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JANUARY 23, 2005 VOL. I, NO. 40 माघ १०, २०६१ बर्ष १, अंक ४०

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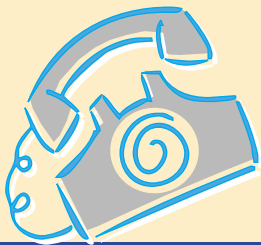
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When a country is torn apart by conflict, human rights violations rise. Those who make the problems public risk becoming targets themselves.

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Since 1991 a number of airlines have gone from boom to bust. Cutthroat competition with so many operators in a small market makes survival difficult.

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By Kumud Nepal



Small IT enterprises have sprung up across the Valley. With a staff of anywhere from two to 20, these businesses provide computer services as good as the big outfits.

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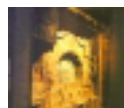
By Indra Adhikari

Nepal Investment Bank responds to vigorous competition in the banking sector

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By Veneeta Singha



The Ajanta paintings are rich. Not only have they captured the quintessence of the paintings but also brought the modern world closer to early Buddhism.

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JANUARY 23, 2005

VOL. I, NO. 40

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& DESIGN: RAJ SHRESTHA

COVER STORY

22 Bitter Medicine

By Biswas Baral and Yashas Vaidya

Nepal lacks a proper monitoring mechanism to oversee the sale of medicinal drugs. Drugs, even those requiring proper prescriptions, are readily sold over the counter. This has led to rampant misuse and, worse, abuse of these lifesaving drugs.

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“ Both the Army and Maoists are making things very difficult for rights workers ”

R. KARKI

Rights muddle

AT A TIME WHEN PEOPLE ARE looking at the country’s free press to shed light on difficult problems before us, you have added to the muddle (“Human Rights Muddle,” by Koshraj Koirala, Jan. 16). In a roundabout way, the reporter accused the human rights workers of creating confusion over alleged harassment by the security forces. You don’t need an analyst to tell you that the Army and the Maoists are making things very difficult for human rights workers and activists who are determined to publicize their poor human rights record.

R. KARKI
 VIA EMAIL

YES, I HAVE A LOT OF SYMPATHY for the human rights workers and I laud the difficult task they are doing. That doesn’t, however, mean people should believe everything they say. They must come out in the open and make it public the 19 names that are said to be on the RNA’s “blacklist.” And indeed, whether there is such a list at all—the Army has repeatedly said in recent days that there is no such thing as a secret list of human rights workers it plans to eliminate or target. Yet there has been relentless noise of such a diabolical list. If human rights workers have been threatened by the Army officials, they should come forward and say so. Beating round the bush doesn’t



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help their cause. Name them and shame them.

PRABIN REGMI
VIA EMAIL

Home analysts

THE ARTICLE ON HOW NEPAL'S Maoist movement is perceived by the outside world was most certainly one of your better cover stories ("Maoist Conundrum," by John Narayan Parajuli, Jan. 9). Often, you get a better view of history from afar, and hence it is very important to understand how the international community is reacting to Asia's most violent insurgency. That said, I have one important issue with the article: You quoted American academia as if its views alone represent the international opinion on the Maoists. Some noted scholars of the Maoist movement are, in fact, based right here in Nepal and their views would have added to the overall understanding of the Maoist movement.

BINOY JOSHI
KATHMANDU

Don't lecture, listen

KUDOS TO SUMAN PRADHAN FOR seeing what most of us have failed to: Prime Minister Deuba has hardly ventured outside Kathmandu for public

consultations of substance since he took office in June ("Go Listen," Meanwhile, Jan. 2). Whenever he does, NTV and Radio Nepal always show him in lecture mode. Little wonder, all Nepalis are growing up to be "problem kids," because their guardians assume that they know everything about them and seldom bother to listen to them. Personally, I have never felt as abandoned as a people as I have the last couple of years. Nepal is a broken home; we are children in distress. Is anybody receiving the SOS messages?

SMRITI GHALE
LALITPUR

Web content

I AM A REGULAR READER OF YOUR web edition and I like most of the content. It is very frustrating, however, when your website doesn't get updated on time or when some of the links are dead. Please improve your archive as well. Though I am based outside Kathmandu, I have seen your print editions, which look sleek and well done. It is time you gave some thought to improving your web content as well.

SUDHALAMICHHANE.
VIA EMAIL

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WEEKLY

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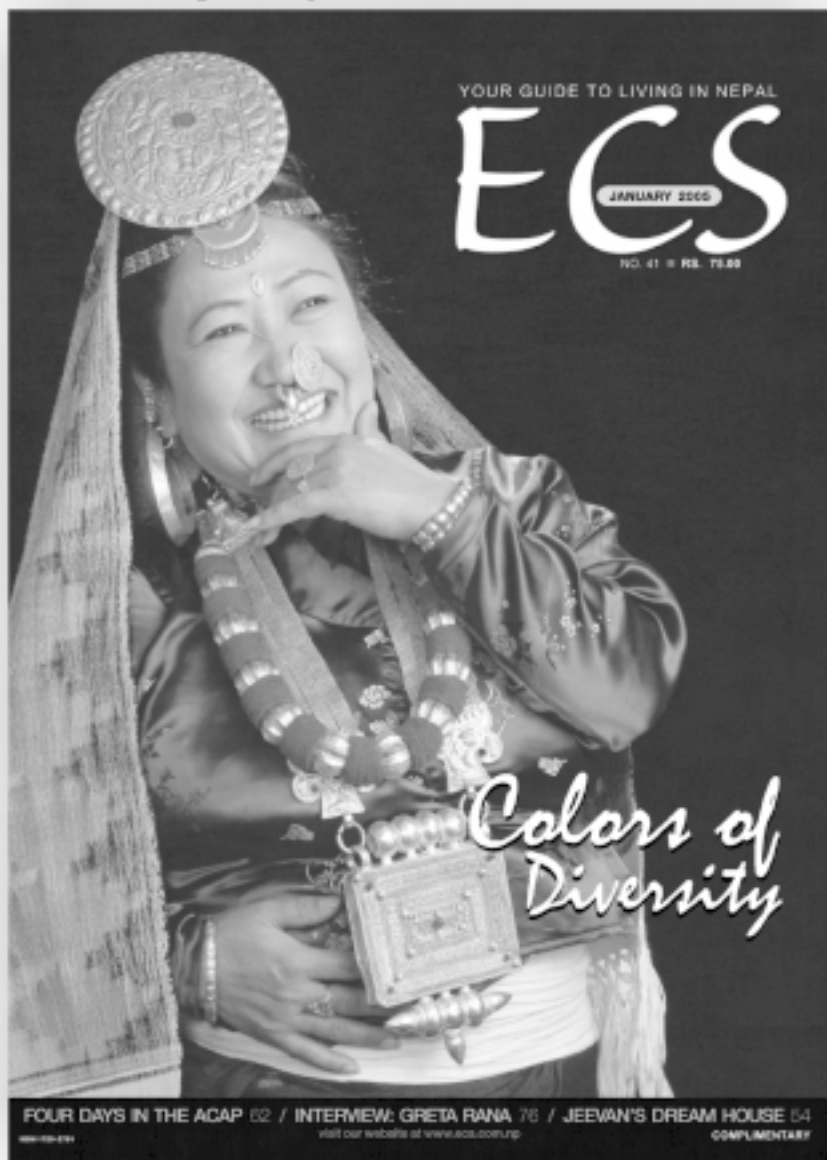
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'Thinker'
by Auguste Rodin

Picture of the Week



AN ODE TO TRADITION: A Tharu girl from Dang dresses in a traditional outfit during a Sakhiya dance organized on the National Unity Day on Tuesday, Jan.11

Nation Weekly Sagar Shrestha



Lame-Duck Argument

The controversy over the appointment of the Nepal Rastra Bank governor was bad enough. Now the attorney general has made it look worse.

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

This is not an argument in support of Yubaraj Khatiwada's appointment as the governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank. In fact, by all indications, he won't get the top job at the central bank of the country because of the politics involved in the governor's appointment and the way that has muddied the whole process. The CPN-UML's vociferous advocacy on behalf of Khatiwada, a well-regarded monetary economist, has not helped the matter much. It only seems to have made the prime minister and his party colleagues in the government more resolute to have one of their men in the position.

Yes, the underlying political machination has done a lot of harm to the institution of the central bank. In the public eye, the coveted position of the governor has been reduced to the rank of a party *karya-karta* and the parties in power seem just too keen to *misuse* the authority of the governor to bend the financial rulebook to serve their interests.

There is, however, a deeper issue at stake. It has to do with our respect as a society for an individual's professional competence, irrespective of her standing in an organizational hierarchy. And, our inclination to take the easy route by promoting the senior-most person every time there is a vacancy at the top.

In response to the government's call for advice on the legality of having Khatiwada's name on the list of the three individuals recommended for the governor's job, the attorney general has said that Khatiwada does not qualify under the Nepal Rastra Bank Act 2002. The reason: Khatiwada is not a deputy governor in the Nepal Rastra Bank hierarchy.

The provision on the appointment of the governor in the act says that the government *shall* appoint the governor on the basis of the recommendation of a three-member committee headed by the finance minister. The same provision also requires the committee to recommend three persons either renowned in the economic, monetary, banking,

finance, commercial law and management sectors or from among the Deputy Governors.

(As of now, the very authority of that recommendation committee is under question due to a stay order issued by the Supreme Court, raising the issue of conflict of interest because of the participation in that committee of a former governor, Ganesh Bahadur Thapa, who also happens to be the chairman of a finance company. The apex court hears the case again on Jan. 8.)

In light of the legal provision, the reasoning of the attorney general seems to have run something like this: The prospective governor should either be a renowned person in any of the fields outlined above, or be a serving deputy governor; and Khatiwada, as a member of the National Planning Commission, in fact maintains a lien with the central bank as one of its executive directors and therefore doesn't qualify for the job.

The attorney general assumes that if you are anything less than a deputy governor of the central bank, then there is no way you can be "renowned in the economic, monetary, banking, finance, commercial law and management sectors." But if you are an individual outside the hierarchy of the central bank, you could still be considered "renowned" even with less experience than most executive directors and other senior officials of the NRB possess. The outgoing governor, Tilak Rawal, had less than 10 years of direct banking experience as the head of the Agriculture Development Bank and the Rastriya Banijya Bank before his elevation as the governor.

There is something fundamentally flawed with line of legal analysis that the attorney general seems to have followed. Of the many different areas that one has to have expertise in, Khatiwada can be safely assumed to have competence in at least the economic, monetary and banking sectors. Sure, he is not a deputy governor, but his standing within the NRB does not mean he can't be an expert in any of the areas. His junior position did not prevent him from being appointed a member of the National Planning Commission, which too assumes that an individual is an expert in the areas of economics, planning and administration.

individual is an expert in the areas of economics, planning and administration.

In these deeply partisan times, it is understandable that an individual should be denied office because of his alleged political tie-ups. That very well explains why Khatiwada is being sidelined. Why then offer a lame legal argument to disqualify him? Whatever his position, or lack of one, in the NRB hierarchy, he is at least as competent, if not more, than some of our recent governors. **N**



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WEEKLY

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B Rai

Petroleum hike

The government raised the price of the petroleum products for the third time in five months. All the major political parties including the NC and CPN-UML expressed their disapproval at the hike. Madhav Kumar Nepal, the general secretary of UML, called the move untimely. The Nepal Students' Union and the ANNFSU took to the streets to protest the hike. The students have demanded its annulment and have called for nationwide protests to pressure the government to go back on its decision.

Rise in fares

In line with the hike in petroleum prices, there will be increases of up to 20 percent in transportation fares. The Department of Transport Management said the ticket-price of the long-route buses would be increased by

up to 15 percent while a 20 percent margin has been given to the microbuses and the buses going to the hilly regions. Bus operators in Kathmandu will be allowed to increase their fares by Rs.1. Taxi fares will increase by one-seventh of the earlier rate.

More aid

Nepal Red Cross Society plans to raise as much as Rs.1.7 million to those displaced by the tsunamis in Sri Lanka. The Red Cross collected relief materials that include blankets, clothes and utensils for 5,000 families. Separately, the employees of Soaltee Group Private Limited contributed a day's salary to help the tsunami victims. The total amount collected was Rs.200,000. The group is also organizing a golf tournament on Jan. 29 to raise more funds. Earlier, the government had donated \$100,000 to Sri Lanka and \$50,000 to the Maldives.

