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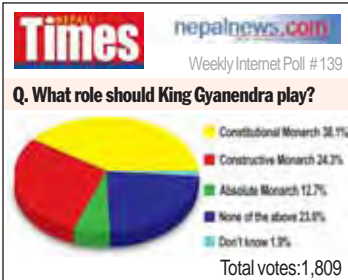
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Q. Should the five parties have met the king's deadline for a common prime ministerial candidate?

DEUBA III

Sher Bahadur Deuba must prove that he is not just another bahadur

KUNDA DIXIT

Sher Bahadur Deuba's appointment this week as prime minister for the third time is a chance to end a two-year political deadlock and make up for lost time in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

It took nearly a month to get a successor to Surya Bahadur Thapa, and the delay prompted speculation of back channel talks between the Maoists and palace emissaries. It was reportedly after those dialogues failed that the five party alliance was asked to come up with a common candidate for premiership. But the alliance fell apart over differences between the NC and the UML on whether or not to send a nominee.

Essentially, there was no procedural difference between Deuba's appointment and that of Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand before him. But analysts say where Deuba can make a difference is in showing that he can take the parties along. To do this, paradoxically, he has to prove to them that he is not a palace pawn.

Minendra Rijal of the NC (Democratic) told us his party was taking things step by step, adding: "We are determined to get all the parties on board." But NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh KC was less upbeat: "It shows regression hasn't ended. Deuba may have been reinstated, but the people's sovereignty has not."

Piecing together the sequence of events this week, it is clear that everyone except Sher Bahadur Deuba and Speaker Taranath Ranabhat failed the royal interviews for the premier's post. At the last moment, Ranabhat put himself out of the race on Tuesday morning by refusing to resign his speaker's post

as the palace insisted.

Deuba's appointment was then hastened by the surprise announcement this week that caretaker premier Thapa had, without telling anyone, extended an invitation to Indian foreign minister K Natwar Singh to visit on 4 June. A prime minister had to be found quickly before he came.

King Gyanendra decided to eat his words and reinstate a prime minister he sacked 20 months ago for "incompetence". The king risked being ridiculed by the parties, but hoped that public opinion would favour the move.

Deuba thinks his reinstatement proves once and for all he was never incompetent. As with his predecessors, the king gave Deuba a three point agenda: get the parties on board, start a peace process with the Maoists and conduct elections within the next 10 months. Given Deuba's track record during his previous two tenures, analysts are not hopeful that he can deliver.

During his second term, Deuba made the fatal blunder of terminating local bodies, which left a vacuum at the grassroots that the Maoists filled. He declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament and announced elections he knew he couldn't hold. He was also stained by the misdeeds of his cabinet.

This time, the fact that Deuba rushed to see Girija Koirala first thing on Wednesday afternoon shows he takes the king's instructions seriously. He even broached the

subject of reunification of the NC, which Koirala did not reject outright because it would help him deal with the UML.

The UML itself has fallen out with Koirala and is waiting for his next move before deciding on a common minimum

program and whether to accept Deuba's invitation for support at a central committee meeting on Friday. But for now, the parties are still adopting a hardline stance because they do not want to alienate radicalised students on the streets who will need time to cool down. ●



SUBHAS RAI

Editorial p2
Square one

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The error of terror

Terrorism is not going to get the Maoists anywhere

SQUARE ONE

As Sher Bahadur Deuba becomes prime minister for the third time, it is difficult to say which square Nepal is back on. Is it 1960? 1980? July 2001, his first tenure? October Third 2002, the day before he was sacked? Or 7 May 2004, when Surya Bahadur Thapa resigned?

When Deuba became prime minister the last time in July 2001, we wrote in this space that he should not expect a honeymoon period and must learn from his previous tenure. He didn't, and went on to disband local bodies, dissolve parliament, surround himself with crooks and announce elections he couldn't hold.

We have reproduced the editorial page cartoon from the edition of 27 July 2001, the week Deuba assumed office. It is eerily prescient today. Not much has really changed: the war has become worse, 5,000 more Nepalis were killed, the country is in a deeper crisis. And we have lost two valuable years as the palace and the parties squabbled unnecessarily for power.

Then, the Maoists had greeted Deuba's assumption of office by slaughtering 17 policemen in Bajura before announcing a truce. The ceasefire and talks lasted four months before the rebels attacked the Ghorahi barracks and dragged the Royal Nepali Army into the war, seriously escalating it.

King Gyanendra has swallowed his pride to reinstate a prime minister he sacked two years ago for incompetence. Deuba and the king gave each other a face-saving way out of a political deadlock that has paralysed the country for two years. The parties must now look beyond their insistence on process and help Deuba tackle the nation's larger crises.

His challenge is much greater this time. If he couldn't resolve the Maoist crisis then, how is he going to do it now? If he had to postpone elections last time, how is he going to hold it within the 10-month royal deadline? How is he going to get the government working? Restart development? Can he keep the crooks out this time?

Deuba has a few things going for him: he is well-meaning and down-to-earth. He has fought and suffered for democracy, and this LSE fellow has a wife who coaches him on development. He has also served in the high-power committee set up by his mentor, KP Bhattarai, in 2000 to solve the Maoist crisis.

But before he gets down to any of this, Deuba needs to build a minimum consensus among the parliamentary parties so they are all rowing in the same direction.

GUEST COLUMN Samrat Rana

There are fundamental questions about whether the current position and posture of the Maoist movement can be considered legitimate. Yet an organisation which has adopted terrorism as an end in itself, continues to be accepted and receive sympathy and consideration from responsible and intelligent liberals and democrats.

The answer probably lies in the post-1990 political standoff. The disillusionment of the people led to the Maoist insurgency wherein a micro-political group wanting to draw attention to their grievances resorted to using terror as a shortcut to power.

This path of violence and anarchy, which rests on a foundation of subversion and terrorism, has attained dangerous dimensions in the absence of appropriate political initiatives. The longterm objectives of the Maoists and their methods have not been properly analysed and need to be seen in the correct perspective. The campaign of violence and coercion has effectively destroyed the state's ability to achieve any progress or development. It has also seriously damaged the very social foundation and harmony of Nepal's unified and heterogeneous society.

properly analysed and need to be seen in the correct perspective. The campaign of violence and coercion has effectively destroyed the state's ability to achieve any progress or development. It has also seriously damaged the very social foundation and harmony of Nepal's unified and heterogeneous society.

Maoist subversion was developed and designed to lead to the eventual collapse of the state machinery, infrastructure and economic activities. In the absence of political resolve and effective policies to counter these designs, there is an urgent need for a socio-political movement against the inhuman methods adopted by the rebels. Public awareness, initiative at all levels, commitment and concerted action by civil society in particular is an absolute necessity.

There is a certain reluctance on the part of media to term Maoist activity as terrorism. These Kathmandu-based journalists may be respected and responsible, but they are far removed from the daily reality of rural Nepal where the people grapple with terror every day. One internationally-accepted definition of terrorism is: 'The premeditated deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience.' This accurately describes the Maoist tactic of fear, intimidation, threats and murders that is happening throughout Nepal today.



LETTERS

BUS BOMB

It was disgusting to see the media, political leaders and important sectors of society taking the bombing of the Sajha bus and resultant loss of life and serious injury so lightly. No political leader uttered even a single word of concern. The media failed by not seeking comments on the matter from the political parties. Although the bombing may be of minor interest to them, it is of serious concern to the people who use

public transportation every day. The bombing by the perpetrators and the lack of response from all political forces has stunned us, with its arrogance and inhuman attitude. If this goes on, Nepalis will lose what little faith they have in the media, democracy and political parties as well as their sense of patriotism.

Rajeeb L Satyal, Bansbari

• Three years ago, the

Maoists were on the brink of victory, if they had been willing to take a negotiated settlement. I was telling friends that the Maoists had waged a carefully-targeted campaign against the government, mostly without harming civilians and that they had a certain amount of popular support. The US ambassador at the time said, "If they would renounce violence, I could support most of the Maoists' demands." I would tell anyone who would listen, "These people are revolutionaries, not terrorists. This isn't Cambodia or Peru." I was wrong. Recruiting cadres is revolutionary: kidnapping students is terrorism. Robbing the government bank office is revolutionary, destroying a village's electricity or water supply is terrorism. Closing VDC offices is terrorism. Burning a government bus after getting the passengers off is, perhaps, a revolutionary act, but leaving a bomb on a bus is terrorism, plain and simple. No excuses, no rationalisations. The tiger's stripes are showing. I don't

want to live in the People's Paradise. I doubt anyone at the palace or the party offices does either. Let's hope they all come to their senses soon and unite against the danger.

