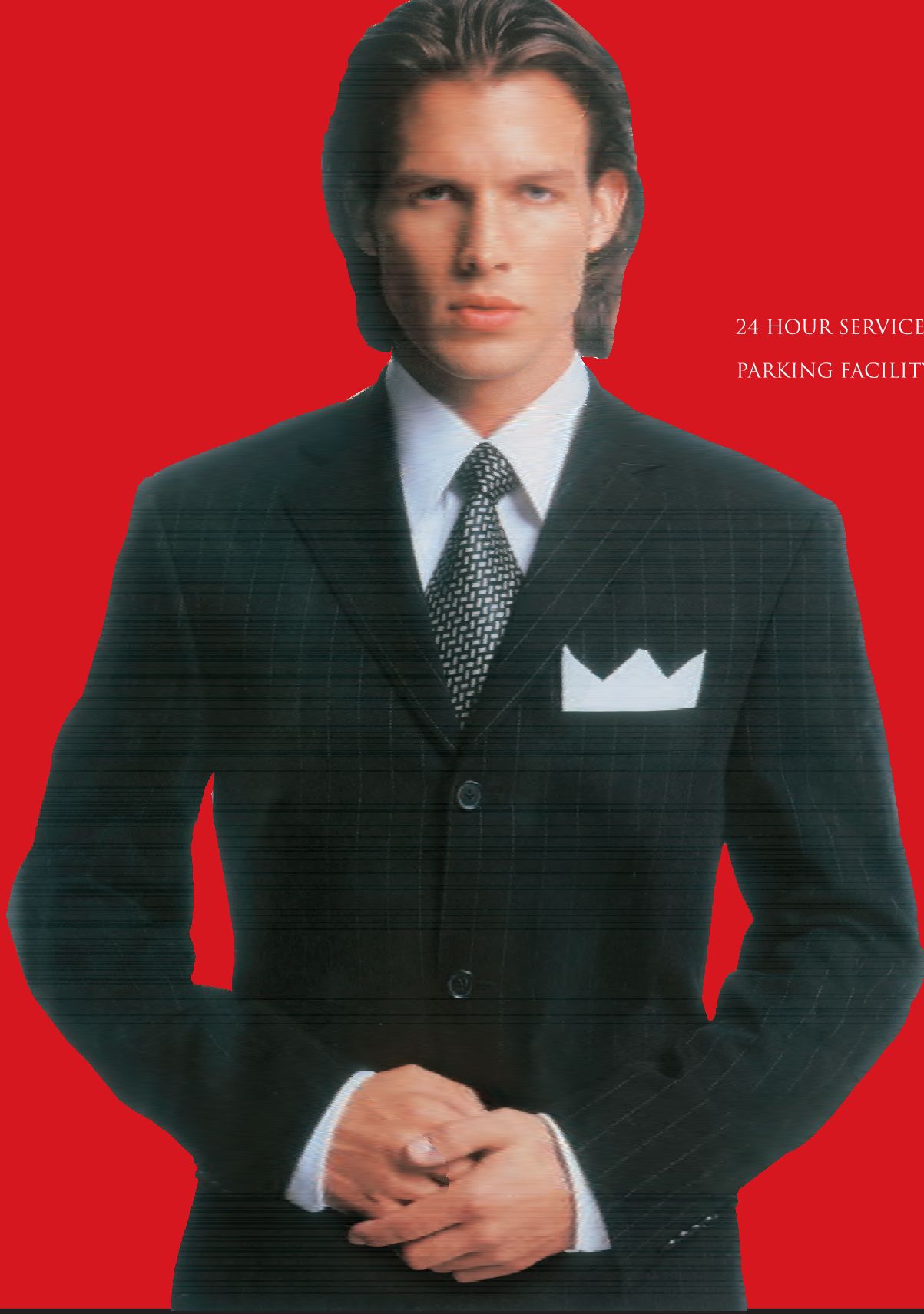
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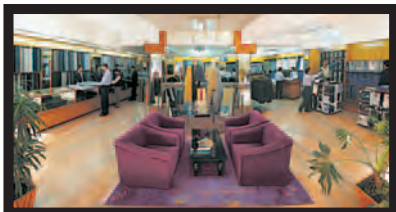
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The Journey Ends

On to Beni, then!

BY KUNAL LAMA

I was really looking forward to a long soak in the hot spring. It was not that I needed a bath; after six days of tough-ish walking, it was my sore muscles that were demanding a bit of TLC. It was darkening and already four in the afternoon when I decided to visit the hot spring. The Tatopani hot spring consisted of two stone-lined shallow pools fed by an underground source. The first pool was very hot at 50° C; the second had been cooled down to 40° C. After a quick wash under an outflow from the pools, I gingerly lowered myself into the hot water: toes in first, then the feet, the legs—ouch! steady!—waist in, then up to the neck. Boy, did it feel great to let the heat and steam work their magic on my tired body. All around me, a good number of trekkers and a few locals were in a similar state of grimacing ecstasy. It was quite a surreal sight to behold: bleached, white bodies turning pink juxtaposed with wrinkling, brown Nepalis. Some had ordered beers from the nearby kiosk. The mood was mellow, the voices hushed, the eyes drooping when a beau-

gathered, she carefully rose and disappeared. Mirage muddled, the men hauled themselves back to reality and to the raised eyebrows of their female friends. Almost in unison, they got up, collected their belongings and headed back to their lodges. It was time for dinner anyway. The lights had come back; the dining room was heaving with hungry souls. Tomorrow, the descent to Beni awaited, marking the end of my trek.

The walk to Beni was not spectacular in any way. Some bits of the trail—especially those overhanging with drippy, droopy grass, carved into the sides of cliffs—were steep, stony and slippery. When we reached Beg Khola, the trail widened out unannounced and looked suspiciously like a highway in the making. It was; in fact, Royal Nepal Army is soon to restart work on the Beni to Mustang highway. Tractors and wheezing four-wheel drive vehicles noisily and dustily drove past us, crowded with passengers and their crude cargo. Just as I thought that the trek had lost its romance, an encounter with a charming old man in Rakhu rescued the day for me.