Stay order

The Supreme Court ordered the government not to go ahead with the appointment of the governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank. A three-man committee headed by Bharat Mohan Adhikari, the deputy prime minister, had proposed three names for the post that will be vacant at the end of the month. The stay order came after a writ objecting to the presence of a former governor, Ganesh Bahadur Thapa, on the committee. Meanwhile, Attorney General Mahadev Prasad Yadav has said that one of the contenders, Yuba Raj Khatriwada, is ineligible, as only deputy governors of the bank should be considered for the job.

Malaysian envoy

Malaysia has appointed Mahendra Singh as its resident ambassador in Nepal. This is the first time a Malaysian ambassador will reside in Nepal. There are more than 200,000 Nepalis working in Malaysia.



King's visit

King Gyanendra's visit to India, scheduled to begin from Jan. 15, was postponed again. The visit is being rescheduled as the King has to attend the Samyak festival in Swayambhunath, held every 12 years. The festival began on Jan. 14 (see picture above). The visit had been postponed in December after the death

of former Indian Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao.

Budget increase

A finance ordinance that increased the total expenditure for the ongoing fiscal year by Rs.3.5 billion came into effect last week. The increase was made in order to meet the spiraling security expenditures and dearness allowances for

civil servants. The Value Added Tax, the VAT, has gone up to 13 percent from 10. Much of the increase of Rs.1.3 billion in the security budget will go toward adding 13,000 new recruits in the Army.

British Gurkhas

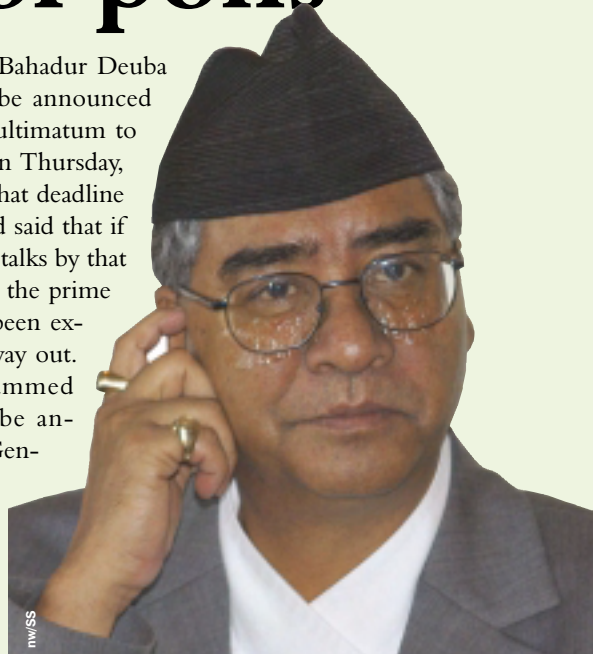
The British government decided to review the terms and conditions for Gurkha soldiers. The British Secretary of State for Defense Geoff Hoon made the announcement during a parliamentary session on Wednesday, Jan. 12. He said that the perks and benefits for the Gurkha soldiers should be reasonable and justifiable. The British Gurkhas have been demanding pay and perks equal to their British counterparts for a long time.

Dead in Delhi

Two Nepalis were killed and one injured in New Delhi when a train ran them over on Jan. 8. The two who died are from Barhabishe VDC in Bajura. The third Nepali is undergoing treatment at a hospital. All three were working as security guards in a private firm in the Indian capital.

Politics of polls

Last week, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said that election dates would be announced within a week's time. Deuba's ultimatum to the Maoists to come for talks ran out on Thursday, Jan. 13. Deuba had given the Maoists that deadline last November. The prime minister had said that if the Maoists failed to come forward for talks by that date, he would go for polls. Last week, the prime minister said that the all options had been exhausted and that polls were the only way out. The government spokesman, Mohammed Mohsin, said that elections would be announced by January end. The UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari said the passing of the deadline didn't rule out negotiations with the Maoists.





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YELLOW PAGES



Development Publication House has brought out the new Yellow Pages 2005. This is the 13th edition of the book. Unlike the past issues, the publication house claims that the new issue is attractive and has more listings and business information. Connection Yellow pages is an information directory containing useful telephone numbers and important details about business enterprises in Nepal.

PRICES HIKE

The government has raised the price of the petroleum products for the third time in five months. The government took the decision to that effect on Monday, Jan. 10. A liter of petrol will now cost Rs. 62, while diesel will cost Rs.41 per liter. The prices of both commodities have gone up by 10.7 percent. There has been an increase of Rs.100 in LP gas which will now come for Rs.850 per cylinder. However, the price of Kerosine has seen the biggest hike; its prices rocketing to Rs.36 per liter from Rs.28.57, a jump of 28.57 percent. The price of subsidized kerosene has been set at Rs.30 per liter.

NEW PRE-PAID LINES



Nepal Telecom is planning to issue 70,000 new pre-paid cell phone cards within the next three weeks.

The telecom is also planning to distribute cards outside the valley. The company issued 50,000 pre-paid cards in October last year. Officials say that Nepal Telecom is considering setting up additional

Base Transmission Stations to address the network problems the new lines will pose. The company is planning to increase the number of its stations to 90 from the existing 72.

CAN INFOTECH

Computer Association of Nepal is organizing the 11th CAN InfoTech from Jan. 25 to Jan. 30. The biggest Information Technology related event in Nepal is being organized at the Birendra International Convention Center, Naya Baneshwor. A total of 114 stalls will display

various IT products during the event. Two IT institutions each from Singapore and Bangladesh, and one each from Taiwan and Sri Lanka, have also registered for the IT fare. The upcoming exhibition will feature the latest Nepali security system software, webcams, wireless networking equipments, and mobile technologies. The IT fare pulled a crowd of 180,000 last year.

NEW FILTER

Mama Bhanja Traders have introduced a new water filter in the market. The filter equipped with reverse osmosis is made with Star RO technology. It is capable of filtering harmful chemicals, as well as viruses and bacteria, the traders say. It will come with an easy steam iron facility, which will enhance the quality and taste of beverages and soups.

VEGETABLE BAZAAR

The largest vegetable market in the valley will be built at Manahara in Madhyapur Thimi. The market will be called the 'Manahara Vegetable and Fruit Wholesale and Export Market Complex,' the largest market of its kind in the country. The construction of the complex, expected to be completed in five years, will cost an estimated Rs.400 million. The need for this kind of market was felt due to the growing demand of an organized setup for a fruit and vegetable market in Kathmandu. The Kalimati wholesale market deals in 400 to 500 metric tons of agriculture commodities daily, which are worth eight to nine million rupees.

PROMOTIONAL SCHEME

The consumers of Big Mimi noodles will now be able to win immediate prizes of Rs.1 to Rs.111. Fast Foods Nepal, a subsidiary of Chaudhary Group, introduced the new promotional scheme for its noodles. Coupons of Rs.1,111, Rs.11,111 and Rs.111,111 may be found inside the Big Mimi packets anytime, the company says. Big Mimi Noodles has been awarded the Nepal Standard mark for its quality.

IA FARES

Indian Airlines has revised its Kathmandu-Delhi fares. Effective from Jan. 16, the economy class flight in the route will cost Rs.5,000 for one way and Rs.9,600 for the round trip. The fare for the executive flights is set at Rs.6,700 and Rs.13,000 for one way and round trip respectively. The revised tariff has come as a promotional scheme by Indian Airlines and will be in effect till March 31.

APPOINTED



Tirtha Man Shakya was appointed the chairman of the Public Service Commission on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council.

Shakya is the fourth chairman of the commission since the restoration of democracy in 1990. Yogendra Nath Ojha, the outgoing chairman, retired in October.

Shakya was born in 1944 in Hakhatole in Lalitpur. Shakya holds Master's in Commerce and Bachelor's in Law degrees from Tribhuvan University. He entered the judiciary as a section officer in 1965.

In 1994 Shakya was appointed the chairman of the Nepal Law Reform Commission. He later served as the secretary at the Ministry of Law between 1997 and 1999. In 1999 he was appointed the chief secretary of the government.

Shakya has been an active social worker, leading various organizations, including the Hakhatole Reform Association where he has been the president since 1987. He was a member of the Social Welfare Council from 1982 to 1992.

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	Lukla	YA 105	Daily	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA113	Daily	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA109	Daily	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 115	Daily	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA117	Daily	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Taplejung	YA 901	3	1025	1135	2695	164	DHC-6/300
	Phaplu	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	1030	1105	1245	61	DHC-6/300
	Manang	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300
	Meghauly	YA171	Daily	1130	1200	1340	79	DHC-6/300
	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300
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	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	Kathmandu	YA 302	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 151	Daily	1000	1040	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 153	Daily	1210	1250	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	YA 155	Daily	1700	1740	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 131	Daily	0825	0850	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 137	Daily	1000	1025	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	YA 135	Daily	1410	1435	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	Bhairahawa	YA 163	Daily	1550	1625	2220	79	SAAB 340B
	Bhadrapur	YA 121	Daily	1140	1230	2950	109	SAAB 340B
	Nepalgunj	YA 177	Daily	1415	1515	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	1100	1140	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1310	1350	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1800	1840	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0910	0935	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 138	Daily	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1455	1520	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1645	1720	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1535	1635	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0750	0825	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0755	0830	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 104	Daily	0800	0835	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 114	Daily	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 110	Daily	0940	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA182	1,3,5	1120	1155	1480	85	DHC-6/300
Meghauly	Kathmandu	YA172	Daily	1215	1245	1340	79	DHC-6/300
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1120	1155	1245	79	DHC-6/300
Manang	Kathmandu	YA 602	6	1145	1245	2995	122	DHC-6/300
Taplejung	Kathmandu	YA 902	3	1150	1300	2695	164	DHC-6/300
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1240	1305	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA 202	Daily	0905	0925	970	55	SAAB 340B
	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300

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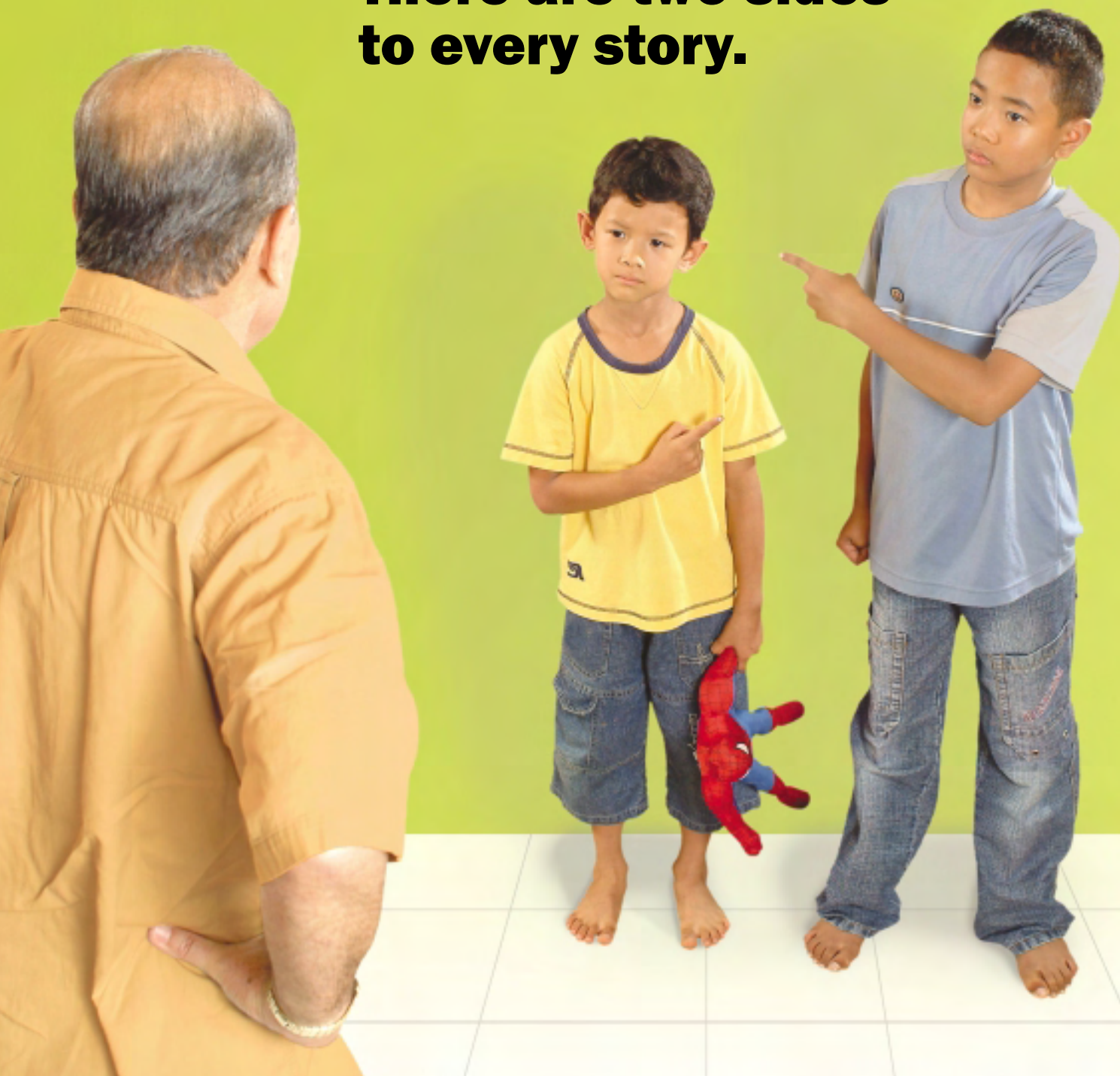

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LINE/2005

There are two sides to every story.