Janardan Chand, email

• I wonder why the political parties who are so concerned about the king's 'regression' are quiet about the callous terrorism displayed by the Maoists in bombing a bus in Kathmandu. Isn't it strange that people who supposedly have such deep concern about democracy don't utter a peep of protest?

Jagadish Gautam, Baneswor

SADDAMISED

Re: "Saddamised" (Here and There, # 198). Daniel Lak, like all flip-flopers, has pretty good hindsight. If I'm not mistaken, he once wrote in this very column that Saddam was an evil man who had used chemical weapons on his own people and that America was doing the right

thing by going to war to get rid of him. Now he claims that the invasion of Iraq 'was a huge mistake'. Even Americans (a majority of whom were in support of the war) 'are now changing their minds', he says. It's not on moral grounds, that's for sure. Would this change have taken place if fewer American lives had been lost and things had progressed according to US plans for 'liberating' the Iraqi people? 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going' is a popular American saying. I leave it up to your readership to decide as to who is more worthy of this saying—the Americans or the Iraqi people?

SS Pal, email

SHAME

I am ashamed to be a citizen of Nepal after seeing the crowd of wannabe prime ministers at the palace gate. What a joke on our destiny and on the pride of the people!

Basanta Gautam, Kasugai, Japan



KIRAN PANDAY

However, the reporting of this is sanitised and ad hoc. The source and accuracy of the reports in the media are questionable.

Most reporters have never been near the scene of an incident and when and if they are, it is hard to gauge if they are not unwittingly victims of Maoist misinformation or intimidation. The astonishing thing is that the international community has selectively accepted the propaganda of human rights violations by the security forces in total, without the benefit of doubt.

All forms of terrorism violate human values and are desensitised towards loss of innocent lives: Maoist killings are carried out without any sense of remorse. Terrorists use the cold-blooded murder of non-combatants as a means to an end, but why is society tacitly accepting and sometimes even justifying it?

It is clear that a once-politically savvy Maoist party is now trapped by its own rigid interpretation of a defunct and outdated ideology that it is trying to force on an uneducated and desperate populace using unrestricted and systematic terror to establish a monolithic single party state.

The priority now is to pursue diplomatic and political initiatives to develop the appropriate armed response to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table. The Maoist tactic of assassinations and threats against non-combatants to create panic and chaos has not worked and will not get them any nearer their goal. The only rational course open to the rebels is to stop this futile violence and terrorism and revert to peace talks. ●

Samrat Rana is the pen name of a military analyst.

Niki Lauda's revenge

Flashback to a scandal from which neither Nepali politics nor its flag carrier ever recovered

The national flag carrier has been trying for months to lease an aircraft, but to no avail. Royal Nepal Airlines has become such a pariah in international aviation circles that nobody wants to touch it with a barge pole. The airline had been

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



flying through bumpy weather for years, but what made it lose all credibility was the scandal involving the lease of a Boeing 767 from Lauda Air in 2000.

The word Lauda, along with other international brand names like Pajero, has become a shorthand for corruption in high places. The UML, which was then in the opposition, disrupted the entire winter session of parliament in 2001, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for his alleged involvement in the Austrian aircraft lease. Everyone was baying for Koirala's blood.

The CIAA served the premier a letter asking him to furnish some 'clarifications'. Koirala finally quit on 19 July 2001, to be replaced by Sher Bahadur Deuba in his second tenure as prime minister.

Public memory being what it is, there may be very few today who remember the smear campaign that was run in the name of Lauda to bring down the Koirala government. But its political fallout was similar to that of the Bofors gun deal in India that ousted Rajiv Gandhi from power. Till date, the octogenarian Nepali Congress president carries a whiff of Lauda. The case is still pending at the courts and it may be too early to write off all allegations with any

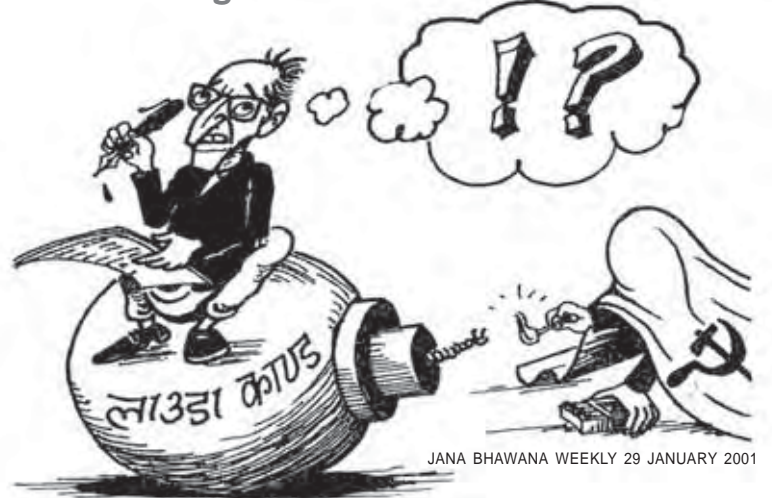
certainty but a review of those tumultuous days reveal the wheeling and dealing of power politics in Nepal.

Sore at being ousted from Singha Darbar, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was trying to get back at his good friend Koirala. Some of his sidekicks at Royal Nepal Airlines were miffed at the Lauda lease since it deprived the carrier's 757 crew of lucrative allowances. Competing commission agents offered a voracious media comparative cost charts to prove that they had better rates.

Ambitious Deuba used it as an opportunity to play factional politics inside the ruling party against his mentor and leaked details to a pliant press. The UML saw it as an opportunity to divide the ruling party and exploited it to the hilt. Civil society wanted to test the power of its fangs and pounced upon a victim already wounded by the political attacks. The scandal suited the needs of several power players. In the end, no one won. Everyone lost.

The Lauda affair was proof that political forces go to any length, sacrifice anything, use any weapon against an opponent even if it meant hurting the country and its institutions.

Beholden to those who had



JANA BHAWANA WEEKLY 29 JANUARY 2001

helped him claw his way into Singha Darbar, Deuba did their bidding by refusing to extend the term of local government units, declaring a state of emergency, crippling his political party, dissolving parliament and finally recommending the suspension of general elections before being dismissed as an incompetent prime minister by the king.

Madhab Kumar Nepal's dreams of benefiting from the split in the ruling party did not materialise as the October Fourth royal move swept him into the sidelines. The CIAA is yet to regain the credibility it lost in pursuing a lost cause. Kantipur has buried the Lauda hatchet for good and prominent hacks responsible for the operation have moved on. Its

front-page editorials of that period can still be read in libraries and are examples of partisanship. Bhattarai has deservedly become a laughing stock.

Local agents of Lauda Air and their political sponsors milked the deal to the last drop, pocketing a cut for every hour that the jet was in the air and then dumped the scandal on a hapless state airline. This intelligently planned and cleverly implemented campaign in the name of fighting corruption offers proof—if proof is still needed—that all is fair in politics. After all, politics is what you do, propaganda is how you do it. For its lasting impact, just look at Girija Prasad Koirala today still struggling four years later to convince King Gyanendra that he has a clean image. ●



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STARSTRUCK

The current astrological planetary configuration favours the king, said Ashok Bajracharya, a Kathmandu-based astrologer and shaman. "If the dialogues are handled properly, the conflict in the country terminates by 24 January," he said. He concluded that the country will see proper stability only after 2009.