Stopping to sample a plate of *aloo dum*, I spread out my map to see how far we were from Beni. As I did this, I noticed an old man,

togged up in a crossover shawl of the Gurungs, peering dimly over my shoulder. His apparent ability to read English led me to ask him if he had been in the *paltan* (army). He instantly straightened up and said yes, he had been in the Fifth Gurkha Regiment of the Indian Army, which he had left a long time ago when his hearing got impaired from an ear infection. As we idly chatted, he curiously asked me if I had binoculars. When I wondered aloud why, he said, oh, there is a certain *buti* (herbal plant) I need to see on the cliffs yonder. What *buti*? Shilajit! He turned out to be a rare shilajit harvester, a dangerous work involving cliff-climbing on dangling ropes. When I mentioned Dabur shilajit capsules (which I take daily), he scorn-

fully dismissed them as tainted with tar and not fit for human consumption! But with bad hearing and failing eyesight, he had stopped harvesting shilajit. I got the sad feeling he wanted to remind himself of what he was capable of once, not what he could do now.

Warmed up by this encounter, I marched to Galeshwore, only to hear the alarming news of a Dhaulagiri *banda* the following day. I immediately hopped on to an ancient jeep and rushed to Beni. Not wanting to get stuck there, I reserved a taxi at a considerable cost to whizz me to Pokhara. Two-and-half hours later at 7 p.m., I was by the Lakeside at the Hotel Barahi. My idyll in the hills was over. **N**



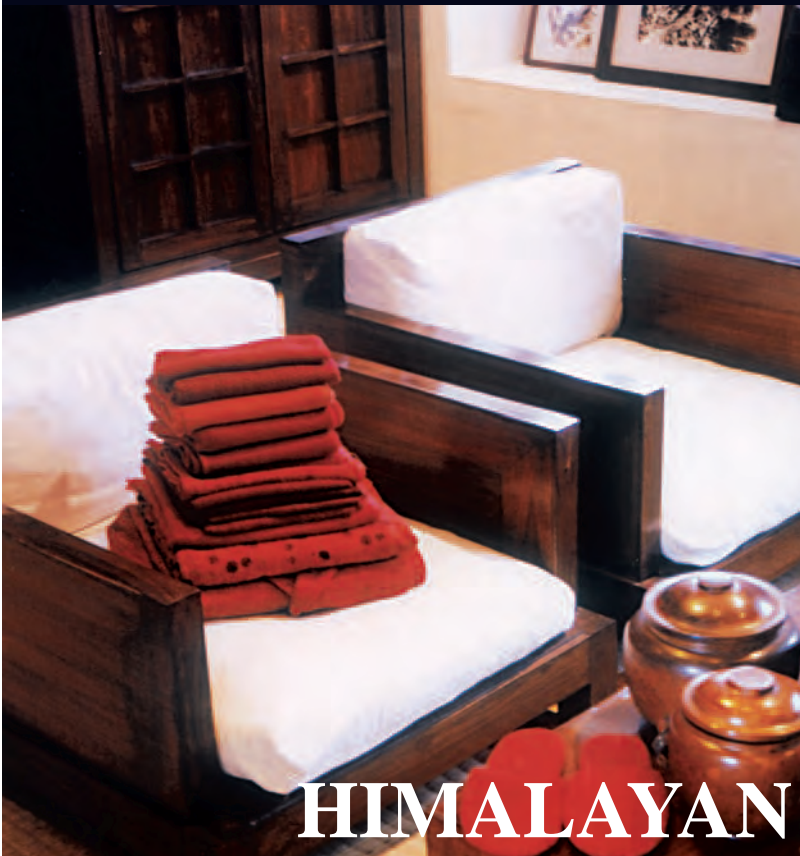
tiful Nepali girl dropped her clothes and, clad only in a thin sarong and a bikini top, gracefully slid into the pool, water nymph-like. You should have seen the men jerk into action! The girl in question turned out to be *the village belle*. For the next hour or so, she nonchalantly lingered in the shallow waters, a slow, wide turn of her head here, a demure lowering of her eyes there, lost in the pleasures of the hot water steaming over her wet body, seemingly oblivious to the vigorous desires she was churning in the thoughts of men who were, by now, helplessly in love with her. She was a class act: no cheap flirting, glances or exchanges of words. And she never smiled. As the twilight

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Impression of Nepal

Victor Klenov in association with Hotel Shangri-La presents a photo exhibition "Impression of Nepal." Date: Dec. 25-28. Time: 11 a.m. onwards. At the Shambala Garden. For information: 441-2999.

New Year in Dwarika's

Dwarika's symbolizes Nepal and its heritage and it is the ideal place where you can reflect on 2004 and set your sights on 2005. Dwarika's New Year Eve celebration includes live cooking stations from around the world and a live musical performance by the sensational pop diva Abhaya and her smoking "Steam Injuns" band. Date: Dec. 31. Time: 8 p.m. onwards. Price: Rs.3500 per couple, Rs.2000 for singles, includes a welcome drink, New Year's Eve dinner and dance with the band.

Freedom Zone

The four ways to let your hair down this New Year's Eve. Zone 1: Decheling Garden, pre-party with Rasa; Zone 2: J Bar, electronic room, DJ Rav4 feat. House & Trance; Zone 3: Himalayan Java, main room, DJ Sickfreak feat. latest hip hop/club remixes and Zone 4:



ONGOING

The Spirit Of Christmas

Sensational and sumptuous Christmas goodies are laid out at the Hyatt Regency to celebrate the



spirit of Christmas. For information: 449-1234.

Nepali Platter

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come and enjoy this special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin and Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 441-1818.

Java Terrace, Chillout Lounge. Date: Dec. 31. Time: 8p.m. onwards. Price: Rs.1600, inclusive of dinner, snacks, two complimentary drinks. For information: 98510-68871.

Just Divine Nite 3

Enjoy the New Year's Eve Edition of the most popular party in town. Date: Dec 31. Time: 9 p.m. onwards. Venue: Jack Lives Here, 1905 Kantipath. Price: Rs. 500 per person.

Jukebox Experience

The jukebox experience with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar. For information: 449-1234.

Seasons Specials

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian cuisine, daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri~la Hotel. Date: Dec. 1 onwards. Price: Rs.450 per person, includes a bottle of mineral water or a soft drink.

Tickling Taste buds

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri~la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 441-2999.

All That Jazz

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Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards, every Friday. Entry fee: Rs.555,



including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 447-9488.

Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of eastern and western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 449-1234.