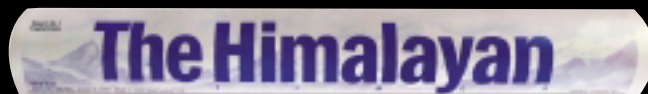


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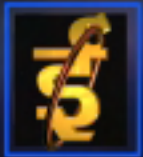
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SS/MS

ON THE EDGE

When a country is torn apart by conflict, human rights violations rise. Those who make the problems public risk becoming targets themselves.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

WITH THE INTERNAL CON-
flict showing no signs of reso-
lution, all aspects of democratic
society have been pushed to the back
foot. Human rights violations are at an
all-time high, and the number of miss-
ing people is shocking. There have been
some media reports recently alleging
that the Army is compiling a “hit list” of
human rights activists. Our own report
last week carried the story and asked

human rights activists to come out in
the open if the Army has, in fact, tar-
geted them. Some rights activists found
our report “lop-sided” and said that it
had placed the onus on the rights activ-
ists instead of turning up the heat on
the security forces.

Human rights activists fear both the
Maoists and the state’s security appara-
tus; they claim both are targeting them
with impunity. The least they expect
from the media is some support, they
say.

“We have heard alarming news re-
cently,” says Shiva Hari Dahal, an activ-
ist with the Peace Campaign Nepal. Al-
though human rights workers are always
under threat, he says, the recent devel-
opments have been more disturbing. Last
week the Army wrote to many rights or-
ganizations demanding information
about their codes of conduct, their mis-
sions and their objectives. There has al-
ready been an angry outburst from
prominent rights workers. Activists say
this was not something the Army was
supposed to do. “In a democracy,” says
INSEC’s Subodh Pyakurel, “the Army
doesn’t directly correspond [with these
organizations].” Many are already see-
ing it as an example of the Army’s grow-
ing high-handedness. Human rights ac-
tivists lament growing excesses against
them by both the Maoists and the secu-
rity forces: The difference, they say, is

that the state's security apparatus is legally required to be more responsible.

"Human rights activists in Nepal are under threat," says Pyakurel, whose organization has been at the forefront with the National Human Rights Commission in conducting investigations on human rights violations. Recently, says INSEC officials, one of their reporters, Naman Kumar Shahi, was beaten up in Dailekh by security forces. They say he was wearing a jacket identifying him as a member of INSEC. In Nawalparasi security personnel arrested four workers of HURON, the Human Rights Organization of Nepal, alleging that the workers were Maoist sympathizers. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were beaten.

On Dec. 31, Kantipur reported that human rights activists were fleeing the country because security men were hounding them. Last week Nation Weekly ran a story that included denials from some of the rights workers who were alleged to have fled, but the brouhaha continues. While many rights activists in the capital deny receiving any threats directly, they point out that their differences with the security forces over rights violations make them eyesores and obvious targets for reprisals. The paranoia is understandable. Observers say that when the Army had a chance recently to clear the air during a press briefing, it only added to the rights workers' concerns by alleging that they had fallen prey to Maoist propaganda.

In reference to media reports that the Army has a "hit list" of rights workers, says a rights activist: "I haven't seen the list myself. But there can be no smoke without a fire." He says that there is at least a grain of truth in the reports. Rights workers say they are deeply suspicious about the security forces' frequent sojourns to their offices and what they believe are attempts to intimidate them. The Army's spokesman Deepak Gurung rubbishes the allegations. Colonel Raju Nepali of the Army's human rights cell insists that "if there were a grain of truth in the reports, I would have been the first person to know." If not as a military officer, at least on a personal basis as he has good relations with prominent rights activists in town. One rights worker's reply: "You can't just take what the Army says at face value, because it is a party to the conflict."

The government has little to say publicly about the allegations. When asked about the Army threatening human rights workers, the government spokesman, Minister Mohammed Mohsin, said he knew nothing about the issue. But privately the government must be profoundly uncomfortable about being on the radar of international organizations.

On Dec. 19 three major rights organizations—New York-based Human Rights Watch, London-based Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists—first rang the alarm bells about human rights activists themselves being under threat in Nepal. In a

joint press statement the three organizations urged enhanced international protection. "Human rights defenders in Nepal face grave threats amid the country's deepening human rights crisis," the statement said. International organizations like the Human Rights Watch have been regularly conducting field visits to Nepal. They believe that both the Maoists and the security forces have routinely harassed national and international rights organizations. They say they have documented cases of both armed parties targeting rights workers, journalists and lawyers.

Rights workers say that the security forces have a reason to threaten them: Their work has brought international attention and intervention in the form of diplomatic pressure. High profile visits from U.N. officials and expressions of concern from the international community, for example, have been more frequent. The recent U.S. Congressional decision to attach human rights strings to its military aid to Nepal is a sign that the international community is gradually taking a tougher stance on Nepal's human rights problem.

"Both the warring sides take rights activists as a threat," says INSEC's Pyakurel. Nepal's spiraling descent into lawlessness threatens to consume not only basic human rights but also their defenders. Indeed, it would be unfair to blame just the security forces, but it is only natural to expect more civilized behavior from them than from the rebels. **N**



WATCHDOG: The National Human Rights Commission

SS/NU

Cover Story



nw/Sagar Shrestha

BITTER MEDICINE



It's midday at the drug retail shop by the roadside in Gaushala. Wooden shelves in the cramped space are jammed with paper-boxes of popular medicines like Paracetamol, Gelusil, Diazepam, Metron and Imid. Bottles of cough syrups and vitamin supplements showing cherubic, red-cheeked toddlers line the bottom selves, along with boxes of No.1, Kama Sutra and a few other brands of condoms.

A man, most probably in his early 20s, saunters in. His face looks glum. "Do you have Imid [a common anti-depressant brand]?" he asks. The retailer asks for a prescription, which the man says he doesn't have. "Sorry, I can't give you the medicine without a prescription," says the shopkeeper as he gently waves the customer away. "I may be the only drug retailer around here who doesn't give out medicines without proper medical prescriptions," he says with obvious pride.

Indeed, he is right. Out of the six shops we visited asking for a common tranquilizer, alprazolam, across Kathmandu—in Gaushala, Maitidevi and Putalisadak—five handed us the medicine though we did not have any prescription.

The lack of a proper monitoring system to enforce the rules is compounded by indifference and the ignorance among both drug retailers and customers. Consumers want to save the cost of a visit to a private doctor and avoid the long waits at government hospitals. The retailers sympathize, and of course they want to increase sales. The result is widespread misuse and abuse of these drugs.

Not that rules do not exist. The Drug Act of 1978 forbids the sale of Class A drugs, narcotics specifically, and Class B drugs such as antibiotics and hormones without a doctor's prescription. "Only vitamins, some pain relievers such as Cetamol and a few other drugs are

Nepal lacks a proper monitoring mechanism to oversee the sale of medicinal drugs. Drugs, even those requiring proper prescriptions, are readily sold over the counter. This has led to rampant misuse and, worse, abuse of these lifesaving drugs.

BY BISWAS BARAL AND YASHAS VAIDYA



supposed to sold over the counter," says Dr. Sanjay Lakhey, a general physician at B&B hospital. Those basic medicines are Class C drugs. Few medicine shops make any distinction between the classes of drugs: Everything is doled out on request.

We do have regulatory mechanisms. The government agency which oversees the sales of drugs is the Department of Drug Administration, the DDA, established a year after the Drug Act came into being. The DDA is supposed to prevent the misuse and abuse of drugs. It also regulates the production, export and import, storage and utilization of drugs.

When asked about the blatant flaunting of the rules, the DDA says its problem is that there are only a handful of inspectors. It has nine inspectors to police more than 18,000 drug retailers in the country. Four inspectors are posted in the Valley, where they have to cover more than 2,300 shops, according to DDA figures. These inspectors have to make sure that prescription drugs are being sold with proper prescriptions, that the drugs aren't fake and that illegal brands aren't being sold.

A senior officer at the department defends his organization: "We need 75 inspectors, one for each district; if not, we should at least have one for each zone," he says. Department officials say that they want to hire more, but the Ministry of Finance has stopped the recruitment, citing at budget constraints. "We are helpless," says the officer.

Officials at the DDA remain wary of the media. They've gotten a lot of bad press over the issues of misuse and abuse

and counterfeit drugs in the market. Without enough staff, the department can do little to control the drug retailers, and the market is so big and lucrative that drug retailers are unlikely to police themselves.

Drug retailers say they are in a business. According to DDA estimates, it's a Rs.8 billion business and growing fast. There are over three-dozen Nepali manufacturers competing with more than 200 Indian companies registered with the DDA. With thousands of different drugs available, customers are happily popping pills as they see fit. The negligence and ignorance of consumers, who buy medicines without prescriptions, is troubling. "Even when they have prescriptions, most people prefer not to take the complete prescribed doses," says a drug retailer in Mangal Bazaar, who prefers to remain anonymous. "We try to convince them," he says. But if the

customer chooses otherwise, the shops have no problem in handing them the medicines.

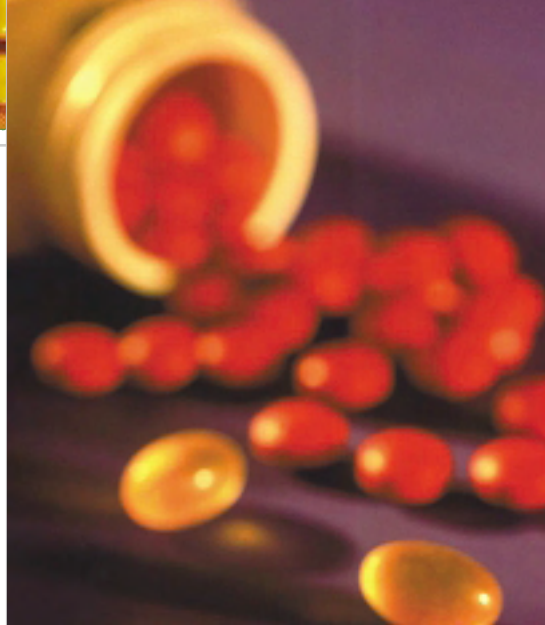
One of the reasons behind such consumer negligence is the lack of awareness about the harms of unsupervised drug usage. Among all misused drugs, antibiotics stand out.

Antibiotics are strong drugs that cure bacterial infections. In a survey of more than 300 patients done in the hospitals and private clinics in Kathmandu in 2001, it was found that only 8.1 percent of the patients understood the proper use and side effects of antibiotics.