-Nepalnews.com

if astrologers are to be believed and you are separating O₂ from CO₂ & 'other' particles from kathmandu air waiting to collect that pure drop of water from melamchi getting stuck in krishnabir in a swirl of dust somewhat perilously closer to trishuli than pokhara

flying on rnac to delhi via brunei, several new spare parts and days later sitting out month-long bandas reading another pro-madhesi rant of ck lal in nepali times & fading reminisces of peter karthak in ktm post getting that 'network busy' signal on your cellphone

following the gesticulations of 3 policemen to 3 different directions in the same traffic snarl marvelling at the dazzling variety of german—and a few local—accents at a studio 7 play at the vajra hotel

witnessing the regressive progress of rato machendranath started at BS 2061 to-be-continued-&-completed

horrified at the artistic display of garbage around the latest re-designed roundabout of staphit, yonjan & co

wonderstruck at the ascent of mt everest in 8 minutes without crampons, a new record!

envious that unified command personnel's uniforms look better than your clothes from khasa bazaar

disgusted at the 5-party alliance's proposal of all its leaders to be joint prime minister of a coalition government

alarmed you have to pay maoist visa to enter thankot

worried at the shift of pm's office from singha durbar to the banks of bagmati at aryaghat

pleased as punch to be one of the commoners at king gyanendra's reception at gokarna durbar

then put your head down dig yourself in kiss all your lucky stars goodbye drown your sorrows in rakshi and wine till the year after 2009

Kunal Lama, email

Final farewell in a

How did a popular university graduate from Myagdi end up jumping off a bridge in Belgium?



Prem Prasad Subedi (top) during happier times in Belgium, and lying in a mortuary in the town of Gent. Prem Prasad's son, Sagar, at his school in Beni.



LUCIA DE VRIES in BRUSSELS

On a cold December afternoon Prem Prasad Subedi, aged 32, climbed onto the railing of the Muide Bridge in the town of Gent. While cars sped past on the frozen asphalt, he jumped into the dark waters of the harbour below. Someone screamed. A passing boat threw a life buoy, he did not take it.

It took divers from the Gent Fire Brigade two days to retrieve Prem Prasad's body. Police found his landlord's address in his pocket. The Nepali Embassy was informed, and it says the information was passed on to the Home Ministry in Kathmandu. His friends decided to collect money so Prem Prasad could

be cremated back home. Staff at the Gent municipality didn't know there was an effort to get the body to Nepal and Prem Prasad Subedi was buried in Gent, where he had lived for the past six months. None of the family or friends of this desperate Nepali asylum seeker and father of three were present. There was no representative from the Nepali embassy, no priest. The grave will have no headstone, no name, only a number.

How did a university graduate from Myagdi, popular both in his hometown and in the Nepali community in Belgium, end up alone and depressed in a Belgian

town? What was he fleeing: poverty, Maoists or the army? Why was he not granted asylum if his life was at risk?

With about 1,000 refugees, Belgium has the highest number of Nepali asylum seekers. They come to Europe through various routes, overland across eastern Europe or by air, some paying up to Rs 800,000 to middlemen who promise them well-paying jobs. Others know exactly what they are in for. An unknown number of asylum seekers have arrived on costly student visas provided by the former Belgian Consul General in Nepal. Authorities found out about this only last year, after which the consul was dismissed.

Until 2002, asylum seekers received E 590 per month from the Belgian government and were allowed to work. The process of applying for asylum could take anywhere from a few months to five years. These days the procedure is much shorter. An asylum seeker can be deported within a month and applicants must live in a detention centre. The numbers of new arrivals from Nepal is decreasing dramatically, down from 550 in 2001 to 50 in 2003.

After his suicide six months ago, Prem Prasad Subedi's friends gathered in a house in Brussels. A battery-powered lamp threw shadows on crumbling walls decorated with pictures of gracious swans and palm trees next to posters of Karl Marx and Che Guevara. This is the base of the Nepalese People's Progressive Forum (NPPF), which works to 'promote unity and

cooperation among Nepali citizens who are forced to reside in Belgium due to repression and prepare individual files of the members in relation to political activities of and repression against them while in Nepal'.

Forum member Kumar Dahal remembers Subedi as a comrade: "He was a good supporter of the cause, politically well-informed. He left Nepal because the security forces were after him. He applied for asylum in Belgium, and a month ago was told he did not qualify. He committed suicide because he feared being killed by the army upon his return."

Nepali ambassador Shamsher Thapa denies Prem would have been killed. "Governments do not oppress their own people," he says, "I'd say over 95 percent of them are economic migrants." It is the embassy's task to confirm the identity of Nepali asylum seekers, who normally do not carry any identity papers. It's a cumbersome task: if the Home Ministry cannot confirm the identity, there is little Brussels can do. The embassy also provides travel documents to those who willingly return to Nepal, after their case has been rejected. During peace talks last year, a number of people chose this option.

Bijay Lama, a 29-year-old shopkeeper from Palpa, just arrived at the asylum detention centre in Brussels. "A few weeks ago Maoist rebels came to my house and asked for a donation of Rs 500,000," says Bijay, trembling in his thin overcoat in a sparsely heated café. "When I

Democracy now

It is the only system that works

The world news agenda focuses—necessarily—on war and disaster, politics and big business. These are forces that creep into everyday lives and change them irreparably. So it is the job of the reporter to enquire into these matters and lay out what facts can be unearthed.

Lately, a ray of light from South Asia shone into a litany of news that is otherwise dark and foreboding. And this was the general election in India. Now understand

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



that I'm not declaring for

Congress here. I take no sides in Indian politics, save to be against extremists of all sorts and to be in favour of democracy. That is what India showed the world, that is the light that emanated from Kashmir to Kanyakumari recently. Remember Chairman Mao Zedong saying, "the Chinese people have stood up" when he spoke to party cadres in Beijing after his successful revolution? Well to my mind, the Indian people not only stood up, they leapt to their feet, punched their fists into the air and made it very clear that they were mad as



hell and not going to take it anymore. They did what works best in democracy—they punished a government with their votes. Not that Atal Behari Vajpayee's coalition government was particularly bad or inept. It wasn't. Vajpayee himself is a towering figure in Indian public life. Some of his cabinet colleagues were able and well meaning. A few interesting policies were in the works, not least privatising some of India's vast public sector so that money used to run government steel mills could be spent in

villages and farm communities. But the Indian electorate wasn't impressed, and it let that be known in the most convincing way possible.

So now over to Congress and its ragbag of allies across the political spectrum. Except for the communist parties, the new coalition in India isn't that different from the old one. There are regional parties from the south where personalities count more than policy. There are disgruntled independents, those who want to carve new states from old, one-issue parties, regional satraps and political gadflies. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a dignified and honest man, has quite a task holding them all together. At the heart of this democratic turmoil is an organisation that is a political party in name only—the Indian National Congress. Aside from using the word

'secular', it's hard to find a term to sum up Congress from a political point of view. It's more of a political system unto itself, led by a dynasty, its ranks stuffed with opportunists and sincere reformers alike. The Congress is a uniquely south Asian organisation, and its renewal at the polls last month is good news for Indian democracy, even if the leader inherited her job.

The democratic system works best with a vigorous responsible opposition to keep the government in check, along with a lively, committed media. India has both. It was always said of the BJP that were more comfortable opposing than proposing. They proved that maxim wrong in power, but they didn't cover all of the bases necessary for re-election so they paid the ultimate price. For now.

Indian democracy is alive and well. It's a journalists' delight and something the Indian people are rightly proud of. Despite corruption, confusion and cronyism galore, India uses the ballot to change governments—not royal fiat or military coup. Nepal's putative power brokers take note and repeat after me: Democracy Now. It's the only system that works. ●

distant land

Mao in exile

In 1999, Krishna Dhoj Sharma, President of the Nepalese People's Progressive Forum (NPPF) was on his way to Canada. During a stopover in Brussels, his wife became dangerously sick. She was admitted to the hospital, and the Sharmas decided to seek asylum in Belgium. Ever since he attended a Maoist mass rally during which looted land document papers were distributed among the poor, Krishna felt he was no longer safe in Nepal. A member of the United People's Front, he believed in Prachanda's revolution and in restructuring Nepal's "semi-feudal, semi-colonial state". His house was raided by security forces, who believed it was a Maoist hideout. Krishna Dhoj and his wife, Laxmi, are appreciative of the Belgian government for allowing them to stay and be full-time political activists. "If we had stayed in Nepal, we would no longer be alive," says Krishna Dhoj.