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Emerging Voices

Three young artists, Sushma Shakya, Rukmani Maskey and Dal Bahadur Rai exhibit a total of 48 prints in a group exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. These three aspiring artists are students of the famous printmaking husband-wife team of Uma Shanker Shah and Seema Sharma. Printmaking is not easy. These young printmakers have immersed themselves in learning the technicalities of time bite, gum bite, colograph, wood block and sugar-lifting to understand the crux of this modern graphic art work. Dal Bahadur Rai has depicted the natural heritage of Nepal; Rukmani Maskey has her work influenced by religion and culture and Sushma Shakya surprises the viewers with elements of mystery in pictures that might seem conventional in first glance.

PRINT EXHIBITION



New Year in Hyatt

It's goodbye to 2004 and a time to welcome the New Year, 2005. The Café at the Hyatt Regency will serve a special



New Year's Eve dinner with sparkling wine and exotic cocktails. The Rox Restaurant will also feature an exclusive

seafood menu with champagne. The decoration of The Café and Rox Restaurant will only add to the festivities. Date: Dec. 31. For information: 449-1234.

Sinners in Heaven

Following an exclusive fashion show, Haute Couture, where the models will be walking across the ramp in the lobby, Hotel Yak n' Yeti will bring to you Sinners in Heaven on the New Year's Eve. Time: Haute Couture till 8 p.m. and Sinners in Heaven

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Dream Reawakened



TIME HONORED TRADITION: Valery V. Nazarova, ambassador of Russia, lights this year's chimney

The aura and the legacy that Boris has left behind make the Chimney unique among the restaurants serving fine cuisine in Nepal

BY VENEETA SINGHA

The New Year is around the corner and the Christmas festivities are underway. Bells and mistletoes hang on the windows. Golden pinecones sit next to salt and pepper shakers. A grey haired waiter is placing logs in the fireplace and the chimney in the middle shines with its own story to tell.

Bishnu Bijel, the waiter, learnt the tricks of the trade from the legendary Boris Lissanevitch. Bishnu has been around since the grand old days of the Royal Hotel. Sunken cheekbones, but wearing a merry smile; there is so much to talk about him. He looks pensive and his eyes are wistful for the days gone by. Yet he smiles again and brings a glass of water. He exudes hospitality and warmth. Boris—restaurateur, hotelier and pioneer of tourism in Nepal—has trained him well. Boris was commissioned by the government to set up the country's first luxury hotel to accommodate British royalty. He also invited the first tourists to the country, paving the way for the tourism trade that flourished

even after him. His friendship with the late King Tribhuvan, who frequented his club in Calcutta, later won him entry into the social scene of Kathmandu, which he lit up delightfully.

The Chimney restaurant as it stands now was built painstakingly from ruins. It is a part of the luxury hotel Yak and Yeti. The hotel is built on and around the late Bir Shumshere's Lal Durbar. Boris, often called the father of tourism in Nepal, lived upstairs with his family and entertained guests like a king. Ambassadors, ministers—they came regularly to the restaurant and the word spread that the Chimney served the best food in town. There is an old world charm about Bishnu and the restaurant—of the days of fine dining and gracious living. Boris came to Nepal with the Ballet Russe and his name is and will always be associated with the dazzling social landscape of Kathmandu in the 1970s and even earlier. He has probably single handedly changed the face of Nepal's modern gourmandizing culture. He opened the Chimney in Kathmandu when restaurants were but meager establishments and fine dining was but a

dream. You can read about the legendary Boris in Michel Pissel's "Tiger for Breakfast." A museum has been built in his name in Odessa, his hometown, in Russia.

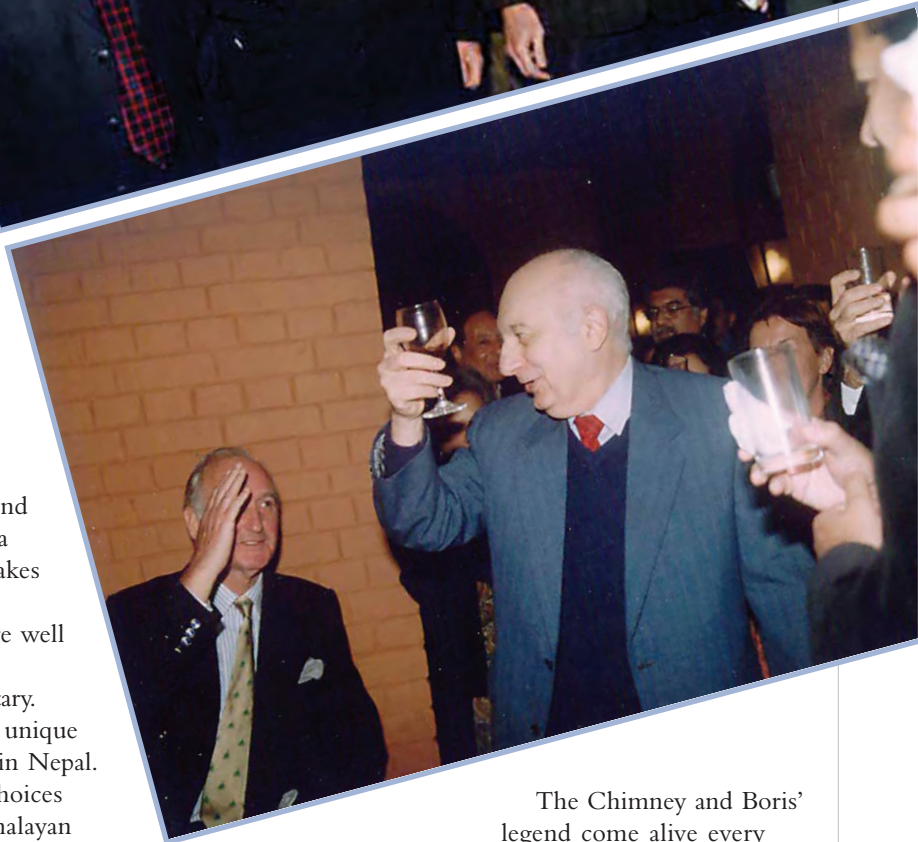
The restaurant takes its name from the chimney on the open, handcrafted, copper-shafted fireplace. Boris brought not only fine dining and entertainment to Nepal but also left his mark on the Nepali hospitality industry. Bishnu recalls how Boris would give personal attention to the guests. Bishnu has now emulated the great master himself. Prince Charles, Imelda Marcos and other dignitaries have been spotted in the restaurant.