Antibiotics are not cure-alls—they are useful for bacterial infections only, not for viral infections such as common cold or viral flu. Their misuse is dangerous; taking them unnecessarily can build up resistance. That means the drugs wouldn't work as well or at all later. Dr. Ishwar Lal Acharya, a senior physician at



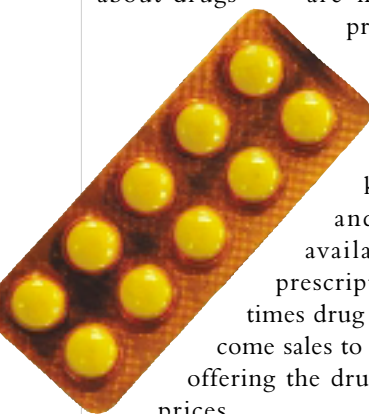
TEEMING: There are over 2,300 drug retailers in the Valley



the Kathmandu Hospital in Tripureshwore, says, "Resistance to antibiotics can cause complications at crucial times such as during surgeries."

Resistance occurs because the bacteria being targeted evolve new defense mechanisms to counteract the medicine. Doctors point to the antibiotic ciprofloxacin as an example. The drug was originally used to treat typhoid and also occasionally prescribed for tuberculosis. But as ciprofloxacin became widely used for its effectiveness in treating many other bacterial infections, in recent years, the effectiveness of the drug in countering typhoid-causing organisms has fallen.

But negligence and ignorance about drugs are not the only problems. Prescription drugs are also abused knowingly, and most are available without prescriptions. Sometimes drug retailers welcome sales to drug abusers, offering the drugs at inflated prices.



The ABCs of Drugs

CLASS A:

Narcotics

Group of drugs containing substances that relieve pain by preventing transmission of pain messages to the brain and also by altering the reaction to it. Causing both physical and psychological dependence.

CLASS B:

Antibiotics and Hormones

Antibiotics are any of a variety of natural or synthetic substances that inhibit and destroy microorganisms.

Hormones are chemicals produced by glands in the body and circulate in the bloodstream. Hormones control the actions of certain cells or organs. Hormones may be produced both naturally, inside the body, or artificially.

CLASS C:

Basic Drugs:

A group of drugs that maybe used without prescription and which do not present serious risks to health even if taken without medical supervision.

"It has been a disturbing trend for some time now," says Bijay Pandey, a social worker. Pandey has worked in the rehabilitation center run by the NGO Youth Vision for the last 10 years. He says the abuse of prescription pills is rampant, especially in the younger generation. Students just into high school looking for a "high" turn to prescription drugs. Lax regulations and the non-functional monitoring system make it easy. In most cases, these students will already have experimented with other drugs like marijuana.

Nineteen-year-old Nisedh studied in a reputed high school in the Valley. During his school days he experimented with different kinds of drugs, including street drugs like marijuana and hashish. He also abused prescription medicines. About a year ago, he had a scare, as he calls it. He gulped down a number of Proxyvon tablets, a commonly abused brand of painkiller, with a bottle of cough syrup. "My body wasn't able to

take it," says Nisedh. "I went completely numb." After the terrifying experience, Nisedh gave up both prescription and street drugs.

The drug Nisedh took, Proxyvon, is a prescription Class A drug. It falls into a class of drugs known as opioid pain relievers, containing chemicals called opioids. These include morphine, from which heroin and brown sugar are made. Though morphine and other strong opioids, which are mostly injected, are not widely available, weaker opioids like the one present in Proxyvon are. Codeine, approximately 10 times less potent than morphine, is used both as a cough suppressor and a pain reliever. It is available in the form of tablets and is also present in cough syrups. Those who abuse these substances develop tolerance: The abuser requires larger doses to get the same effect over time. Opioid

***Nitrazepam is listed in the C category (available over the counter) but the Drug Control Act has made prescriptions mandatory for drugs containing the chemical. Nitrosun and Nitrovet are two common brands. DDA officials say these are among the most abused drugs in the Valley. The low price may be one of the reasons for widespread abuse. A tablet of either drug costs Rs.2.60. When sold illegally, the prices are usually pushed up to or over Rs.100 or more for a strip of 10.**

CLASS A

Codeine
Ethylmorphine
Methadone
Nalorphine
Opium
Barbituric acid
Cocaine
Meprobamate
Dhatura
Nicotine

CLASS B

Metronidazole
Vancomycine
Tetracycline
Penicillin
Ampicillin
Amoxicillin
Coxacillin
Paranomycine
Diazepam
Insulin
Oxytocin
Vasopressin

CLASS C

Nitrazepam* (see box above)
Nicotine
Ibuprofen
Paracetamol
Piperazine
Ascorbic Acid
Codeine (<1%)
Morphine (<0.3%)
Cocaine (<0.1%)
Nicotine (<0.2%)

The substances are listed in the following classes according to the drug list published in the *rajpatra*, the national gazette. The drug list has not been updated since 1978 when the Drug Act was introduced. Here are some common substances that are either misused or abused:

drugs cause physiological dependence, meaning that after a while the body develops a craving for the drug after a while. Stopping their use leads to severe withdrawal symptoms. These drugs can be lethal. They cause respiratory depression—the breathing slows down. In case of an overdose, breathing can stop completely, leading to death.

In spite of the dangers, many continue to abuse them. Central Nervous System depressants like Nitrosun and Nitrovet are two more brands abused widely. DDA officials say that these two

are probably the most widely abused medical drugs in the Valley. They contain nitrazepam. The substance falls in a class of chemicals called benzodiazepines—these provide short-term relief from severe and disabling anxiety and from insomnia. And they are potentially addictive in high doses. They are favorites because they come cheap: less than Rs.30 for a strip of 10 Nitrovet or Nitrosun tablets. When sold illegally, the price is normally pushed up to Rs.10 to Rs.15 per tablet.

No formal statistics are available on the number of drug abusers

though informal estimates exist: Youth Vision quotes a UNAIDS report in December 2002 which puts the figure of drug abusers in Nepal at anywhere between 30,000 and 60,000. Those who've watched the problem grow say that the number is likely to get bigger: The abusers of prescription drugs can, and often do, graduate to more potent drugs. "It's a progressive thing," Pandey of Youth Vision says. "They start out with pot, move on to pills and later hard drugs like brown sugar or heroin."

Easy availability increases the chance of abuse. The United States, with a much stricter healthcare system, has over six million prescription drugs abusers, according to the United States Food and Drug Administration. Nepal with a much laxer system faces big problems. With minimum regulation and much room for irregularities, the problem of abuse has burgeoned in recent years.

The lack of effective controls on drugs is one another serious problem that has been sidelined in the face of bigger, graver issues. The indifference among the buyers and sellers of drugs, consumer ignorance and government inactivity pose a serious problem for the collective health of the nation. **N**



CROWDED: Government hospitals struggle with the high number of patients

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STALEMATE

The peace process is stuck

BY BIPIN ADHIKARI

THE JAN. 13 DEADLINE GIVEN to the CPN-Maoist to negotiate an agreement with the government has passed. While the Maoists have rejected the call, the government has not yet explained what the next course will be and whether new moves, if any, will not just be a continuation of the ongoing military efforts to contain the Maoists. In the eyes of Nepalis, this constitutes a stalemate; but those who are doing business from the outside are doing it as effectively as ever.

The scenario is like this: Two beggars are sitting in a bench at Ratnapark. One is holding a replica of Pashupatinath and one a Star of David. Both are holding hats to collect contributions. People walk by, lift their noses at the man with the Star of David and drop money in the hat held by the man with the replica of Pashupatinath. Soon his hat is filled while that of the man with the Star of David is empty. A priest approaches the men. He turns to the man with the Star of David and says: "Young man. Don't you realize that this is a Hindu country? You'll never get any contributions holding the Star of David." The man with the Star of David turns to the man with the replica of the Pashupatinath and says, "Moishe, can you imagine? This guy is trying to tell us how to run our business?" This indeed is how the King, the parliamentary political parties and the Maoists are being manipulated in the conflict business.

It does not mean that local factors do not contribute to the conflict at all. Even if the Maoists are not taken in the fold, half of the Nepalis have some sort of Maoist/Leninist hangover that is difficult to explain. Furthermore, they are still not clear whether to cherish the Maoist victory or to condemn it as something that they differ with in terms of their political destiny under a communist party. Moreover, most civil society organizations—possibly about 95 percent of those that are funded by western donors—also have

the same dilemma in their peace campaigns. They speak about human rights but don't condemn "inhuman wrongs." This confused group is yet to push hard for a durable peace process, an issue that has only been limited to table talks in hotels and restaurants.



BR



CAUTIOUS: New Delhi

That, however, is not all. The Maoist “people’s war” has never been a pressing issue for the Nepali Congress, which traditionally misconceives itself to be a nationalist and socialist movement. It has never condemned the violence and mayhem in the country. Very often its rank and file takes sadistic pleasure in the Maoist advances and eroding bases of the monarchy. While the Congress continues to keep itself busy with the fight against “regression,” something that has lost popular appeal, the political power that the King usurped from the parties in October 2002 has almost reached New Delhi quietly and under a planned process. This leaves the King in Nepal to contest with these parties and his own *fait accompli*. Yet Girija Prasad Koirala pretends he does not understand this “regression.” And the question remains (for him), who required the King to do it? And for what purpose? He also does not want to understand why the Indian media is now spewing poison against the King and why Indians are openly writing about directions they are giving to the King and the Royal Nepal Army and deciding the fate of Nepal in the murky rooms of New Delhi.

There is no doubt that the King has erred, but Koirala should have known by now to whom he should have protested. He must understand how he and his allied parties should have used their unspent energy, instead of wasting it on the histrionics he performs on the stage that has been set for him.

Even the Maoists never denounced the King the way he is being denounced by the parliamentary parties and the Indian outlets. The King of course is to be blamed for his undemocratic moves and not allowing the popular process to resume, but it is the parties which suffered most from the lack of a strategy to deal with the Maoist conflict. They never had a unified voice on this issue. They were united only once, and that was for the deployment of the Royal Nepal Army to counter the insurgency. One really wonders whether these parties, who authorized the Army to operate and need the Army’s protection for their own existence, can escape the responsibility to defend it or to dissociate themselves from the vices of military operations.

In fact, the Army is facing difficult times because the parties have failed to occupy the political space that the Army has created for

them through their operations. It would be callous of them not to realize that the blood the Army has shed was to protect the remnants of the political system, which even at present has accorded them political freedoms. The Army’s operations definitely need to be monitored to make them comply with the rule of law, to safeguard human rights as well as to minimize collateral damage. In fact, when the Maoists confront the Army, they have strong reasons for doing so, because they are fighting with them. But when political parties confront the Army, it is just a lack of character. How can this appalling character help resolve the conflict?

The upheavals in Nepal over the last two years adequately show that the King abhors parties and, therefore, the prospect of peace. In essence, he has no alternative but to work with the political parties if he intends to transform the conflict from its current intensity to manageable proportions. He cannot afford to act alone. No matter how much he tries, he cannot find alternatives for Madhav Kumar Nepal, though his stand may be like the shifting sands, and Koirala, who can only speak for his coterie deputed around him and not for the nation. They and the parties around them are still the best available options, and they must work hand in hand with the King to map out the course of an elusive peace.

In his bid to corner the CPN-UML and the Nepali Congress, the King has robbed himself of the power and significance that is necessary to deal with the anti-Nepal conspiracy that has already torn apart all traditional and democratic forces in the country. Strangely, the degree to which India has been given access to the Army in recent times while marginalizing the political forces already indicates unpropitious days ahead. Under the current circumstances, it is difficult to wish the King good luck, because the country as a whole is suffering, and he is not the only one who will have to bear the brunt of it.

The Maoists want to engage in dialogue as much as any ordinary Nepali on

the street. They too are aware that what they fought as the “people’s war” is being used by outsiders to balkanize this country. They know that this is being done militarily and by sidelining the political forces. The weakening of the parties has been followed by the weakening of the King and the liquidation of political machinery that is at the disposal of the people. The utility of Maoists has indeed been finished to the “balkanizers” who are now effectively pursuing *sikkimization* with all trappings. But even with all these realizations, nobody should entertain the thought that the Maoists can be battered into submission, carved up into cantons and kept under control without any need to talk on their demands. Again, nobody should expect them to be foolish enough to surrender arms and compromise with the *purano satta* (the King, political parties and the national army) without ensuring sufficient political space for themselves.