Sandhu Magar is also with the NPPF. He used to be a Maoist supporter, but left Nepal in 1999 because he was scared: "I didn't have enough courage to go underground and did not want to surrender to the security forces." His departure was not taken lightly by the party. "I feel guilty for having let down my comrades. I work full-time for the forum just to show that I regret my decision." Sandhu misses his wife, and would do anything to be able to return to Nepal. However, he feels he may be targeted by both the party and the army. "Being tortured is one thing, but I worry that I will be killed without anyone knowing about it," he says. Sandhu doesn't like staying in Brussels, but for the moment he has no choice but stay put and hope for things to change. (LDV)

explained I didn't have that kind of money, they said either me or my brother should enroll in their army." Bijay fled to Delhi, where his cousin paid Rs 600,000 to a middleman to get him a false Indian passport and a ticket to Europe. After a nerve-wracking journey, Bijay found himself in Belgium.

Bijay now stays in a room with six other young men from different parts of the world. He receives three meals a day, plus a weekly allowance of about Rs 340. He takes tranquillisers to calm his nerves and tries not to think of his wife and son. Bijay is unaware of the fact that his case does not look hopeful. He has no documents to prove he is Nepali and that his life was in danger. "All I know is I can't return," Bijay

says.

Most asylum seekers do not return after their case is rejected. They become illegal immigrants, drifting from one odd job to another without state welfare. They are exploited, underpaid and overcharged for basic services. The NPPF says returning to Nepal is not an option. "We face arrest at the airport, and if we're lucky we can bail ourselves out by paying Rs 97,000," says a member. "If we're unlucky, we're tortured or killed in detention."

The Belgian government remains undecided on the issue of Nepali refugees. "We know that the human rights situation in Nepal is getting progressively worse, but we have doubts about claims by

individual refugees. The stories are too similar, and there are too many contradictions to take them seriously. Also, the fact that none of them have identity papers or other documents to make a strong case works against them," says an official. At least for the moment, Nepali asylum seekers will not be deported, but they will not be accepted as legitimate refugees either. With the political climate hardening in Europe, the future of asylum seekers looks anything but rosy.

Prem Biswokarma used to be a close friend of Prem Prasad Subedi. "The last time he came to my house he was joking: 'If I die make sure my body is sent to Nepal'." Biswokarma is not interested in politics, nor in the question of whether his friend was a revolutionary or an economic immigrant. The truth is much more complicated. Prem Prasad had been an active UML supporter and sympathised with the Maoists to a certain degree, but so did his brother-in-law, who was shot dead by Maoists in 2003. "Subedi became depressed after he heard that news. He must have thought: I might be the next in line," speculates Biswokarma.

We may never know what it was that made Prem Prasad jump off the Muide Bridge last December. But his death adds one more name to the long list of Nepalis who are caught between two equally uncaring parties, and for whom words like freedom and dignity have become meaningless. ●

Some names have been changed.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Grand slam

Alan Hinkes aims to be the first Briton to climb all the world's fourteen 8,000m peaks. This spring, he climbed Dhaulagiri and has only one left: Kanchenjunga.

"I am on the final bend of the final lap," says the climber, who started his odyssey in 1987 after climbing Xixapangma, the 8,046m peak which lies just inside Tibet and is visible from Kathmandu Valley. Since then, he has climbed all the 8000m peaks in the Pakistani Karakoram, and all the 8,000-ers in Nepal except Kanchenjunga.

"Kanchenjunga is not easy, it is more difficult than Mt Everest," Hinkes said in Kathmandu this week, after coming down off Dhaulagiri. He expects to make his Kanchenjunga bid next spring. So far, only 12 people have completed the grand slam of climbing all the world's 8,000m peaks, of which eight are located in Nepal.



Surfing in Nepal, not Scotland

A member of the Scottish parliament is furious after he has discovered that five villages in Nepal have faster Internet connections than some of his constituents. Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands, Rob Gibson, said this week that five villages in remote Nepal have a wireless Internet connection and "villagers can surf the net till the yaks come home". OK, so they might have a shortage of phone lines up there, but they have broadband while their apparently more high tech cousins in far flung parts of Scotland have barely a dial-up line to work with.

"If yak farmers in Nepal can be afforded high-speed access to the web why can't someone in Dunbeath?" Gibson seethed. He said if the Scottish executive was so keen on repopulating the highlands, with more than the current population of a few tough Scots, a few cattle and some sheep, then it needed broadband. Apparently cuddles and a few romantic evenings in does not do enough to produce more baby highlanders. Gibson was referring to a BBC Go Digital Program this week about a village in Myagdi where local educationist Mahabir Pun is using wireless Internet to keep in touch with remote villages.

Money for the poor

Nepal's poverty alleviation drive just received an immense boost with the World Bank approving \$40 million in assistance this week. Out of the total, \$25.3 million is earmarked for improving water supply and sanitation. In addition, the credit is expected to support rural communities in forming local water supply and sanitation user groups, which will be involved in planning, implementation and operating their infrastructure. The support is expected to benefit about 80,000 rural Nepalis.

The rest of the \$15 million grant will be used in the Poverty Alleviation Fund, a pilot initiative to create income generation opportunities and facilitate access to basic services and infrastructure to poor rural communities. A World Bank statement acknowledged that the government recognised some NGOs, community based organisations and donors implemented successful programs to reach marginalised groups through community-managed infrastructure.

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The gori details

Nothing like a modelling contest to remind you that beauty is only skin deep

So there I was, working hard on a presentation all through Saturday afternoon, wondering what to do at night to let off some steam. Should I call up friends and go see Mani Ratnam's *Yuva* at Jai Nepal Cinema with dinner at Thamel afterwards? Or chill out with them at an airport *sekuwa ghar* with beer? Or I could make some thick soup and curl up with Ha Jin's *The Bridegroom*. Then again, listening to some humid jazz in one of Kathmandu's

NEPALI PAN
Bhupendra Sharma

smoke-filled bars sounded good too.

Then the phone rang. My buddy SMS was inviting me to the finale of 2004 Saboon Beauty Star Contest. "For free, yaar," SMS went on. "I've got you a pass. There's dinner afterward. Be at the Hyatt at seven. I'll meet you at the lobby. And, uh, wear something nice."

The Hyatt was packed to the rafters with Kathmandu's who's who. Not the literary, poetic types. Nor the rabble-rousing political brigade. There were corporate types with wives in various stages of undress. The multinational crowd was there in force and the media typhoons. Elderly women, sporting salt-and-pepper hair, were resplendent in their saris. The men were all dressed like Wall Street bankers. Everyone seemed to know each other and in the pre-event cocktail chatted with effortless rib-poking banter.

The show begins. Eighteen girls make an appearance, wearing skimpily outrageous costumes that no woman would wear on the streets of Kathmandu. They were scrawny—some looked positively malnourished. "Don't they feed these girls?" I ask SMS. "Only lettuce," he answers.

The ethnography of the contestants is fascinating, and some of the visibly non-bahuni lasses have bahun surnames. What is going on here? "When we bahun sleep around, we contribute to the melting pot of this great nation," whispers SMS. The guy in front gives us a dirty look, we are ruining his concentration.

Looks like the fair ones have an advantage here. And sure enough, the dusky ethnic types don't stand a chance, the winner iss as *gori* as they come. The Kathmandu elite in attendance is composed of old-line aristocrats, largely irrelevant and in need of money, and the yummys (young, upwardly-mobile mummies) who have amassed new money but are in the process of acquiring class so they are taken seriously. And what could be better than for both types to cross-pollinate each other, to see and be seen together at events such as these?