Each year the chimney is lit to mark the onset of the winter season; this year it was lit by Valery V. Nazarova, ambassador of Russia. Boris' dream has been reawakened this year with the revamping of the menu and the return of some of his specialties such as the Russian borscht and the flaming baked Alaska Sagarmatha.

The restaurant is famed for its delectable menu, but also for its warm ambience, some of which it gains from the chimney, the fireplace and the gathering around it. The fire and Crepes, a la Boris, warm up chilly winter nights. Bishnu makes sure that every evening is a memorable one.

The palate-teasing delicacies on the menus are well known, both in Nepal and abroad; a stop at the restaurant is seen as a must for any visiting dignitary. The aura that the restaurant has about it gives it a unique place among the restaurants serving fine cuisine in Nepal.

The menu enlists all kinds of food items. Choices range from tasty appetizers—including the Himalayan Parma Ham—to the soups and the famous Russian borscht. There is a rich selection of fish, meats and poultry, along with a range of other vegetable dishes. Then come the desserts. The savoir-faire with which Boris entertained his guests lives on in the menu, the food and the restaurant. The Chimney becomes the dining place of the eminent, as Boris had always dreamt. Bishnu with his welcoming persona has his own role to play now.



The Chimney and Boris' legend come alive every evening as Bishnu lights up the chimney. He has seen and met many eminent personalities yet he talks mostly of Boris. He is eager to tell the story of the Chimney but is also determined to keep alive its true spirit. The restaurant is inviting, as Bishnu is welcoming. The food speaks for itself but one must pay homage to the man behind the dream. It is a dream like no other, and it lives on in Bishnu's endearing story. **N**





IN THE DOLD



The Nepali film industry is going through the toughest phase in its short history

BY BISWAS BARAL

A VISITOR TO THE UNITED States was aghast when he spotted Karishma Manandhar outside an immigration lawyer's office in New York. "What on earth is Nepal's most successful actress doing during her movie tour to the United States?" he wondered with his friends. He soon found the answer: Manandhar's Rs.8 million "Babusaheb," which she had also produced, had bombed at the box office. Apparently she had had enough of Nepal.

Manandhar is not the only cinema artiste to leave Nepal due to the dismal state of the film industry. The west has recently lured such established actors like Saranga Shrestha, Gauri Malla, and Rajaram Paudel, who join the trailblazers like Karishma KC and Saroj Khanal. Indeed, Bhuvan K.C.,

who is past his prime, and Rajesh Hamal seem to be the only big-league survivors.

The film industry has taken a nosedive in the last couple of years. The fall in the number of productions is alarming, and several of the movies that have come out have bombed at the box-office. There has been an exodus of top actors from the country; those who remain are struggling.

Cinematrix in Tripureshwore—one of the two digital studios in Kathmandu—once used to be teeming with the superstars of the Nepali films. These days they are hard to spot, and the studio seems largely vacant. During 2001, its peak year, it processed around 50 films. For the last couple of seasons it has only been doing 8-10 films. This year it expects the number to come down to 4-5 films.

The insurgency seems to have taken its toll on the film industry. Due to the





RUMS

lack of security, many cinema halls across the country have closed down: Twenty-six of them along the major highways have ceased operation. The lack of security has hurt the remaining theaters too. Where there used to be three shows daily, most halls are only running two now.

In 2002, 50 Nepali films were produced. A year later the figure had plummeted to a dozen. The industry had a turnover of around Rs.200 million a few years ago: The figure is around Rs.40 million now. These days Cinematrix has to sustain itself by doing post-production work for advertisements and documentaries; television serials are its chief source of income now.

There are around 450 movie theaters in the country, and the average hall has 700 seats. But almost all are playing to empty galleries. Five to 10 percent occupancy rates are typical. A film collecting Rs.2.5-3 million inside Kathmandu used to be classified as a hit, but these days, movies making a tenth of that are counted as blockbusters.

Rajan Panta, who handles marketing and administration at Cinematrix, asks, "When people's main concern is security, how can we expect them to go out and enjoy the movies? Entertainment is the last thing on people's minds today."

Surprisingly, though, the market for the foreign films remains largely unaffected. The hackneyed storylines and underdeveloped plots in most Nepali movies may be one reason why they are not attracting the masses of yesteryears.

Producer-director Ashok Sharma, who is the general secretary of the Nepal Film Development Corporation, looks at the problem differently. He says that an average Nepali film has a production cost of Rs. 3-4 million but has to compete against Bollywood movies with at least 10 times that budget. When there is less money, quality is invariably compromised. Producers and directors bear some responsibility, he says, but there are too many other variables to take into consideration.

Chief among them is the mass departure of the main audience for Nepali films, young people in the villages and in urban centers. The declining audience is directly affecting the film industry. "A major portion of our audience is now chopping onions in Qatar and Malaysia," says Sharma. "The industry is having a hard time filling the void left by them."

Even films like "Caravan," "Numafung" and "Bheda Ko Oon Jasto," which have received critical acclaim, have only been "media hits," Sharma claims. "Even when interesting, out-of-the-box movies are produced, the audience doesn't come to the theaters. What can

we do, then?" he asks. "The only way the Nepali film industry will revive is if audiences go and watch the movie. If the halls are full, we will have bigger budgets, and with bigger budgets, better movies will invariably come out."

The Nepal Film Development Corporation is doing its bit to help. A system of keeping visual archives has been put in place, a film library is in the offing, a screenplay competition and a film festival are scheduled for 2005 and work documenting the history of Nepali films has begun.

The government seems willing to pitch in too. It has given a tax concession to Nepali films, raw stock facilities of production equipment have been improved and the duty on the import of the film-making equipment has been lowered. A shooting studio is also on the cards if the corporation gets foreign donors.

Still, the future of the industry looks gloomy. Theatre-shy audiences will be hard to coax back. And with the exodus of youth continuing and the state of the country deteriorating further, people like Panta see little hope.

Sharma remains optimistic, though, "We should make movies aiming at an international audience; then we will have to make good movies," he says. "And though the situation is dismal now, we are not distraught and hopeless."

As for Manandhar, who was recently in Nepal, she says she has gained respect for all professions, big and small, while in the United States and that she is ready to do menial jobs when she returns. Sadly, that may be the best advice for all starry-eyed Nepali actors. **N**



Chinese Wonders

A flood of inexpensive but good-quality Chinese imports has changed Nepali lifestyles

BY KUMUD NEPAL

Dharahara was being newly painted. The workers hung at dizzying heights, their lives depending on the long ropes that ran down along the white plastered nine-story tower. It was a dramatic sight, but not many people were looking up. Attention was centered instead on the piles of clothing that lay along the teeming footpath.