Above all, it will be a disaster if the Maoists are compelled to change the “people’s war” to a war against *sikkimization*. Unfortunately, the state is not offering a politically powerful team that can represent all its constituencies in the peace process, nor does the government in its present makeup seem capable of effecting changes that may be promised to the Maoists at the negotiating table. What is clear, however, is that given the level of unholy intervention from outside, the Maoists can’t relinquish the demand for credible international mediation that can ensure a protected future for them and not endanger the independence of Nepal and its nationalist sentiments.

The peace process is stuck; the outcome of which has larger consequences. Despair has never been an effective agent for change, but hope can be. There is still time to understand each other and create that hope on the basis of consolidated efforts of all, including the Maoists. The Jan. 13 deadline stands too superficial for this purpose. ■

Adhikari is a lawyer in the field of human rights

EDUCATION AS USUAL



B Rai

A compromise may put an end to the 12-year politically tainted wrangle over the fate of the Proficiency Certificate Level program. But the decision is unlikely to advance higher education.

BY KOSHRAJ KOIRALA

A LONGSTANDING DISPUTE MAY finally have been resolved. In a recent statement, the Higher Secondary Education Board and the Tribhuvan University announced an agreement to introduce an integrated curriculum for the 10+2 and the Proficiency Certificate Level, known also as the Intermediate Level. The decision integrates the curriculums of both systems, even though the board was charged 12 years ago to replace the Proficiency Certificate Level with the

10+2 program. Educators say they doubt that the new plan will make higher education more accessible to all, the ostensible purpose of the 10+2 system.

The decision comes after years of argument. When the Higher Secondary Education Board, the HSEB, came into being as an autonomous body 12 years ago, it introduced a two-year extension in the secondary school level. The idea was to gradually phase out Tribhuvan University's Proficiency Certificate Level program, the PCL. Continued wrangling among students, educators

and T.U. authorities over the issue had blocked any action.

The debate was never about significant educational issues. The curriculums of PCL and HSEB are quite similar. "The difference lies in the model of the questions and in checking the answer sheets," says HSEB spokesman Narayan Prasad Koirala. The PCL system's survival even after a Cabinet decision in favor of the HSEB last April is due to pressure from student unions and T.U. lecturers. Academics say that more than a thousand lecturers raised their voices against a phase-out of the PCL program, fearing that their jobs would be in jeopardy.

The other force supporting the PCL system is political. The HSEB doesn't allow student unions in higher secondary schools. And student political lead-

ers worry that they will fail to pull big crowds onto the streets without the certificate level students, since PCL students form the majority of many street protests. "This could be the reason why the student leaders are against the phase-out," says Basant Bhattarai, who completed his PCL from Mahendra Morang College in Biratnagar and is currently in Kathmandu doing his Bachelor's Level.

With the establishment of the HSEB in 1993, the government set 2002 as the deadline for the complete elimination of the PCL program. Japan donated Rs.40 million through the World Bank to facilitate the phase-out. Nineteen T.U. campuses received grants under the plan, but the phase-out took place in only two, Shanker Dev and Min Bhawan. Under the recent agreement, both the HSEB and the T.U. will introduce an integrated curriculum in science and management faculties by 2006. If everything goes according to plan, the integration of the curricula in the humanities and education streams will be implemented in 2007, officials at HSEB say.

A seven-member committee under T.U. Rector Professor Mahendra Prasad Singh comprising two members from the HSEB and one each from the University Grant Commission, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the T.U. curriculum depart-

ment and the HSEB curriculum department will oversee the process. Committees of different subjects will work to bring uniformity to both curricula and examination systems.

The proposed integration will present difficulties of its own. "There is a statutory obstacle to implementing the integrated curriculum," says Tirtha Khaniya, former vice president of the HSEB. "Should a student register with the T.U. but study under the HSEB curriculum, who will then be authorized to conduct the exam?" The HSEB's Koirala replies, "The HSEB will handle all examinations once the students studying under the old T.U. curriculum get through the certificate level." For the time being though, the T.U. will continue to run the exams for the PCL.

It's not clear that many students will benefit from the compromise. The HSEB program has a much better pass percentage than the T.U.'s PCL exams, 45 percent to 11 percent. But the mission of the HSEB to provide affordable education to students in rural areas remains unfulfilled. There are 911 higher secondary schools in the country, most of which are too expensive for poor students. The HSEB has prescribed a diversified curriculum to cater to the need of the students of all backgrounds, but it has failed to spell out the specifics in terms of the syllabi

and study materials for a majority of the subjects.

Educators voice their dissatisfaction at the government for failing to translate policy into action. According to them, the first duty of the government should have been to develop a plan to upgrade the best public schools to the higher secondary level. Instead the reverse has happened: The HSEB has discouraged the transition of public schools into the higher secondary level by imposing a fee of Rs.850,000 rupees as a deposit for registration, they say.

The HSEB disagrees. "There is no hard and fast rule of depositing Rs.850,000 for registration," says its spokesperson Koirala. "We have been flexible with the amounts we charge in the case of public schools, where higher secondary education has been deemed necessary."

If the agreement does unify the curriculum instead of perpetuating both systems, it should ease woes of students struggling to negotiate the confusing and conflicting dual exam systems. But it will be easier said than done. Entrenched interests like lecturers protecting their jobs and student political leaders holding on to their support bases will resist any changes. The decision may make the controversy go away but is unlikely to help poor students. **N**





All Photos n/w/S

RISKY BUSINESS

Since 1991 a number of airlines have gone from boom to bust. Cutthroat competition among so many operators in a small market makes survival difficult.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

NEPAL MAY BE SMALL GEOGRAPHICALLY, but it can boast of more private airlines than any other South Asian country. More than a dozen are in operation, vying with one another for a small but steadily growing domestic market.

Since the introduction of an open sky policy in 1991 a number of established airlines have gone from boom to bust trying to compete. "There is tough competition," says Rupesh Joshi, Buddha Air's Marketing Manager. An industry that looks glamorous from outside is actually risky business. Airlines are capital-intensive. Aviation experts say that it takes a lot of money to keep aircraft flying and that only those with deep pockets can afford to make such huge investments.

Despite the risks and the presently unstable business environment, the

number of private airlines is still going up. Jets have now become a part of domestic travel, and many airlines are expanding their fleets.

To cash on travel during Dashain, Cosmic introduced jet aircraft into the domestic sector in October. Many aviation experts raised eyebrows at the decision, declaring jet operation on domestic routes "unsustainable." Three months on the jets are still a sensation among the travelers. Cosmic operates the jets on its international routes and from Kathmandu to Biratnagar, Nepalgunj and Bhairawa. The company is likely to add two more jets soon. Frequent travelers say Cosmic's flights are quick, though they are irked by frequent cancellations.

Cosmic is among 34 domestic airlines that have obtained Airlines Operating Certificates since the government introduced open sky policy in 1991. Among those 34 companies, only 15 are operating. There is widespread fear that

some of them will fail too. The bust of high-flyers like Necon and Mountain Air is still fresh in the people's minds. And early this month Necon's bankers sent a note to its promoters. The sheer amount defaulted by Necon alone is enormous.

Nepal Arab Bank Limited (NABIL) sent another reminder recently to the promoters of the failed airline to pay back a whopping debt of over Rs. 332 million. NABIL financed Necon Air 13 years ago when the company was launched. The bank has threatened to put Necon's principal borrowers on the bad debt "black list" if no effort to pay the debt is made. The bank has also written to the shareholders and guarantors of Necon.

Until last year Necon had been the success story of the sector. The company flew for 12 years and dominated the market for many of them. Necon was the first Nepali private airline to operate regional flights, and its long survival had given the impression that the company was here to stay. Experts say Necon's finances came under strain when the company brought expensive



FLYING HIGH: Buddha Air has made the most of Necon's fall

ATR-42 aircraft to replace its aging Avros. Necon's move came at just the wrong time, when the volume of tourists fell precipitously

Necon, Mountain Air and half-a-dozen other airlines have gone bust, squandering billions of rupees borrowed from banks and raised from shareholders. Aviation experts cite poor management and lack of proper planning as the reasons behind the high casualty rate. Others blame the government for failing to have sufficiently strict rules for providing licenses to new airlines. They say that the airline business has become just too easy to enter and too easy to exit.

Many operators want the government to introduce a mechanism to limit the number of airlines. While that sounds like the airlines want protection from competition, their call may have real merit. Government laxity in providing licenses is evident. Among the license holders, say observers, there are many

companies who do not own even a single aircraft. Experts concur that there should be fewer airlines. "In a small market like Nepal, can so many airlines be sustained?" asks aviation expert Hemant Arjyal. "The government must do some homework before issuing licenses." Others suggest that restricting licenses to only those airlines capable of operating large fleets would benefit both the industry and the public.

Declining tourism could have a similar effect by causing smaller airlines to fail. Nepal's rating as a tourist destination fell by 17 places this year in the widely followed list released by international travel and tourism company iExplore.com. Last year the country was among the top 10. Tourists are crucial for the airlines: About 25 percent of total passengers are foreigners, and because they pay much higher fares than Nepali passengers, the foreigners' contribution to the airlines' bottom lines is even

higher. It will be bad news for the industry, says Buddha Air's Joshi, "if the tourist occupancy goes below 15 percent."

For now the domestic market is driving the boom in the business. Road travel has become slow and uncertain due to bandas and blockades. The airlines estimate that domestic flying has expanded by almost 20 percent because of this. More Nepalis have started to fly more often. The airlines are counting on strong growth in this sector to counter the drop in tourists and to pay for the expensive new aircraft they are ordering. It's a gamble.

Investors are nervous. Many of them believe that the tough competition will knock some out of business. If airlines can keep occupancy rates as high as they are now, counter others, they may yet be able to stay afloat. **N**



PIONEER: From propellers to jets

I'm Only Fooling Myself

Too bad we can't just hibernate

BY KUNAL LAMA

Waking up is easy; rolling out of bed is kinda difficult. With the memories of many pleasant dreams still lingering woozily in the subconscious, the half-somnolent efforts to throw off the soft and warm duvet just do not come dexterously. Whatever the season, the urge to snuggle in, eyes barely open, is a pleasure one cannot tire of indulging in every morning. But I must admit, in winter, this indulgence assumes extra dimension, and turns into an all-consuming, all-day-long desire. My Rs.500 under-sheet Chinese electric blanket has made the difficult decision to gingerly step out of bed an even more unenviable eventuality of what is, to begin with, an anomaly. Why should we have to get out? We can do almost everything in bed: drink tea, read the papers, watch the TV, listen to the news, write emails, make babies, etc. The list is endless, but the world has decreed that get out we must. Aaargh! The traumatic transition from a cozy bed to a cold room has been made only slightly endurable by the ease with which I can turn on my assembled-in-Nepal Superser gas heater. As of Jan. 10, however, this little bit of morning magic has come to a sudden and tragic end: Gas prices have been raised by a whopping 13.33 percent to Rs.850 per cylinder, the third price hike by the Deuba-led coalition government in five months. Is the message from the government to its shivering citizens to chill out, or what?

Okay, I do understand petroleum products have been heavily subsidized by the government for years; that even the newly-increased rates don't reflect the current high prices in the international market (not that the rates have ever been decreased, even when oil prices have dropped from \$50 a barrel to \$25); and that the state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) is bearing an annual loss of Rs. 7 billion. My question is: why were the prices not adjusted earlier, in other incompetently-led governments, so that this massive exercise in balancing the books didn't have to take place with such alarming frequency precisely when the citizens have been suffering so much—and are freezing at the same time? We

all know that the ongoing Maoist insurgency, the mismanagement and misappropriation of state funds have seriously compromised the living standards of us ordinary citizens. Not only do we have fewer opportunities to work and earn a decent salary, but we also have to face increasingly bigger bills at the end of every month. The government should really be considering cheaper alternatives to trucking in petroleum products from India, a system prone to massive pilfering and adulteration. Recently there was talk of a gas and oil pipeline into Nepal from India. Though costly, it could be a possibility. The private sector should also be engaged instead of the monopoly that NOC enjoys at the moment, which makes millionaires out of government and corporate officials. According to NEA, nearly 23% of its total electricity transmission gets 'leaked' every year, causing a loss of 140 MW of electricity, almost equal to the installed capacity of the 144 MW Kali Gandaki A project.