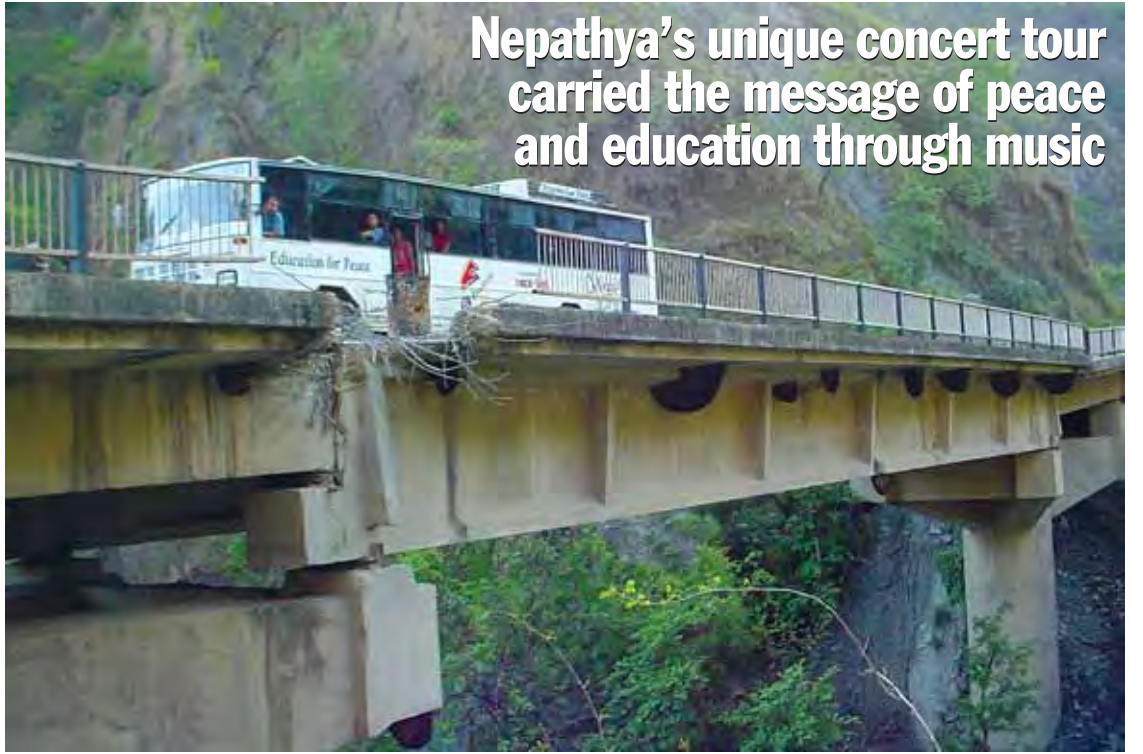
And over in the far corner are the 60-something men, who can't seem to get enough of the 18-year-olds sashaying down the ramp. Next to us is a nattily dressed Alfa Male who displays an enthusiasm for chatting up other people's wives while neglecting his own. The corporate alsowannabes are clicking away with their Olympus digitals just so they can ogle at the pictures with co-workers on Monday morning.

Given the state of the country, I guess it is a form of escapism to spend a Saturday evening watching people watching beautiful young women. And I could still get back to Ha Jin. ●

(Bhupendra Sharma fancies himself as a Boston Brahmin)

"Leave our schools alone"

Nepathya's unique concert tour carried the message of peace and education through music



ALL PICS: ANUP PRAKASH

Halfway through the final concert of the Nepathya Sangeet Yatra at the BICC last Saturday, the audience decided it wasn't going to sit through the performance.

Nearly a thousand people were on their feet to dance, wave, clap and sing along with *Resham*, *Bhedako Oon*, and the band's other hits. When Amrit Gurung lead his band into its rendition of *Rato ra Chandra Surya*, the audience, made up mostly of school and college students, decided to move into the aisles to join at the top of their lungs the song that many regard as Nepal's alternative national anthem.

Nepathya's four-week, 15-concert tour across the length and breadth of Nepal had the theme 'Education for Peace'. And everywhere they performed, it was to jam-packed auditoriums of young Nepalis eager to have fun and contribute to the cause of peace.

"The audience is even more enthusiastic outside Kathmandu. In Chitwan, they brought flags and waved candles in the audience. In Pokhara, the audience knew every song by heart and sang so loud I had a hard time keeping in tune," a visibly exhausted Amrit Gurung told us. In Damak, the temperature inside the hall rose to nearly 40 degrees and the exhausted band had to shorten the performance because there was serious danger of dehydration.

The Kathmandu concert began with a brief video of the concert tour with shots of the band's bus negotiating destroyed bridges and the charred hulks of buses burnt by the Maoists. In the background was the band's haunting peace ballad, *Rangeen Chara*. There were very few dry eyes in the audience.

Between songs, Amrit Gurung made an impassioned plea to the warring sides to leave the schools alone. "I call on everyone to keep politics and weapons out of schools. This is where we nurture our nation's future, schools belong to children," Gurung would say, only to be drowned out by sustained cheers of approval.

Money raised from ticket sales

From top down: Nepathya's 'Education for Peace' tour bus passes a bombed out bridge on the Prithvi Highway, flag waving fans in Chitwan, and the final concert at the BICC last Saturday



was donated to schools in the cities where performances took place. Proceeds from the Kathmandu concerts went to Madan Memorial School and Bijay Smarak. Uniformed children from both schools were at the BICC on Friday and Saturday, and were the most enthusiastic fans, often spilling out into the aisles to dance.

This is Nepathya's second concert for peace in the past two years. This year, it braved five days of Nepal bandas and eight days of blockades in various districts, but the tour did not stop. The only concert that had to be cancelled was in Nepalganj

because of a banda called by the Maoists.

"In most places, the audience was seeing an international class concert for the first time, with fabulous sound, special effects, and a background live video of the audience to make them more interactive, and they loved it," recalls Arpan Sharma event nepa-laya, the management group that organised the shows.

In most cities, local FM stations broadcast the entire concert live, so the audience was much larger than the fans who thronged to see Nepathya perform. ●



19 daughters, still hoping for a son

A lot more needs to be done to bring Nepal's fertility rate down

Forty-eight-year-old Subhadra Dangi has given birth to 19 daughters since her marriage about 32 years ago. She is pregnant again, and is hoping it will finally be a son. Two of Subhadra's daughters died very young, and seven of the remaining 17 are married. Last year, Subhadra gave birth to twins: both daughters.

"It was god's wish that all 19 were daughters, I have to accept that till I get a son," she says. Subhadra's husband, Sher Bahadur, is delighted that his wife is pregnant again. "We hope it will be a son, because we need him to look after us in our old age," he says.

A local astrologer told Gita Pakharin that her 12th child would be a son, but like all her previous offsprings it was a daughter. Two of Gita's daughters died, three are married. "How unfortunate we are," says the 56-year-old Gita. "It seems we are just not fated to have a son."

Family planning programs have made no inroads in these backwaters of Nepal's eastern Panchthar district. Bachu Kumari Kadayal, a 61-year-old woman from Ranitar VDC, chased away health workers advocating family planning from her village. Bachu Kumari is no ordinary woman, she has given birth to an astounding 30 children, an accomplishment that has given her stature and respect in the district. Bachu Kumari had two miscarriages and five of her children died.

"We thought that the rest of the children might also die and continued producing children as per god's wish," Bachu Kumari told us. "We were not rich, but we managed to raise our children." After her last child was born 12 years ago, Bachu Kumari has been busy raising her brood. Still carrying loads and working in the fields, her health seems none the worse for it.

"I delivered so many children without anybody's help, I don't see why people need doctors," she says.

Elsewhere in Nepal, it is the lack of



TOM AND LOUISA SHIELDS

health care that contributes to the country's high maternal and infant mortality rates. Sabitri Regmi of Kerabari in Gorkha district gave birth to 10 daughters and four sons. No one ever told her about family planning. Five of her daughters and two sons died young.

But where there is awareness about family planning, Nepal's paternalistic society does not permit women to have a say in reproductive matters. Gita Devi Bartaula in Sindhuli knew about contraception, but was compelled to give birth to 26 children. "My husband could not go against his father and he did not use any means of family planning," Gita Devi says.

Gita was married to Bharat Raj in 1948

and gave birth continuously about once every two years until 1992. Fifteen of her 26 children died young.

It is a tradition among some communities in Nepal for couples to remarry sitting on the roof of their house if they have 20 children. In Basewar of Sindhuli district, Rikman Nepali's wife is pregnant with their 20th child and they are preparing for a remarriage ceremony. "We are looking forward to it," says Rikman, speaking on behalf of his wife whose health has deteriorated.

The couple now have grandchildren, but the burden of raising so many children has meant that the family is not well off. Rikman can't even grow enough food to

feed his family for a month, and now regrets not taking his fellow villager's advice to go to the district hospital for family planning.