"Two hundred, jackets for two hundred!" a hawker was shouting at the top of his voice. Nearby, some policemen were bargaining over a navy blue cardigan. "Chinese pants, hajur. Can't give them to you for Rs.150," another hawker explained to a customer. Dozens of vendors and hundreds of shoppers filled the area around the tower, turning it into an

impromptu Chinese market. Winter jackets and pajamas were the biggest sellers.

"I come here regularly, mostly to sell Chinese jackets," said Govinda Karki, who was wearing a brown woolen cap. It was just past 4 o'clock and getting chilly. "I also sell Nepal-made jackets, but people are more interested in buying Chinese," he added.

Goods made in China, once the sole preserve of the National Trading Corporation and a few big stores, are now sold all over town. There is no official merchandise and no popular brand names, but the merchandise is still wildly popular. Karki said he makes a daily profit of Rs.400 from selling jackets.

It's not just clothing. There are all sorts of Chinese products available. A little further down the road, in the dark

alleys of Mahaboudha behind Bir Hospital, about 500 people come everyday for TVs, calculators, household utensils and electrical appliances, as well as clothes. The attraction is the same for everyone: the wide range of inexpensive goods.

"This place is just a m a z i n g," said Shirish Pandey, a 19-year-old high school graduate currently learning multimedia. "I generally come here to buy graphic software," he said. Pandey has been buying a lot of stuff from Khasa Bazaar lately, mostly pirated CDs. The easy availability of software worth thousands of dollars for



ECONOMICAL: Low-priced Chinese blankets at Mahaboudha



just Rs.60 has convinced Pandey that it is “the best shopping center in the Valley.”

Pandey, who comes here at least twice a month, related his experience of having seen people of all ages, from children to the elderly. “People want cheap stuff, and quality doesn’t really matter for lots of things we buy. So this place is suitable for people seeking products at really low prices.”



Inexpensive no longer has to mean poor quality. Consumers say that most Chinese goods are worth their price. Salesman Raju Shrestha has been trading in electrical appliance for the last five years. His store has wide range of goods—radios, walkmans, speakers, calculators, TV remote controls and telephones. The phones cost between Rs.175 to

Rs.900, while Japanese sets of same quality cost from Rs.1,500 to Rs.2,000, said Shrestha. Chinese goods, he explained, are as good as any, and many consumers are looking specifically for Chinese products.

Chinese goods have changed people’s lifestyles. Kale Pahari from Badikhel VDC near Godavari is happy that he can listen to FM radio in his remote village. “In our childhood, only the Lahures used to have transistors. Information, news and entertainment were out of reach [for other people]. But a Rs.120 radio I bought in Bhrikuti Mandap last year has made the world much smaller for us,” the 58-year-old said. “Old people like me would die of cold if Chinese clothing was banned,” said Ram Neupane, who runs a teashop in the same village.

Chinese markets cater to everyone. With a Casio calculator in hand, Sourya Subedi, an eighth-grader at a public school, was searching for cheap pens at Mahaboudha. His stationary budget for the year is Rs.300. His elder brother’s good experience with a Chinese camera, which worked well for years, convinced him of the good value of Chinese products.

The Chinese stores do especially good business during the wedding season. The Gift Shop in Mahaboudha was flooded with people last month. Big sellers: sleek photo albums for less than Rs.100, attractive sets of china for less than Rs.200 and colorful electric lamps for Rs.300. Then there are the indispensable rice cookers, which can be had for as little as Rs.600. Indeed, Chinese goods dominate almost every sector of the retail market. From clothing to kitchen utensils, Chinese goods have enriched ordinary Nepalis’ lives.

The effects of the influx of Chinese merchandise go beyond the obvious. Quite a few people believe that the success of Nepali folk songs over the last few years is due less to the recording quality or talent of the singers than to affordable Chinese radios and cassette players. At a time when the film industry is in a downward spiral due to low attendance in theaters, Nepali viewers are watching more foreign movies at home on cheap VCD players.

Chinese goods are no longer a barometer of one’s social standing. They have universal appeal, as Karki at Dharahara said: “All kinds of people buy my jackets.” **N**



Dirty Nexus

Sports reeks of corruption. Unsurprisingly, it extends beyond Nepal's borders.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

It's been four months since two of the country's most powerful sports bodies promised in public to bury their hatchet over who controls the Olympic purse.

Following the mediation by Minister of State for Sports and Education Bal Krishna Khand, the two factions of the Nepal Olympic Committee, the NOC, one led by Rukma Shumshere Rana and the other by Kishore Bahadur Singh looked all set to put behind the nasty power struggle.

"A page had been turned," Rana declared in August even as the Nepali contingent was leaving for the Athens Olympics. "We've put aside all our differences and joined hands for good."

Rana had also assured the officials and athletes that the joint Olympic committee, a merger of the two separate groups headed respectively by him and Singh, member secretary of the National Sports Council, would soon be endorsed by the International Olympic Committee, the IOC.

Unfortunately, the moment never arrived. The situation only exacerbated after the Athens Games. And the power struggle over the control of Nepal's sport fraternity continues. The clash of egos is nauseating enough. Now either group is plotting to pull the rug from under the feet of the other.

But why does someone like Rana, to whom pelf is just a four-letter word, so desperately want to hold on to the Olympic committee? Why is Singh so hell-bent on ensuring that he does not get it?

"It certainly is not for the love of the game," says one disgruntled former national athlete, discussing who motivates the two clashing titans. "That concept is for poor fools like you and me."

Of course, the perks of the office are extremely alluring. Thanks to the astounding amounts of money being poured in by the IOC. Nepal's Olympic committee gets about \$50,000 annually to cover administrative costs, plus thousands more through the Olympic Solidarity Fund, which goes toward assisting the poorer countries to keep the Olympic movement alive.

The fighting started 18 months ago when the government dissolved the NOC following controversial elections. And it set up an ad hoc NOC under Singh.

A great deal has already been spoken and written on the debacle. A lot of it was a brilliant exercise in passing the buck. The NOC was pilloried not for the debacle but over an alleged financial irregularity.

More piquant details of financial irregularities have surfaced. The tales of sleaze are only so damning. And strangely those tales are coming from beyond the boundaries of Nepali sport.