Well, then, the 'leakage' stemming from inefficient transmission and distribution must be stopped. Another option would be to seek new suppliers. Bangladesh has 150.3 billion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, though Nepal must come up with more than just 35 metric tons of lentils to export in payment. There is also the tiny problem of Indian territory in between, but, hell, what is SAARC for? Hasn't the time come to take the burqa off this diffident entity and turn it into an active, chuck-the-national-differences organization? (If it's only meant to exist in spirit,

then let it rest in peace.) Best of all, there's the perfect, "at home" solution: develop the vast hydroelectric capacity that Nepal is singularly blessed with. We need more supply of affordable electricity for us to substitute our dependence on imported petroleum products: to cook, to heat, to travel, to trade and to power the engines of our economy. The sad truth is that along with the expensive petroleum products, we also have one of the highest electricity rates in the world. It's easy to sympathize with the frustrations of the students who have been agitating in the streets ever since the price hikes were announced. The PM's airy explanation: "As the Maoists have shown no signals for talks, the Government is all set to fortify the security forces to combat Maoists, resulting in the increase of the fuel prices," is just not good enough. Maybe the message is not to chill out but to die. I think I'll just slumber on like some modern-day Rip Van Winkle, not for 20 years but, at least, until the winter has vanished and the days have become warmer. **N**



The Ajanta paintings are rich. Not only have they captured the quintessence of the paintings but also brought the modern world closer to early Buddhism.



Tapestry in the Caves

BY VENEETA SINGHA

Rich dark colors, sweeping emotions and intricate details—the Ajanta paintings have captured the essence of early Buddhism in a way that is remarkable. Airy touches of the brush portray vivid colors and emotions; and the paintings tell the stories with a graceful but intense touch.

The Ajanta Caves in India are a World Heritage Site and the paintings were from the second century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. The images and stories of Buddha in his previous births—as a man and in the form of various animals—are woven together in masterful strokes of the brush. Important to note is that only four colors were used by the artists— red, blue, black and yellow.

Binoy K. Behl, Indian documentary film-maker and art historian, broke new ground by capturing these paintings in photographs using a new technique in photography. The use of flash lights is prohibited in the caves and the dim natural light in the caves had hitherto made true representation of the paintings near impossible.

The exhibition of the Ajanta paintings photographed by Behl in the Nepal

Art Council is a first of its kind. Art has captured the birth of a religion and modern photography has captured the beauty and grace of the art. The exhibition itself is divided into sections. It flows like the movement of a dance and Behl's technique is a reward in itself.

The Bodhisattvas come first bringing with them peace of spirit. The details of their dress and jewelry are striking. The part bird and part human Padmapani stands in all its glory. King Mahajanaka's sermon with a sage presents the quality of humility—the rich colors are perhaps the most vivid in their representation of emotions.

Line and color are perfect in the paintings. The details trapped in the wet hair, for example, are ample proof of the artists' mastery of their profession. The story moves and is told and retold in painting. It is as if time has stood still and the essence of the moment is encapsulated for posterity.

Queen Maya's dream comes next. Each figure in this story shows a different emotion. The vibrant motifs are particularly eye catching. It must be noted that there remains in these paintings a

stark resemblance to Greek art. The geometrical proportions are perfect and fused wonderfully with life.

The Mithunas come next. The luxurious color is symbolic perhaps of Buddhism's openness to all. Prince Visvantara's story is told again in bold motifs. Particularly arresting is the movements of the scarves on the people. The depictions of man, animal and nature are welded together to present Buddhism in its primeval form.

The story of Yashodhara also brings to life the stories of the birth of Buddhism. The stray curl on her shoulder is captured perfectly and so are the highlights on her figure. Many have seen in these paintings the first mark of the birth of modern photographic techniques.

The Ajanta paintings are rich. But Behl's photographs are works of art in themselves. Not only have they captured the quintessence of the paintings but also brought the modern world closer to early Buddhism in all its manifestations. The tapestry from the caves merits a unique place in the world of art and religion. **N**

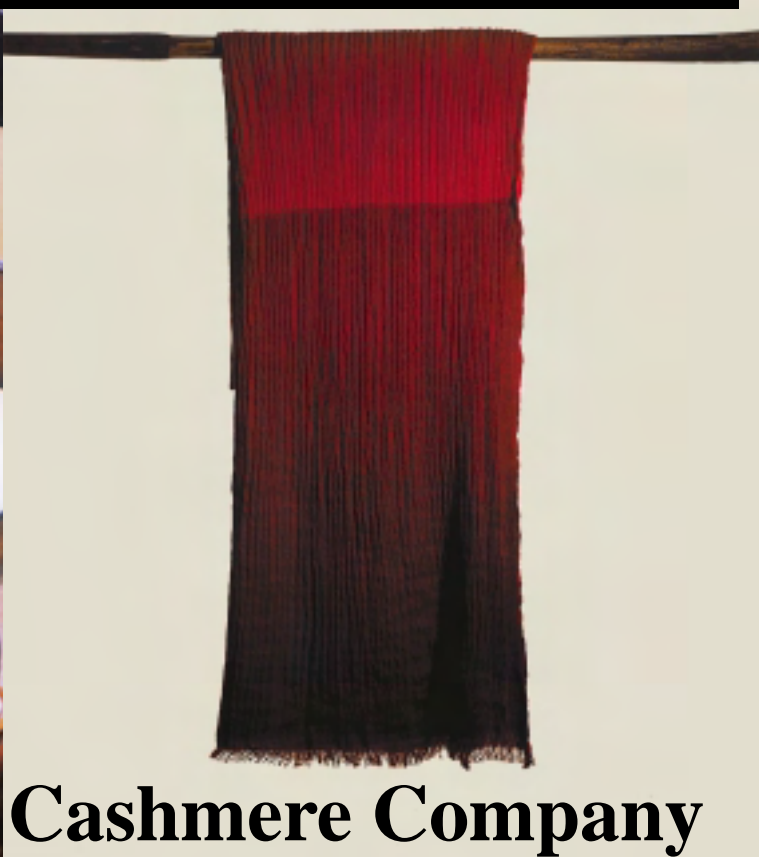


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A NEW LOOK

Nepal Investment Bank responds to vigorous competition in the banking sector

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

THE BANK WITH A NEW LOOK!" is Nepal Investment Bank's new catchphrase. That new look didn't come cheap: The bank spent over Rs.20 million on new infrastructure as part of its restructuring plan. In the face of strong competition in banking, the bank is revamping its service. Customers won't have to wait in long lines anymore, bank officials say. The concept is "15-minute banking": Finish any work in the bank within 15 minutes.

The first step toward 15-minute banking was simple. The bank added more counters. The number of counters in its main branch at Durbar Marg has been doubled to 20. "We treat customers well because they help us grow," says Jitendra Basnyat, the bank's general manager.

The next step to attract customers, the bank says, will be new rooms for account holders with deposits of Rs.1 million and above. These rooms will be equipped with luxurious sofas and will offer personal services. There will be separate counters for customers with balances between Rs.100,000 and Rs.1 million. The bank's management says that these new counters will quicken their service significantly.

On the technical side, the bank has added facilities like online banking and the ability to make payments through mobile phones. The bank was the first in Nepal to introduce Visa Electron debit cards; customers with an account in U.S dollars with the bank can use their debit cards anywhere in the world. Customers with Nepali rupee accounts can use the card throughout Nepal and In-

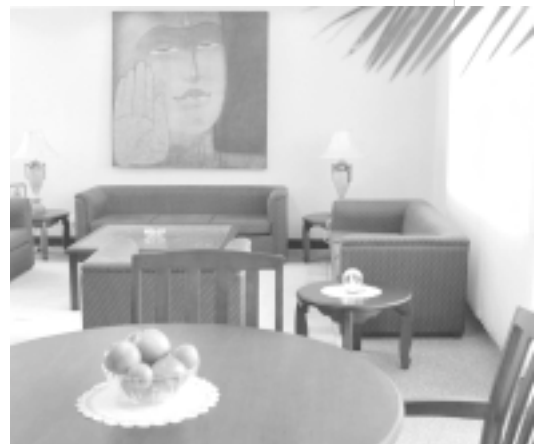
dia. The bank now has ATM services in all its outlets and an interconnected banking facility between all branches across the country.

The bank tries to provide all year-round banking facilities in Kathmandu. On holidays, the head office at Durbar Marg is open from 9 a.m. to noon, the Pulchowk and Putalisadak branches from noon to 3 p.m. and the New Road branch from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

But other banks are improving their infrastructure and services too, and bank officials say there is more to do. They want to offer all banking facilities to customers in all branches. That will take a few years, but they say the time will be well spent developing the bank's standards.

The bank's efforts have brought recognition. The bank received the Bank of the Year award from London-based Financial Times Group's "The Banker" in 2003. The award recognized the job done by the Nepali management team that took over in July 2002. Since then the net assets of the bank have increased from Rs.4 billion to Rs.13 billion. Deposits in the bank increased by 158 percent within the first year, and the non-performing asset ratio is less than 2.5 percent of total loans, says the bank.

Nepal Investment Bank's response to competition has been to improve the customer experience and to strive to match international standards. The consumer wins. **N**



DISASTER, OPPORTUNITY

As our columnists saw in Sri Lanka last week, a series of relatively minor efforts aimed at pre-disaster preparedness could significantly lessen the scale of loss and damage

**BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ AND MAN
BAHADUR THAPA IN COLOMBO**

WHEN THE GIANT TECTONIC plates beneath Sumatra shifted a little on Dec. 26, and unleashed the killer tidal waves, over 160,000 people perished in the southern coasts of Asia. Writing in *Time* magazine, Kerry Sieh of the California Institute of Technology's Tectonics Observatory, who has been studying Sumatran earthquakes, said there were warnings issued last year: Since devastating quakes and tsunamis had occurred in the region in 1797, 1833 and 1861, a future disaster was likely and that people needed to know what had to be done in case such disasters struck. Because poor people have important livelihood concerns to manage in the immediate run, worrying about grand and rare natural disasters appears to be a luxury. But as we saw in Sri Lanka this week, a series of relatively minor efforts aimed at pre-disaster preparedness could significantly lessen the scale of loss and damage.

Turning homeward, it is frightening to even imagine a situation in the Kathmandu Valley or a group of our remote hamlets, when an earthquake of the magnitude that hit Sumatra strikes Nepal in the future. And given the historical pattern and precedence, most of us feel it is coming. The 1934 Great Bihar Earth-

quake that conspicuously toppled hundreds of private houses and public landmarks during Juddha Shumsher's raj, like the Dharahara, the Ghanta Ghar, the old gate of Singha Durbar claimed thousands of civilian lives, probably the largest in the country's recorded history. What will happen in today's Kathmandu, where populations and settlements have conspired a multiplied mess, if the tremors of 1934 return? How prepared are we to mitigate the hazards and to minimize loss of life and property? To what extent shall the unplanned, ill-built and interconnected towns of Kathmandu perish, taking with them lives and institutions paralyzing the country's administration and creating voids in public and private leadership?

What kind of response will we be able to put together when key infrastructure will have collapsed? When one bridge in Malekhu on the Prithivi Highway was swept away one monsoon in the dying days of the Panchayat, the entire Kathmandu Valley choked on limited supplies. Can we imagine a capital where the bridges go down and supplies driven from Kodari and Mugling, or flown into the Tribhuvan International Airport, cannot even cross the Manohara or the Bagmati? How many days can the city go on without electricity, potable

drinking water, telephone and other services? Where will the displaced be sheltered and how will the supplies filter through the narrow roads? How many of our hospitals are safely built and can stand to serve post-disaster casualties? Although use of wood in our city houses is limited, are some parts of the town more susceptible to spread of fire? Our geographical and logistical environments are such that they will constrain the marshalling of national and international relief efforts—how will we sort the rubble and pull out the thousands of women, children and men who would have been crushed under the concrete jungle? Do we have the heavy equipment? Will we have the required will?