Radio Nepal has been exhorting families that "two children are god's blessing" for decades. It doesn't seem to have made an impression on Sarkini Kunwar of Kamala Khoch, also in Sindhuli. She has given birth to 17 children, and has no regrets. "It is difficult to raise them, but once they grow up and start earning, they take care of the family." Even if she had known about family planning during her teenage years, it is unlikely Sarkini and her husband would have adopted it. ●

(Krishna Adhikari/Sancharika Samuha)

LUX

Brings out the star in you



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Crying over spilt milk

Unable to sell their produce due to frequent bandas, farmers are pouring milk into rivers and dumping vegetables on the highways



Padam Chapagain of Rupendehi pours out milk he couldn't sell because of the bandas and (right) four tons of vegetables were dumped on the Mahendra Highway in Chitwan by farmers protesting bandas.



poured into the rivers.

Padam Chapagain lives in Shankarnagar in Rupendehi. In the last week of bandas, he poured more than 1,000 litres of milk into a nearby stream. Padam is on the verge of tears. His family can't watch this daily tragedy and go inside the house.

Rukmant Pandey, chairman of the Rupendehi Dairy Farmers Cooperative in Manigram, says 5,000 of its members produce 80,000 litres of milk a day. They consume 10,000 litres and the rest is usually sold in the market. "The milk just piles up during bandas, we can't sell it, we can't take it to market, and in the hot season it spoils easily, we can't do anything else with it," he says.

Since the products are perishable and there are limited storage and chilling facilities, frequent bandas and blockades have devastated farmers. There are no facilities to turn the milk into ghuu or yoghurt, so if it can't be taken to market, there is a milk glut. Milk that used to sell for Rs 15 per litre doesn't even go for Rs 9 anymore.

Last week, Chitwan farmers dumped 100,000 litres of milk into drains and rivers. Some farmers found an ingenious way to recycle milk and pumped it into their biogas plants, effectively turning lactose into methane. "It's better to pour it inside the digester than to dump it into the river, at least some of it will become gas that I can use," says Pandey, who pours 25 litres of milk into his biogas plant every day that there is a banda.

In Rupendehi, dairy farmers who took bank loans to buy jersey cows for Rs 25,000 each tried to sell them for Rs 10,000, but there were few takers. Five thousand dairies in Rupendehi alone are on the verge of closing down. Farmers can't afford to feed their cows as it costs Rs 150 per cow per day. Many are letting them out, and there are now hundreds of abandoned cows grazing along the Mahendra Highway. This is creating problems for the Butwal Municipality and the District Traffic Police, which is simply taking the cows across the border and leaving them in India. Like their cows, bankrupt farmers themselves are migrating to India to

find work.

Farmers in Dhading, Kabhre, Makwanpur, Chitwan, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Gorkha, Lalitpur, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Rupendehi and Nawalparasi invested decades of hard work and all their savings to supply the Valley market with produce. Everyday, they exported Rs 10 million worth of vegetables and Rs 3.3 million worth of milk to the capital. Much of this used to come from India up until a decade ago.

Out of the 2,000 poultry farms in Chitwan three months ago, only half are still in business. The current spate of bandas and transportation strikes is sure to send the rest into bankruptcy. Indra Bahadur Bohara used to have 4,000 chickens in his farm, today he has none. It cost money to feed the birds for which there was no market. "I am ruined," he says, "I am going to sell my property, pay off my loan and think about what I will do next."

It costs Chitwan farmers up to Rs 5 per kg to grow the cauliflowers that they are being forced to sell for Rs 1 per kg. They fed the vegetables to their livestock, but there were still

mountains of vegetables left. They dumped four tons of it on the East West Highway in protest, blocking 300 metres of the road with vegetables. Elderly farmers by the roadside wept openly when they saw the waste.

Krishna Sapkota has a vegetable farm in Chainpur in eastern Chitwan. He couldn't afford to hire porters to take his produce to market during a banda, so he and a hundred other farmers just let the vegetables rot in the fields and ploughed them over.

Farmers across Nepal are now drowning in their own sweat. They took the risk of investing in agriculture and made this country self-sufficient in poultry, eggs, vegetables and fruits. They turned Nepal into a milk surplus country, reduced the dependence on vegetables imported from India. They are being punished by the political forces who can't agree on sharing power in Kathmandu and the Maoist rebels who would rather destroy livelihoods than build on past successes. ●

(With reporting by Janak Aryal in Chitwan and Mukeh Pokhrel in Bhairawa)

HASTA GURUNG

In the past nine months, vehicles have been off Nepal's highways for one full month. National bandas, regional blockades and district bandas have affected more than 7.5 million farmers in central Nepal, destroying livelihoods and endangering Nepal's hard-earned self-sufficiency in the poultry and dairy industries.

Investments worth more than Rs 7 billion by small-and medium-scale farmers across the region are seriously threatened. In the past fortnight, Rs 250 million worth of vegetables was left to rot, Rs 60 million worth of milk was

Development deadlock

In past month, Maoist warnings have forced many aid agencies to pull out

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The Maoist insistence that aid agencies stop working with the local government and sign agreements with them instead has forced some to suspend basic health and education programs in rural areas.

Last month, the Dutch aid agency, SNV, Britain's DfID, and Germany's GTZ suspended their programs in Karnali Zone and Kailali district. More than 55,000 people are directly affected.

Now, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) is considering terminating work in areas where rebels are insisting that the agency formally recognise the Maoist local administration. SDC works in 54 of Nepal's 75 districts with basic health, forestry and education and many of its projects

are regarded as models for cost-effectiveness, sustainability and local participation.

"Wherever we go in these places, someone shows up and asks us to recognise their administration," says Joerg Frieden, SDC's Kathmandu-based director who has just returned from a fieldtrip himself. "How can we have double standards by recognising both the government and the rebel administration?" This is exactly the same question other donors are asking.

This is the first time local Maoist cadre demanded that aid agencies work through them. Earlier, it used to be threats against Nepali staff and extortion. On 10 May, a consortium of donors including SNV, GTZ and DfID put out a statement through the media saying that their projects in Nepalganj and Dhangadi had been threatened, their offices bombed and staff intimidated. They said they were closing activities in Karnali's Mugu, Humla,

Jumla and Dolpa districts where they had supported the Rural Community Infrastructure program. GTZ and DfID also suspended their support for the Freed Kamaiya Food Security program.

The situation has worsened in the past month, according to one European aid worker. Now it is not just the NGOs who are being threatened—even the representatives of the donor agencies are under increasing pressure.

Asked if they are not playing into the Maoist's hands by stopping their activities, another donor official in Kathmandu admitted it would be Nepalis most in need who were going to suffer, but staff security could not be jeopardised. "Also, recognition of the local Maoist government is just not acceptable until the rebels give up violence," said the official.

The Maoists, for their part, are hoping that by forcing out what little development is still going on in the rural areas, they will further discredit the government that is already non-existent in large parts of the country. But it is clear that the biggest losers will, as always, be Nepal's increasingly desperate villagers. ●

BIZ NEWS

Go north

Now that Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has launched its pilgrimage package south of the border, it is looking north. In association with Air China and five authorised tour operators, NTB is organising a tourism roadshow from Chengdu to Beijing, 8-15 June. During the sales mission, prominent Chinese media and tour operators will be provided updated information on Nepal.

High five

Laxmi Bank opened its fifth full-fledged branch in Pokhara on 30 May offering services like Internet banking, ATMs and debit cards, loans, business and trade finance, fund transfers and remittances from abroad. Special schemes for Gurkha servicemen have been introduced. Local businesses will also benefit from cheap, real time transfer of funds between branches.



Celebrating Nepal

The third Nepal Himalayan Festival, organised by the Nepali Association in the UK and hosted by Manchester City Council at the town hall, will feature talks, food, arts and artefacts. The festival has attracted an impressive line-up of civic and celebrity support, including entertainer and hill-walking enthusiast Mike Harding. The event will be inaugurated by the Nepali ambassador to the UK and features a lecture on mountaineering by Doug Scott, the first Briton to reach the summit of Everest.