"Rana has embezzled the IOC fund," Richard Morley told a press conference recently. Interestingly enough, Morley, a British millionaire, had led his adopted son Jayram Khadka to the Winter Olympic Games at Salt Lake City, Utah in 2002

as ski coach, representing Nepal Ski Association that was headed by Rana. The participation was carried out without the sports council's approval.

Khadka, albeit through controversial channel, competed in 1,500-meter cross-country sprint, to become the first Nepali athlete to participate in the Winter Olympic Games.

According to Morley, NOC had received at least \$32,000 in IOC funding for the team's preparation and participation in the Games. "Out of that, I've enough evidence to prove that Rana has embezzled \$8,000," he told reporters. He also accused Rana of spending the



amount to fund Rana and his wife's trip to the United States. "I've even met with the prime minister and sports minister and informed them about the incidents," Morley claimed.

Rana, however, denied the allegations. "They are without foundation," he said but declined to make any further comment.

It is not as if questions, often inconvenient and indefensible, have risen only this time. Ignoring widespread protest, NOC in the past has ferried officials to Olympic Games on seats allocated to journalists.

"Rana has betrayed the entire sports community," says Lok Bahadur Shahi, treasurer of the Singh-led NOC. But he frets even more over



EGO CLASH: Singh (left) and Rana

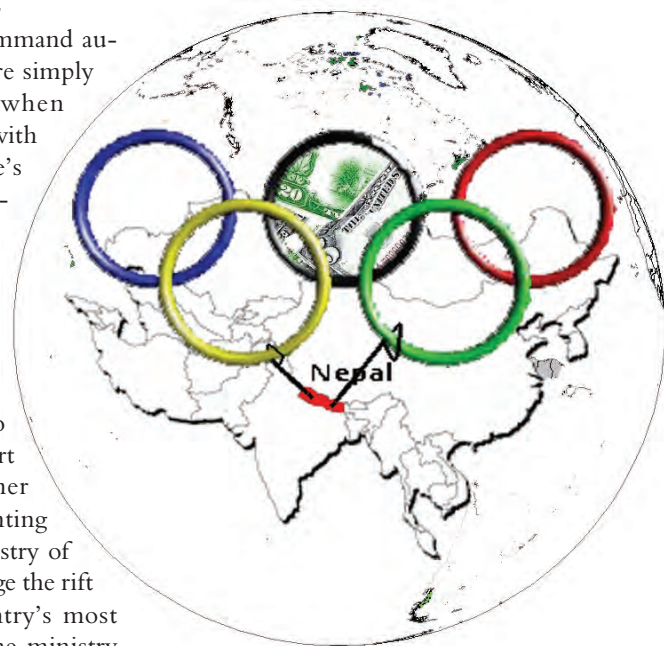
the fact that people who command authority in the government are simply helpless. Shahi explains when people like Rana hold ties with international officials, there's little those inside the country can do.

"Organizations like IOC and FIFA run international programs through their own statutes. The problem will not be resolved until government authorities get used to the ways of international sport federations," says the former ANFA general secretary, hinting at the failed bid of the Ministry of Education and Sports to bridge the rift between two of the country's most powerful sport bodies. The ministry had suggested fresh elections to revamp the NOC administration.

Go back a few years and turn over the sports pages. There are enough examples that would explain how the international sports federations are being run. And they are sleazier than you can possibly imagine. They are institutions notorious for groupism, shifting loyalties, changing equations and backroom maneuvers; polemics eventually becomes irrelevant.

In 2002, six IOC members were expelled while four others were forced to resign for the involvement in the Salt Lake City bribery scandal. It dealt a fatal blow to the Olympic ideal. A detailed investigation into the allegations revealed that the Salt Lake City Games organizers had spent more than \$10 million

lavishing gifts on the members to win precious votes to stage the Winter Olympic Games. The tradition of IOC



members visiting bidding cities has been dropped since.

Likewise, there are enough reports suggesting FIFA elections in 1998 too were rigged. The allegations appear in an explosive book "How They Stole the Game" by British author David Yallop. Twenty leading figures in world football allegedly accepted a million dollars in bribes to "fix" the election held at the Meridian Hotel in Paris for the game's top job. But FIFA never called for the investigation because too many people implicated in corruption going back 25 years are still in positions of power. And those powerful men, in turn, do everything in their power to see their henchmen at member countries.

In the light of all these things, it looks more difficult to see a positive change in countries like Nepal. The IOC funds could have been best used for the development of Nepali sports as the government is already outstretched with its resources to meet escalating security costs.

Apparent however is a state of confusion, as people holding powerful position at sports bodies keep enjoying political clout. As a result, the associations and federations, formed with the express purpose of serving and promoting the practitioners of sport, are slowly losing their relevance. And configuring the power equations within Nepal's sports sector seems a daunting exercise even to the most analytical of observers. **N**



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Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

Riding High

It was her song “Kina Kina” from her first album “Priyatam” that won her the Hits FM Best Female Vocal Award seven years ago. Since then, there has been no looking back for **NALINA CHITRAKAAR**. She received the prestigious Chinnalata Puraskar in 2003 and the Hits FM Music Award in 2004. On Dec. 18, Chitrakaar also became the first female to bag the Icons Award-2004. She entertained the crowd present at the awards ceremony with 13 of her most melodious numbers. “This is just the beginning,” says Chitrakaar. Well, we can certainly expect more.



B Rai
P. Rai

SCORING SPREE

RAMESH BUDHATHOKI clinched the Himalayan Bank Cup for Mahendra Police Club on Dec. 18 with his 77th minute goal. The final goal against the Three Star Club also won him the top scorer award. He had seven goals in the four knockout matches. The skipper, who joined the national team as an Under-17 player 10 years ago, remains humble about his achievements. “I didn’t expect to be the highest scorer,” says Budhathoki. “I must really thank my luck.” Budhathoki is already back on the field for the San Miguel International Cup that began on Thursday, Dec. 23. He is warming up in style for the SAAF Championship to be held in Pakistan in January.



Costly Ad

“I pleaded before the organizers to spare my French beard,” says **SURAJ SINGH THAKURI**, producer and VJ at Kantipur Television. “But unfortunately they wanted a clean shaved model.” Shot at Jim Corbett National Park in India, Thakuri’s latest Shikhar Lights ad without his signature French beard, however, is making waves. What does the environment science student say about provoking others to smoke? “If it wouldn’t have been me, it would have been someone else,” says Thakuri. “Smoking depends on individual will, not on any person’s appearance in an ad.” No comments.