The Indian Ocean tsunami has taught us that complacency and fatalism are not an option. While we cannot also panic and start becoming scaremongers, we need to start putting in place a series of preparatory mechanisms so that should a major earthquake strike Nepal, we are in a position to save and rescue lives. First, we need to mainstream our contingency plans into all spheres of national life. By requiring disaster-related knowledge and drills to be part of academic curricula, and a feature in all formal and non-formal institutions, we can generate more public awareness and practice. At present, the name of our National Calamity Relief Act 1982 is itself biased towards post-disaster activities. Aspects of pre-disaster preparedness must run through every activity overseen by our main government agencies. Ministries of agriculture, local development and forestry and other line agencies present in all our district headquarters need to take into account the risks of disaster in all their investments, akin to the manner in which environmental risks are now increasingly assessed and incorporated in projects. These entail costs, but ex ante investments are likely to be far less than the price of post facto repentment. Second, the building codes



**What will happen if
ments have conspir**

AND QUESTIONS

toring the quality of construction, use of materials and space, at least in the tightly built municipalities to begin with, we can reduce risks. In the midst of the utter ruins in coastal Sri Lanka, for example, often the lone structures that survived were statues of Lord Buddha. While the religiously inclined might attribute this to the divine powers of Siddhartha, the Nepali boy from Lumbini, others would simply say that the statues used good cement, rods, and were basically well built. Third, without the political will to mainstream disaster concerns in all aspects of national life, the kind of capacity development that is needed to spring into action after a disaster hits cannot be organized and expected. The youth and mothers' groups, the many community NGOs need to be oriented towards coping with vulnerabilities surrounding the fragile grounds all of us inhabit. In Bam, Iran, it was the local groups of survivors who immediately launched themselves into rescue efforts who ended up saving more lives than the relief workers from outside who inevitably arrived late. Local awareness and capacity efforts should especially target women and children, because they are vulnerable for a curious combination of factors: their home based chores, attires, and intense attachment to the offsprings.

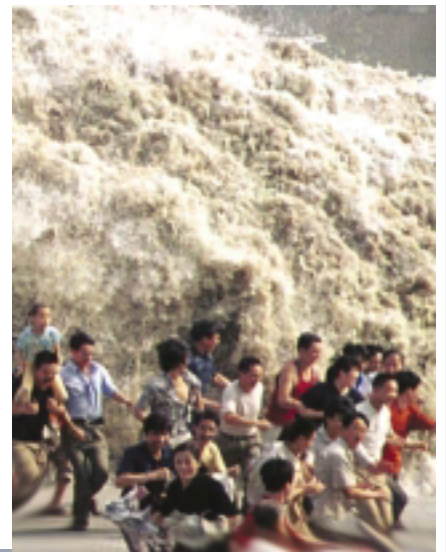
In managing pre- and post-disaster efforts, the role of our domestic institutions is key. In Nepal, every year we lose hundreds of lives to flash floods and landslides; thousands more are displaced. State policies to prevent this kind of avoidable loss, or aid rehabilitation efforts, are still ad-hoc-ish. We simply haven't accorded due importance to disaster related policies and enforcement of existing laws and warning systems for floods, etc. Cynics point out that countries are only jolted into action after they face a great tragedy. But in a globalizing world networked through television and cheap airfares,

feelings of grief and sympathy coalesce across borders, and we must learn from recent tragedies as if they happened on our own foothills.

Apart from local capacities that are the first line of offense in response to catastrophes, the role of credible institutions is also important. In Sri Lanka, we witnessed the way positive forces surrounding monasticism were ushered for relief and psychological counseling. One reason the monks and their monasteries were able to facilitate offer of sanctuaries, material support and advice was that they are held in great esteem and are considered natural allies of people at times of distress. Unlike in Sri Lanka, where geographical accessibility and the role of such non-state institutions eased post-disaster relief efforts, in Nepal, the geographical problem accentuates the reach of external actors as well as flow of information and communication. This is more pronounced at present as the state is hardly present outside the district headquarters. Complicating things further, it has traditionally been the Army

sentimental stock of a tragedy diminishes?

The Maoist leadership in Nepal is callous about the way it treats human life. They openly say that even a sacrifice of a quarter of the country's population could be justified to attain their utopian revolutionary aim. Will the kind of numbers that succumb to a likely nature's fury within our own borders numb our Maoists to nudge them towards seeking a peaceful solution to the current crisis? Will they be part of a broader coalition built around volunteerism and solidarity in case a ma-



and the police that the Nepali state relies on for disaster relief. At a time when these forces are locked in a bitter battle with rebel militias, will hatred give way to cooperation in the face of disaster in remote hinterlands? Or as happened in North-eastern Sri Lanka and Aceh, initial rapprochement between feuding forces tends to fizzle out as soon as the

major disaster strikes? Or will they simply use these calamitous outcomes as a strategic channel to gain more control over a weak and stretched state? These are hypothetical scenarios worth mulling over even though it is not clear what public policy response could be framed around these political concerns at this point. **N**

in today's Kathmandu, where populations and settled a multiplied mess, if the tremors of 1934 return?

CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS

ITALIAN FOOD FESTIVAL

Chef Vito Froio is the Executive Chef at The Grand Hotel, New Delhi. In his 17-year career, he has worked in some of the best hotel chains around the world, including cuisine innovations and experimentations at the Crowne Plaza, Dubai; Sheraton, Beijing; and Le Meridien, Dubai. The chef specializes in Italian cuisine and also delves in other European cuisines. He now brings forth his creative best in the art of cooking to The Hotel Yak and Yeti. Already busy giving a new look to the menu, Chef Froio conjures up an exciting mix of Italian cooking presented in his inimitable signature style. From the traditional aromatic breads pre-



sented along with a delightful trio of sassy sauces to the indescribably silky tiramisu, experience a culinary sojourn, which is authentically Italian. Hotel Yak & Yeti present Chef Froio's Italian innovations this season at the Sunrise Café for buffet lunch/dinner and the Chimney Restaurant for à la carte dishes. Date: Jan. 10 – Jan. 22. At the Sunrise Café: 12 - 3 p.m. and 6:30 - 10 p.m. At the Chimney Restaurant: 6 - 10 p.m. For information: 4248-999.

Seafood Festival

The Sea has always offered a variety of exquisite and diverse range of exotic seafood. The Signature Restaurant at the Rox presents you the palate-tantalizing fried jumbo prawns, smoked salmon, crisp batter fried ruby rocky

mountain crab, white oats fried sea fish and other delicious seafood cuisine during the seafood festival. An array of wines will also be available alongside the food. Date: Jan. 12 - Jan. 26. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491-234.

ZEN PAINTINGS

The "Buddha Gallery," in partnership with "Gallery 9," presents 50 paintings by Kang Chan-Mo. Among his 50 artworks, 25 will be exhibited at the Buddha Gallery in Thamel and 25 at Gallery 9 in Lazimpat. The Buddhist Korean artist Kang Chan-Mo uses a few colors in his experimental approach. For this exhibition, Chan-Mo has derived inspiration from a recent trek amidst the natural splendor of the Himalayas in the Khumbu region of Everest. The paintings are simple figures that depict his imagination of Buddha, various landscapes and people. Born in 1949, Chan-Mo passed got his Bachelor's degree in fine art from Joong Ang University and graduated from the Japanese Art School. This is his 12th solo exhibition till date. Date: Jan. 20 - Jan 26. For information: 444-1689, 4428-694.

ART EXHIBITION



Martini Mania

Hotel Yak and Yeti presents Martini Mania at the Pub. Date: Jan. 21 – Feb. 5. Time: 12 a.m. - 12 p.m. For information: 4248-999.

Trip of all Times

For just Rs.5999 for Nepalis and \$199 for expatriates, the J o m s o m M o u n t a i n Resort provides two nights and three



days accommodations. The price will also include roundabout airfare from Pokhara to Jomsom, daily buffet breakfast and dinner, pick up and drop from the airport to resort and a walking tour of the Marpha village in Jomsom. For information: 449-7569.

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Dosa Festival. This is going to be one full meal with a variety of delectable fillings to



suit every taste bud. Date: Jan 15 - Jan. 30. Time: 6:30 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491-234.

Master Little Star

The Nepalese Fashion Home presents Master Little Star-2005. Watch out for special attractions like the kids fashion show with dance and song sessions. At the Royal Nepal Academy. Date: Jan. 22. Time: 2 p.m.

Margarita Night

Dwarika's Hotel presents the Margarita Night serving Churasqueria BBQ, Latin American Delicados and refreshing margaritas. Also enjoy the Latin beats by Abhaya and the Steam Injuns. Every last Friday of the month. Price:Rs. 799. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. Happy hours from 4 p.m. - 7 p.m. everyday at Fusion Bar. For information: 447-9488.



ONGOING

Taste of Thailand

The Rox Restaurant features diverse range of popular dishes of Thailand. The herbs, spices and market fresh ingredients will make a difference in your culinary experience. Thai buffet lunch every Fridays and Saturdays. Time: 12:30 p.m. - 3 p.m. For information: 4491-234.

Seasons Special

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian encounter daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-la. Price: Rs.450 including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. For information: 441-2999.

Krishnarpan

The Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel offers fine dining ceremonial cuisine. Four to 16 course ceremonial meal. Open for lunch and dinner. For information: 4479-488.

Winter Splash

Want to sweat in the winter? Go and experience Shahahshah's indoor heated pool and relax in the steam and sauna. Price: Rs.350 per person. Exclusive ladies' day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Time: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Nepali Platter

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday. Come and enjoy this

special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin & Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6 - 8 p.m. For information: 441-1818.

Dwarika's Thali

Lunch at The Heritage courtyard. Enjoy the Nepali cuisine, hospitality and heritage. For information: 4479-488.

Jukebox Experience

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

Cadenza Live

Listen to the best live jazz in town. Enjoy every Wednesday and Saturday at the Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat. Time: 7:45 p.m. onwards.

Charcoalz

This festive season Yak and Yeti brings to you "Charcoalz" at the

poolside. The piping hot grills are guaranteed to drive away your autumn chills with an array of Indian, western and Mongolian barbequed delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 424-8999.

Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the 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.

Tickling Taste buds

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

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SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Small IT enterprises have sprung up across the Valley. With a staff of anywhere from two to 20, these businesses provide computer services as good as the big outfits.

BY KUMUD NEPAL

A lone building stands in a big compound at Battisputali. There are no signboards or banners. A man in a black leather jacket is seated on a revolving chair in front of a computer screen in a dark room on the first floor, alone. An acoustic guitar and a dumbbell are at his side. The room looks like anything but an office, but that's exactly what it is: the head office of Magnus Consulting Group, a small computer enterprise. The offices of the group occupy two stories of the building. The man in the leather jacket is Tika Rai, one of four partners in the enterprise.

Magnus is just a tiny part of a much bigger story. With the growing craze for IT and the soaring demand for newer and better technology, many small enterprises like Rai's have sprung up across the Valley. With anywhere from a couple of workers to a staff of 20, these enterprises are catering to the needs of the IT-savvy.

The CAN Infotech computer show is just around the corner. Last year 180,000 people visited the fair. This year the IT fair, which opens on Jan. 25, is expected to attract huge crowds again. Mostly, the bigger names in the business will occupy the 114 stalls there, but this doesn't mean that these players are

the only ones in business. There are a lot of smaller enterprises.

"You don't need to be a big organization to survive in the increasingly competitive IT field," says Rai. He has just eight employees working with him. Magnus Consulting started eight months ago and is now active in software development and wireless technology. "With such a small group, low cost and high quality is our mantra," says Rai. This electrical engineer who graduated from the University of Oklahoma in the United States says that bigger is not necessarily better.

Rai is trying to get small software projects from around the globe. One of his prospective international projects includes overseeing the Distant Education System, a distance-learning approach started by Mamta Sharma in Boston. Domestically, his office is busy archiving and sorting the Rajpatra, the national gazette, published by the government.

Magnus is making management software to index these gazettes, which have been published for the last 50 years. What Rai is doing has a financial motive, but it serves the needs of society too. He is also working on an Agricultural Development Bank project to "make financial

THINK BIG: Tika Rai of Magnus says the small can do it too



software and a wireless network to connect small cooperative companies.”

Manohar Adhikari heads Soft Fusion, a small computer enterprise at Naya Bazaar. He and his team of two are all in their mid 20s. Soft Fusion does webpage design and database software development. Its clients include Thames College and the Nursing Association; the company designed their websites. Soft Fusion also produces and manages the electronic databases of the Nepal Electricity Authority and the Connection Yellow Pages.