Up, up and away

Qatar Airways announced a 47 percent increase in passenger revenue during the 2003/2004 financial year, buoyed by a 35 percent increase in the number of passengers the five-star airline served in the last year. The airline carried more than 3.3 million passengers, up from 2.6 million passengers the year before. Qatar exceeded all commercial expectations during the last financial year, recording a 47 percent increase in passenger revenue and a whopping 73 percent increase in cargo revenue.

NEW PRODUCTS

SMOOTH OPERATOR: SABMiller has a reputation, a very good one, with beer drinkers around the world. Royal Challenge Beer, the premium lager of choice for its extra smooth taste in the international market, was recently launched in the kingdom in association with Sungold Brewery.



DRIVING FORCE: Perodua's Kelissa is a compact, stylish 1,000cc car that comfortably seats a family of five. This car is being aimed to fit the niche between the small car and entry level sedans available in the Nepali market. The Kelissa is the second model of the Malaysian-made car being imported to the kingdom by Nemlink International Traders.

(RE)NEW COLOURS: Indian cosmetics giant Godrej's Renew Hair Care Cream dyes were launched in four colours, with a guarantee that the all-natural ingredients mean your new hair dye costs only Rs 105.



The Nepathya model



Taking the message to the people

ANUP PRAKASH

In the 29 days, that Nepathya traveled across Nepal for its peace music concert tour this month, there were times when their bus was the only vehicle on the road. Undeterred by bandas,

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

the band decided their commitment to the people was a priority. So, by the simple act of driving to their concerts, they made a political statement—one that spoke up for music, education and peace. At every concert, lead vocalist Amrit Gurung called for schools to be kept violence-free.

While Kathmandu may be blasé about music concerts, the rest of Nepal is hungry for quality entertainment (see p6). The huge crowds that turned up at the 14 Nepathya gigs proved the demand exists and people are willing to pay. The Beed happened to

witness the long queues that snaked outside the Damak venue hours before the concert was scheduled. Later, the audio-visual presentations and the technical excellence of the event amazed those who were lucky enough to get tickets. An ecstatic fan said afterwards he rarely got the opportunity to witness events of that calibre.

Kiran Krishna Shrestha of event nepa-laya, the event management company that handled the 'Education for Peace' tour, showed courage in his willingness to take risks. His logic was simple: the marketing and publicity rupee fetches more outside Kathmandu. Other businesses too would do well to remember that 80 percent of Nepalis live beyond Thankot. Shrestha won by securing future markets outside the Valley although he gambled with bandas.

The use of celebrities as brand and goodwill ambassadors is a well-established practice around the world. It is heartening to see Nepathya beginning this trend in Nepal. With peace and education suffering, our youth need credible role models more than ever. The socio-economic fabric also demands stars who can afford to spend time and make an effort in addressing larger social issues. We will see the Nepathya model replicated in other businesses. Event nepa-laya has raised the bar for future players, and others will have to think twice before compromising on quality.

It is important that while businesses may boom, the impact of the message is not diluted. The next step, how the concert sound bite is converted into concrete action, will require a separate model. The Beed will gladly give it a name when someone comes up with it. ●

It is a sad commentary on how low our tourism trade has sunk that there was such exaggerated euphoria when a private Indian airline began daily flights from Delhi to Kathmandu this month.

When we have to thank foreign airlines for taking the initiative to rescue our own tourism industry, then things must be much worse than we imagined. The foreign airlines are not starting flights to Nepal for any altruistic reasons. They are flocking to Kathmandu and increasing frequency because there is a market here and they are filling the vacuum left by our own national airline. What is surprising is that this market is growing despite the political instability and the insurgency.

But putting all our eggs in the foreign airline basket is not going to be a longterm strategy to save our tourism industry. The only way is to strengthen the national airline, make it independent. The jubilation seen at Kathmandu airport on the arrival of the first Jet Airways flight on 12 May should have been reserved for the arrival of new equipment or service of our own national carrier. Then we would have real reason to celebrate.

But the present state of our national airline only reflects the state of the country. The airline is plagued by the same symptoms as the nation: indecision, lack of unity, dependency and malgovernance. How long can Nepal go on like this? How long can Royal Nepal Airlines keep flying like this? Are we so mentally crippled that we can't come up with a rescue plan and implement it? Do we have to wait till the political forces get our house in order to improve

Too much drag

It is not too late to rescue Royal Nepal Airlines and turn it into the reliable and profitable carrier it once was

VIJAY LAMA



the airline?

Our government and tourism specialists would rather give foreign airlines concessions, rights and facilities than lift Royal Nepal Airlines out of its quagmire. Every day we see outsiders minting money on rights to lucrative international routes that should have been shared with us. There is no point blaming foreign airlines for grabbing what was effectively handed to them on a platter by our officials and their local partners.

The political interference and refusal by

successive governments to guarantee the purchase or lease of new aircraft for Royal Nepal Airlines is the single biggest act of official negligence that has contributed to the flag carrier's present paralysis. We are not only short-sighted but also have short memories of the long decades that Royal Nepal Airlines served the country flawlessly, flying to remote area destinations and providing international connections.

Nepalis may have a low opinion of their own airline, but many are patriotic and would still

rather fly their own flag than someone else's as long as the service is reliable. And there is no reason it can't be if we are allowed to hold our heads high, regain our confidence and stop being cynical about our abilities.

The blame for the present state of affairs must be shared by past governments, political parties who treated the airline like an employment agency, the travel trade mafia that bled it dry and a few employees of the airline. Today, when the airline is floundering, none of these people who profited at the airline's expense are willing to help bring it back to the path of recovery and success. In fact, they would rather see Royal Nepal Airlines run to the ground so they can profit some more from its privatisation.

The short-term problem is the lack of aircraft for both international and domestic operations. This has made the airline unable to provide services even on its truncated network, leading to a huge loss of revenue. The travel trade is happy enough to rely on foreign carriers because the business sustains them, but a word of caution here: reliance on outsiders will only make our aviation industry weaker. We have to recognise our airline's potential and make full use of it.

It is still possible to have a professional, well-equipped national flag carrier that we Nepalis are proud to call our own. And it is not too late for Royal Nepal Airlines to bounce back and regain some of its past reputation of a professional and reliable regional airline. ●

Capt Vijay Lama is head of domestic operations of Royal Nepal Airlines



KUNDA DIXIT

DOGMANDU

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Dogs are best friends with benefits. They work with us, keep us company, give us unwavering loyalty, protect and cheer us up and never ask for more than a little love and respect in return. Little wonder then, that from cave dwellers right up to fashionistas with designer poodles, our furry friends are our most trusted allies. In fact, in Nepal dogs are even gods certain days in the year. Here are some tips about dog care.

BASICS

The first and most important considerations before you decide on getting a dog is whether you are willing to make a longterm commitment. Dogs are 'till death do us part'. Sharad Singh Yadav of Nepal Veterinary Clinic and Research Centre in Baneswor has a checklist:

- Do you have enough space for the breed of your choice?
- Do you have good bedding that's warm in winter and out of the direct sun in summer?
- Are you prepared to spend time with your puppy that needs constant care?

If the answers to all the above is 'yes', then congratulations, you're ready to get yourself a dog. There is a good reason they call infatuations puppy love—at that age, all dogs are irresistible. Make sure your pick is at least 45 days old and weaned from the mother. Choose the liveliest, most happy one. Look for clear bright eyes, a shiny coat and a moist nose. Observe them at feeding time: the one with a big appetite will usually be assertive and energetic too. Boy or girl? Yadav usually favours females, "It is standard

to want a male but I find females are very loyal and are not as aggressive."

HEALTH

Timely deworming and vaccinations are crucial. Suderson Prasad Gautam and Narayan Prasad Ghimire run Kathmandu Veterinary Clinic, one of the oldest vet practices in Nepal. They say worms must be treated before any vaccine is administered. Deworming should start as early as four weeks and continue approximately every month for half a year. After that, biannually is good enough. Between six to eight weeks, pups are ready for DHPPiL to protect them from canine distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, parainfluenza and leptospirosis. It requires a booster shot after 28 days. The importance of the rabies vaccine can't be overstressed.

Always make sure a licensed vet administers the vaccine. Be wary of door-to-door services. Make sure a fresh disposable syringe is used. Keep the used vial so there's no chance of misuse.