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Radio City

Gopal Jha is a man who takes his job—radio broadcasting—seriously and expects others to do the same. He is also someone who likes to take up challenges. Starting as a program assistant in 1996 with Kantipur FM 96.1, he rose through the ranks to become the station manager in 2002. He now has a new job and a new task at hand as the station manager



B Rai

for Nepal FM 91.8, the newest FM station to hit the airwaves of Kathmandu. Jha has the tough job of carving a market for the new station. The competition is tough with 14 FM stations in the Valley alone, and two more to soon begin operation. He also has another obstacle to overcome—the homogeneity in the programming. Yashas Vaidya spoke to the Jha about the new station, the challenges and radio broadcasting.

There are 40 FM stations in Nepal, 14 in the Valley. One too many?

There is place for many new stations—why only 40, why not 400? The problem with the stations is that there is a lack of identity—a sort of identity crisis. They're the jack of all [trades], but the masters of none. Every station should not try to do everything.

For a startup like yours, the question must be—will you succeed commercially?

We will certainly. We are different from other stations. Ours is a news-based station. We give more news, more information. We've got a lot of news, hourly news...

Is that how you plan to differentiate yourselves from the rest of the crowd?

We're also different in terms of programming. We play more music, talk little, very little, a lot less than in other stations. In most FM programs, the presenter talks between songs and simply keeps on talking. We give news, and then just music. And in small intervals in between the presenter gives small bits

of information. If you give information as in news and if you give good music, it is possible to keep the listeners hooked.

You seem to have a problem with radio jockeys talking a lot...

Yeah. Who cares about gossip? Who cares about what you did in the morning and what you ate? Who has the time? It will soon be 10 years since FM radio started in the Valley. It's time we gave people something new. There is a need for more innovative programming. We've had enough of "live entertainment." It's programming done without any homework whatsoever. What about the integrity of such a presenter and the station? If you keep on doing the same thing always, how will you survive?

It will soon be 10 years since FM radio started in the Valley. It's time we gave people something new.

Why do you think such a problem exists?

It [Good programming] takes time and it takes work. There are so many issues that can be brought up. I think the lack of trained manpower is also one reason. There are a few people with training. But the majority [of the presenters] don't have

any background in broadcasting. There isn't a school of broadcasting like those in the United States, Canada, Germany and so on. Even in the college where I teach broadcast journalism, that part is just a small part in the mass communication degree. RJs, presenters don't seem to know the ethics of broadcasting.

What are the ethics of broadcasting?

How should one speak? To what extent should one speak? How open should one be? What should one speak? It's the broadcaster's duty to know this... They're [the presenters] are not responsible at all.

Well, your station has also built a strong network with stations outside the Valley...

Yes, it is a relatively new thing for Nepal. Networking among radios was already big in the United States in the 30s and 40s. Nepal FM has nine partner stations outside the Valley. We provide them with news we have prepared and they in turn give us local issues outside the Valley. It's a two-way flow.

Why should titts bits from outside the Valley interest listeners in Kathmandu?

Kathmandu's population has increased rapidly in recent years. And that is not due to the indigenous population here. People have come from different parts of the country to Kathmandu because it is a relatively safe place. So, for example, for someone from Surkhet, it would be very interesting if we could talk about issues that concern him. **N**

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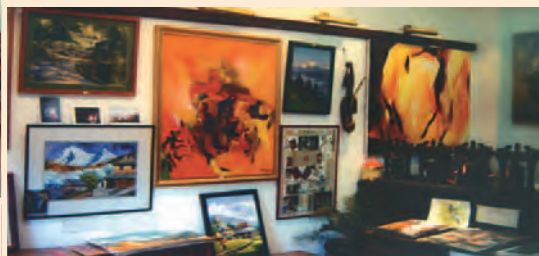
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Development Crisis

The Nepal Development Report 2004 is a reminder of the host of problems before the country. However, by failing to address the Maoist conflict directly, its relevance is limited.

BY PRAGYAN SUBEDI

The third Nepal Development Report is most importantly a reminder of the ills facing the country. At a time when almost all the press is devoted to the ongoing conflict, it is easy to look back at the period before 1996 as a better time and forget about the severe problems our country faced then. This report is a timely reminder that those problems too haven't gone away and have only become more severe as a result of the conflict.

Published by the United Nations Development Program, the report has been drawn from the efforts of a large team of Nepali academics, civil society members and independent researchers.

The core team includes Sriram Raj Pande, Bikash Sharma and Dilli Raj Khanal. Though published by the United Nations, the report is anxious to draw attention to the fact that the views expressed are of the diverse team of independent authors and not those of the UNDP or the government.

To attempt to answer why Nepal's level of development remains among the lowest in the world and to find adequate changes in policy and attitudes, the previous Nepal Development Report of 2001 focused on the role of good governance in creating conditions for economic growth and equity. The present report focuses on "empowerment." That

is to say, why the majority of Nepal's population are so estranged from the sources of power, without the ability to take initiatives in the transformation of their own lives. Like many other development efforts of the recent past, the emphasis is on creating conditions where the poor can take action to change their own lives, instead of relying on re-

sources and help from the government or NGOs. Here, empowerment is divided into three categories: economic, political and socio-cultural. Through a series of chapters, various aspects of government policy and intervention are analyzed to understand why so many efforts haven't been as successful as they should have.

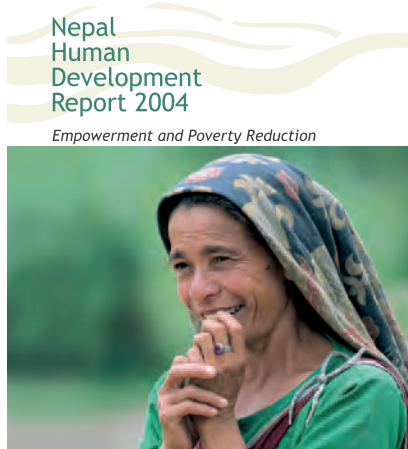
Besides presenting a list of the fail-

ures of development efforts in the past, the report claims to have made "significant contributions to current attempts worldwide to chart the changing dynamics of human development." The first of these is the establishment of the Human Empowerment Index, the HEI. While there have been other mathematical methods of measuring the developmental situation of regions, such as the Human Development Index, the Human Poverty Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure, a single measure to include all these different factors, the report states, hasn't been found. With the HEI, the hope is that a measure has been found for a ho-

listic approach that captures various aspects of "human empowerment."