Many of these small enterprises are struggling, however. Soft Fusion complains about the difficulty in competing against the larger enterprises, which have greater credibility in the eye of the public because of their expensive pub-

intended to show that “things can be done in Nepal” even with limited resources. He takes the problems as challenges and says he is ready to face them. He encourages others to start small businesses as well.

Deepesh Pradhan, whose Yomari Incorporated at Ekantakuna started as a one-room office at his own residence in 1996, is another success story. He was a fresh computer science graduate from India. With two other U.S. trained partners, he pioneered a web programming enterprise. He started with a single computer, which he bought with his parents’ money. The group started with a total budget of \$1,500 from American friends. Today Yomari has a staff of 20 and is a reputed name in the field of web interface and

institutions promise quality manpower for information technology, Nepal still lacks enough trained people. He says that it constrains his business: “We can’t get into the bigger projects of software development like the banking software straightaway.”

There are some big projects in the works, though. Sarose Joshi’s Young Software, with seven employees, is taking up outsourced jobs. The company sells web-based software to clients in the United States. A major project the company handles is for online auction site, E-Bay. The company handles a part of the software which allows customers of the site to auction things online more easily. The auction site pays the company according to the volume of sales.



licity campaigns. Small enterprise owners believe that they can compete against the very best of the bigger companies and do it cheaper as well. The speciality of these firms is that it produces tailored software according to the need of the clients. But the large software houses have started producing the general software packages that compete with the customized ones that small companies make.

But people like Rai are not despondent. Opening a small enterprise was

software application development. Initially the company struggled to compete against bigger enterprises like Mercantile, but Pradhan, the chief operations officer, didn’t give up. Today Yomari handles software and web page development projects for the United Nations and the World Bank.

Most small companies are primarily selling web-based programming and graphic design. “That’s the easiest thing to start with,” says Pradhan. He believes that although many colleges and

None of the small companies are getting rich yet. Joshi says that although he works for foreign clients, these clients take into consideration the lower expenses in Nepal when they negotiate with him. Rai of Magnus voices a similar opinion. “Nepal is no Taiwan,” he says, “where small enterprises have sustained the overall economy.” As they struggle on, though, most small IT entrepreneurs are happy to be building their businesses and to be creating employment opportunities for capable people. **N**

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Snapshots BY DHRITI BHATTA

BIG LEAGUE

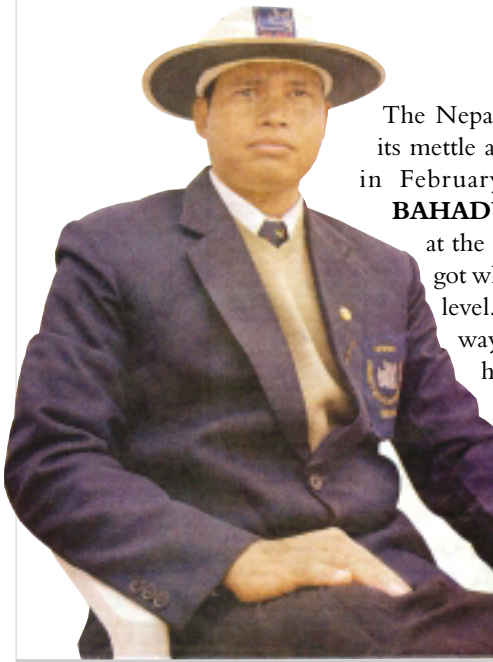
The British TV series “Pop Idol” and its many competitors and spin-offs have been wildly successful. Get ready for the Nepali version! It’s called “Nepal Star” and will be broadcast on Nepal-1 on Jan. 25. Thousands auditioned for the program, which will give the winner a shot at a singing career in Bollywood: The Nepal star will sing for a Mahesh Bhatt movie. Why did it take this long for someone to do this? “It’s wasn’t due to a lack of creativity,” says **RASHMILA PRAJAPATI**, who heads the event management company behind the program. “The sponsors don’t trust you until and unless the same kind of project does well somewhere else.”



nm/ss

Dreaming Big

The Nepali national team will be trying to prove its mettle at the ICC World Cup Qualifying Series in February in Malaysia. So will **BUDDHI BAHADUR PRADHAN**, who will be umpiring at the tournament. He wants to show that he’s got what it takes to officiate at the international level. The 30-year-old has already come a long way from umpiring at local games in his hometown Biratnagar to standing in at international tournaments, including the ICC Trophy in 2001 in Canada. “I want to become a test umpire,” says Pradhan. In Malaysia, the national team will be fighting to keep its World Cup dreams alive. Pradhan can take one step closer to his dream too.



Nepali Stylz

NIRYANA SHRESTHA, known also as the Naughty Soul Kid, was seen all over town in a *daura suruwal*. Why did the rapper who wouldn’t be caught dead in anything else except baggy pants, an oversized jersey and sunglasses don the national dress? It was for the hip-hop artist’s new music video “Ma Nepali” from his first solo album “Ma Nepali NSK Style.” Shrestha says he’s trying to give a Nepali feel to his album. “Hundreds look up to musicians like us,” he says. “At a time of crisis, it’s our responsibility to send a message of patriotism.”



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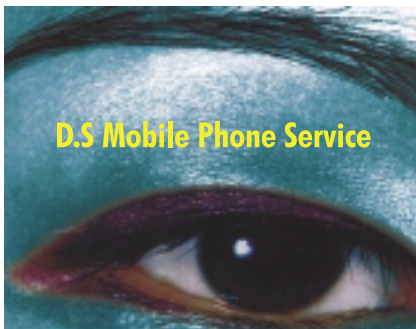
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Ageless Architecture

Wondered who's behind the new-look Bakery Café that recently opened in Sundhara? **Sarosh Pradhan** is the architect responsible for the colorful and spacious design. He decided to break out of the traditional greens of the Bakery and went for something different. The new Bakery houses a lounge, a garden and a hall. During the opening days of the

Bakery, the Bhimsen Stamba Hall exhibited Pradhan's designs of a few selected projects. And the 36-year-old architect who heads the design firm, Sarosh Pradhan and Associates, has worked on more than 40 such projects in the last eight years. The graduate from the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture was recently awarded the Focus Countries' Young Architect Award at the annual Architect of the Year Awards, organized by JK Cement in India. The award was for the Lalitpur office complex of Tewa, a social organization. Dhriti Bhatta talked to Pradhan about the exhibition, the recent award and architecture in Nepal.

What made you come up with the exhibition?

During my travel around Europe and America, I had come across various exhibitions by renowned architects. These made me want to have one of my own. I wanted to reach out to people with my exhibition. I feel that Nepalis still don't value true architecture. Through the miniatures of the Tewa office complex and some of my other major projects [displayed in the exhibition], I wanted to show how much an architect adds to a building's feel.

What was special about Tewa for you?

Of all the projects that I have undertaken, Tewa stands out because of the approach we took while coming up with the design. Tewa is a philanthropic organization, Nepali to the core. So, we tried to give the design a distinct Nepali touch. The Kasthamandap

building was our biggest inspiration. We tried to incorporate some elements of that building into the design—the two-storied roof of the Kasthamandap is emulated in most of the buildings in the Tewa complex. For the interiors, we used local materials like slate and terracotta.

The focus of all of our works is the aesthetic.

What do you focus on—contemporary designs or traditional ones?

The focus of all of our works is the aesthetic. We don't follow exact traditional Nepali designs. It's important to keep in mind the age that we live in too. So, we design keeping in mind contemporary looks while not forgetting the rich heritage of our traditional architecture.

Other than Kathmandu, you've also designed resorts in places like Lukla and Lumbini. Does the location affect your design?

Yes, of course. The context and the place are very important. Each location has its own materials and traditions, which need to be kept in mind. And you also need to understand whom you are designing for and how your design is going to affect the particular landscape you are working on. For example, take Lukla. The stones that we have used in our projects there maintain the uniqueness and exoticness of the place.



nm/ss

You worked on a dozen projects last year. Doesn't doing many projects at a time get monotonous?

No, not at all. The kinds of projects that we get are diverse. And the locations even. We're here in Kathmandu one day and in Phakding village in the high Himalaya the next. So, there is an urge to create something different and unique for every new project, according to the place and its people.

How much of a scope do architects like you have in Nepal today?

In every developing country there is a lot to build. So, the going is obviously good for architects. But just because there is a scope for architecture doesn't mean that work will come your way easily. As a professional you need to put in a lot of hard work and continuous effort to stand out in a crowd of hundreds of others like yourself.

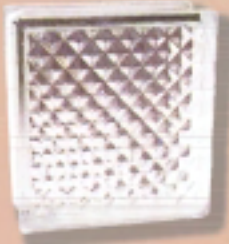
What about the effect of the ongoing conflict? How much of a difference has it made?

Surprisingly, despite the conflict, the real estate business is still booming. At this time of crisis when almost every business is suffering, people are looking for safe investments—buildings, real estate are one means. Also, most of our projects we work on are for positive people; people who think that the adverse situation in the country will change. They are optimistic: They believe that by doing something in hard times, they can get bigger returns when the good times return. **N**

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Righting the Wrongs

2004 was a horrible year. The country made it to the top of the list of human disappearances. The U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances unequivocally stated that it recorded more disappearances in Nepal than anywhere in the world. Nepal also featured prominently on the list of countries that are employing child soldiers. The country's human rights situation looked to be in a free fall.

During the emergency in 2001-02, there was universal acknowledgement that the human rights situation had hit rock bottom. Three years on, the bottom seems bottomless. As the conflict deepens, frighteningly high numbers of reports of summary executions, arbitrary arrests and torture have surfaced. Should elections precede peace, the violence could attain unprecedentedly dangerous levels. It is so easy to despair over the endless violence.

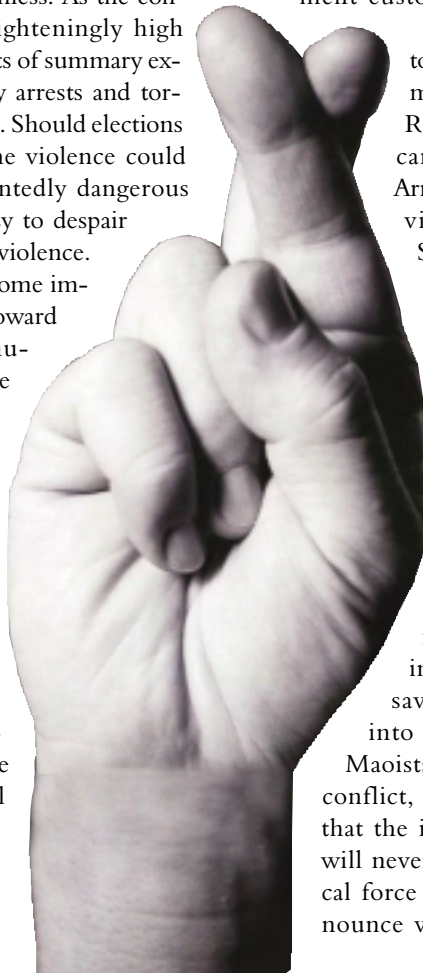
Yet 2004 saw some important progress toward improving the human rights regime in the country. The government and the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights signed an understanding that commits Nepal to accept international assistance for the National Human Rights Commission, the prime human rights watchdog in the country. The visiting EU troika emphatically told the government that it wants the NHRC to have a higher profile in the face of growing human rights abuses. Even the United States finally committed

to monitoring the human rights record of our security forces.

U.S. military assistance will now come with conditions. Nepal will have to take measures to end torture by its security forces and to prosecute security personnel who are found responsible for gross human rights violations. The newly enacted U.S. law also requires Nepal to make substantial progress in complying with habeas corpus orders issued by the Supreme Court to the security forces. It asks the government to cooperate with the NHRC to resolve security-related cases involving individuals in government custody.

We certainly would like to think that all these are remarkable achievements. Right after the U.S. law came into force, Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa visited the Supreme Court and the NHRC, signaling a seemingly new beginning. We want to see more of that before we decide that things have changed for the better.

Toward that end, we want our allies to continue to push the government and security forces and to make it clear that reforms are imperative if Nepal is to save itself from declining into a lawless state. But the Maoists, the other party to the conflict, must also keep in mind that the international community will never recognize it as a political force so long as it fails to renounce violence.



Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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