As can be expected, there is a great disparity in the values of HEI between the different regions of Nepal. At the district level Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Kaski and Morang enjoy the greatest levels of empowerment—between 0.6 and 0.7. Mugu, Humla, Dolpa, Rolpa, Jumla—all in the Midwest—and Bara have the lowest levels—less than 0.3. Medium levels of empowerment are stated to be 0.5-0.7 and high levels above 0.8. None of Nepal's districts falls under the high levels of the HEI.

The second "significant contribution" the report claims to make is a study of various social mobilization practices undertaken throughout Nepal by various NGOs, INGOs and the government. Indeed, the chapter "Empowerment Through Social Mobilization" is



Nepal Human Development Report 2004
Empowerment and Poverty Reduction
United Nations Development Program
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the most important one in the report, as it is the only section where original research has been done. Various organizations have made efforts to change the mental attitudes and relationships within communities in order to make people throughout Nepal more capable of effecting changes within their communities. The objectives of these efforts have been to change the self-perception of people as passive receivers of aid so they can contribute to the development of their own communities. In Nepal this has been done by means of Social Mobilization Agencies and Social Mobilization Committees supported by external organizations. This evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of such efforts will be useful to the various donor agencies, NGOs and INGOs working in this field.

Throughout the country it was found that among the different aspects that are important for the health of grassroots based development efforts, trust and solidarity between members and their in-

volvement in the decision making process were relatively high. The aspects where much improvement is needed are accountability and transparency. Though social mobilization efforts contributed significantly to human progress in Nepal, there are still areas where much improvement is still desirable. In particular, the greatest problem in these groups seems to be the persistence of the exclusion of the very poor. Most organizations still haven't developed mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of the lowest-status groups.

The sections "Barriers on Empowerment" and "Empowerment of Women and Disadvantaged Groups" are mostly an accumulation of commonly known history and other documented bits of information, such as the implementations of government reforms in areas like health and education and their inadequacies. Throughout all these however, there are a few glimpses of the stark difficulties that

face a deeply-rooted traditional culture's transition to modern, democratic ways.

One such glimpse is given on the section on dalits and concerns a seeming paradox in our Constitution. While exclusion based on caste or ethnicity or untouchability is punishable by law, the National Country Code still holds that "there shall be no disturbance in other's religious and social practice." The report states that the latter statement has to be declared unconstitutional to cease discrimination against dalits. What is interesting here, however, is that though both these tenets are considered important in all modern laws and customs, in Nepal they seem to be irreconcilable. One of them has to be suppressed for the other to come into practice.

Another example illustrates the need for awareness of the larger picture of any community that an outside organization or government is considering to intervene. In the late 1990s in Syangja district, a Social Mobilization Committees recognized the importance of building a road to decrease transport costs. Only after the road was built did people realize that 36 families whose livelihoods depended entirely on portage had been reduced to penury. This is a powerful example that shows how development projects, while working for the benefit of many people, can easily lead to the further marginalization of the ultra-poor.

The report concludes with a list of proposed reforms to deepen democracy and alleviate poverty throughout the nation. How enforceable these proposals are in a nation caught up in conflict is debatable.

Though there are some interesting bits of information, the entire report seems to be abstracted from the reality of Nepal's towns and villages. The HEI may be a valuable tool, but numbers alone cannot depict the more serious problems of an underdeveloped country. The feeling that the report is divorced from the current events in our country is reinforced by the fact that the Maoist conflict receives a very superficial treatment throughout. Surely any report at this time that deals with the crises facing Nepal must find ways of addressing the conflict in greater detail. **N**





War and Peace

To say that Nepal is currently facing the greatest crisis in its history is certainly not to exaggerate. The next few months will be crucial, extremely crucial, in deciding what kind of society our children and their children will live in and what kind of value system will govern them. And, indeed, whether there will be such niceties as press freedom and freedom of speech.

The Maoists say that after nine years of the “people’s war” they have now arrived at a point of “strategic offensive,” meaning that they have the might to militarily take on the state. According to an article posted on the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement website, the strategic offensive started on Aug. 31, when Prime Minister Deuba returned from a visit to India “where much of the discussion centered on stepping up Indian intervention in Nepal with the backing of the United States.”

Many of those who have fought against them over the years admit that the ragtag guerrillas, who started out with seemingly insignificant

offensives against six police and government outposts, have come far since February 1996. As we stand on the threshold of a new year, there is a deep foreboding that the war has reached a new low. The escalating security expenses threaten to push every other need—education, health, food and more—to the fringes. How long can this go on? Are we heading toward a situation where aid agencies and diplomatic missions start fleeing and the international community decides that our conflict is “intractable”? The signs are far from pleasant.

Rumors are rife that the Maoists have come to a point where they are looking to establish an open military base, much like the LTTE in north-eastern Sri Lanka.

The blockade of Kathmandu that started on Thursday, Dec. 23, is not so much aimed at strangling the Valley as at shaking up the security forces, at mounting surprise attacks on those who try to keep the highways open, and at snatching their ammunition; all this while suffering minimum casualties themselves. Indeed, since Dashain the Maoists have perceptibly shifted their tactics and are now focusing on major highways and urban centers. Whether it’s their increased military strength or the insistence of their military wing to announce their ascendance, they give the impression that they are fighting to the finish. It looks very unlikely that they will accept the prime minister’s offer for talks by the Jan. 13 deadline. There is very little pressure on them to open dialogue.

As crisis looms, the need for national unity grows by the hour. We regret to say that the political forces—the Palace and the political parties—haven’t helped their cause by their continued wrangling.

If the conflict looks intractable, it is not because of the Maoists: It is because of this disunity. We say with sincere regret that the King has failed to pull together a divided nation. We believe it’s still not too late for him to reach out to the political parties, and we sincerely hope

that the political parties would reciprocate such a gesture with open minds. It’s no time to indulge in partisanship and personality tussles. It’s time to display statesmanship, to rally a deeply divided nation, and to hold talks with the Maoists, united, and, hopefully, under the aegis of the United Nations. The goal is peace, which Nepalis desire above all else.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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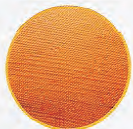
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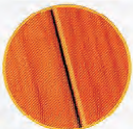
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