RABIES

There are an estimated 200 cases of human rabies infection reported each year in Nepal. According to Durga Datt Joshi, chairman at the Nepal Vet Council, many go unreported because once hydrophobia sets in, death is inevitable.

The simplest and most effective way to deal with a dog bite is to immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for 15 minutes. Then seek medical attention. This procedure reduces the risk of rabies by up to 50 percent.

NUTRITION

Like us, dogs also benefit from a varied diet. "Keep meat to a minimum," advises Yadav, who also doubles as the vet at Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Nepal (SPCAN). "They need a lot of protein which they can get from eggs, milk and lentils. Include fibre through vegetables like carrots and beans. Give them a multi-grain mix, seasonal fruits are very good for dogs, especially bananas for the digestive system." Vegetarian diets that exclude fat, oil, spice and sweeteners suit the dogs at SPCAN, he says, and they are living longer, healthier lives.

GROOMING

Dogs, unlike humans, don't need frequent baths, says Swoyam Prakash Shrestha of Pet Clinicare 'n' Vet Consultancy. It's a common mistake people make. Twice a month is more than enough so their protective oily coating doesn't dry out. "Never use human soaps or shampoos. The pH of their skin is alkaline and ours is acidic," he cautions. Regular brushing is good for your dog's circulation.

TRAINING

Big or naturally exuberant breeds need discipline since they could unintentionally hurt children or adults. Ram Babu Pokhrel at Mount Everest Kennel Club relies on techniques of positive reinforcement to train dogs. Punishment, he found, doesn't work quite as well. He teaches clear hand and voice commands, which the owner must also learn. Both you and your dog need to learn together.

LOVE

Taking all your dog's needs into consideration is useless if you can't actually devote time to doing it yourself. It's not good enough to have others put in the work if all you'll do is occasionally pat the dog. The most necessary factor in your canine relationship is love, because to your dog, you are the centre of the universe. "Love your dog equally from puppy to adulthood," advises Shrestha. "Otherwise you could end up with an insecure animal with psychological problems."

Adopt a dog



MERA THOMPSON

The many stray dogs on the streets of Kathmandu hunger for a little love. And given half a chance, they make the perfect companions, as Mera Thompson, manager at Arya Tara School for nuns, knows. She took in Sangye through SPCAN's adoption program and considers it one of the best decisions she's ever made. Although she grew up with a pedigree dog, Mera says she wouldn't get one again. Sangye is missing a leg and part of her tail (left). She'd been hit by a car and spent two years in neglect. Now Sangye uses a wheelchair to get around and the two have worked out a very happy schedule. "It's a huge responsibility and requires true compassion. But if you have the extra resources and are willing to dedicate yourself, I strongly recommend adopting a dog."

Dogs are brought to the SPCAN shelter. Once they are strong, Sharad Singh Yadav and his team castrate or spay the animal, vaccinate it and put it up for adoption. Last year, they had 32 adoptions.

Adoption days are on the last Sunday of each month.

Contact: 4467953

Contacts

Name of clinic	Address	Telephone	Vets available
Vet Clinic	Krishna Galli, Pulchok	5524236	Mukti Narayan Shrestha
Kathmandu Veterinary Clinic	Maharajganj	4720266	Suderson Prasad Gautam
Veterinary Service	Chabahil	4492365	Baikuntha Parajuli
Patan Vet Clinic	Jhamsikhel	5542733	Jagan Nath Rai
Pet Clinicare	Ekantakuna	5545366	Swoyam Prakash Shrestha
National Vet Polyclinic	Maharajganj	4372290	Karna Bahadur Bohara
Oxford Veterinary Concern	Baluwatar	4412236	Banshi Sharma
Shrestha Vet Clinic	Chapaligaun	4370108	Rebati Man Shrestha
Veterinary Clinic	Balaju	4357660	Dev Raj Adhikari
Mobile Vet Clinic	Jawalakhel	5526937	Balram Thapa
Nepal Vet Clinic	Kalimati	4278844	Anjir Man Singh Dangol
Divine Veterinary Clinic	Gaushala	4495282	Shree Ram Adhikari
Koteswor Vet Clinic	Koteswor	5527156	Shree Basta Man Malla
Vet Diagnostic	Mahalaxmichok	5540400	Vinaya Kumar Karna
Nepal Veterinary Clinic	New Baneswor	9851043662	Sharad Yadav
Bal Chandra Jha	Mobile practice	4489683	Bal Chandra
Love Pet Clinic	Naxal	4359385	Suman Khadka
Gaurishankar Vet	Sanothimi	6632367	Bhim Nath Chaulagai
Pushpanjali Vet Clinic	Bhaisepati	5541265	Dipesh Chhetri
Om Vet Clinic	Khumaltar	5541227	Ram Pukar Thakur



KAT person

What is Charlotte Uhlenbroek (*pic, below*), the British wildlife commentator who some speculate replaced David Attenborough, doing setting up a dog shelter in Kathmandu named KAT?

Charlotte was born in London, grew up in the jungles of east Africa, studied chimpanzees in west Africa for her doctorate, spent time in the Amazon and has travelled the globe filming the natural world for the BBC. But wait, that still doesn't answer our question.

This animal lover, it turns out, has a soft spot for city mutts. When she was living in Nepal between the ages of five and 14, she had four dogs plus rabbits, guinea pigs, parrots and cats. She constantly brought home more animals.

Charlotte came on a visit to Nepal last year. "The essence of Nepal was the same," she recalls. But she found a lot of things had changed. She was appalled by the condition of the street dogs. Poisoning by the municipality has never been a humane or effective way to deal with them. The dogs continue to breed. Plus it's not safe for people and other animals. She also wanted to tackle the problem of rabid dogs on the streets. Charlotte decided to start up a project with Jan Salter, a long-time Kathmandu resident, artist and dog do-gooder in her own right.

The Kathmandu Animal Treatment (KAT) Centre, where Charlotte is patron, offers a very pragmatic solution to the street dog problem: sterilisation or birth control to reduce the population and rabies vaccinations. The team at KAT, which includes manager Khageshwar Sharma, will work systematically area by area while also collecting data on canine population dynamics to monitor the impact of their efforts.

Already 44 dogs have passed through their kennels located on route to Budhanilkantha, most of them females that were spayed and the rest were males. All dogs received treatment for any diseases and also got vaccinated. KAT's target is 60 dogs a month for this year but hopes to work up to 200 a month by next year.

The next phase involves public education. KAT doesn't expect attitudes to change overnight, but it wants people to take responsibility for community dogs by vaccinating them and spaying females. The local municipalities, the World Health Organisation and the Humane Society International are all pledging support. Charlotte shot a short film that she will use for fundraising efforts in England. "There is a lot of work to be done," she says. "But we are very optimistic that we can get the job done." ● (SB)

Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre: www.katcentre.org.np



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Editorials on Deuba

Think ahead

Samacharpatra, 3 June

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Twenty months after the king dismissed Sher Bahadur Deuba and his government, he has been reappointed prime minister. This startling decision is a paradox: on the one hand, the king appears to be rectifying 'regression' by restoring the same prime minister he sacked for incompetence. On the other, it looks like a continuation of the Surya Bahadur Thapa government because Deuba was appointed in the same non-democratic basis as his predecessor. No matter what the political parties say, public opinion favours the king's action, given that the major leaders were unable to come up with any of their candidates for the post. There may be politicians who bear personal grudges against Deuba, a few who are too proud to accept him as prime minister but it is time to set aside differences and work with the government to ensure a strong parliament for the sake of the nation and people. This is a chance to end the animosity between the king and parties. In a way, the pre-October Fourth situation has been restored with the return of Deuba's government. Now the question is should we support him and think ahead for 2004 or protest and push ourselves back to pre-1990?



KIRAN PANDAY

Tough challenge

Spacetime, 3 June

स्पेसटाइम टाइम्स

The king directed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to work with the major political parties to form a ministerial cabinet and hold general elections for the House of Representatives by year end. It is a tough challenge for Deuba, whose cabinet was dismissed earlier for being unable to fulfil his pledge to hold elections because of the Maoist insurgency in 2002. The situation hasn't changed. As a matter of fact, things are worse today and unless the government brings peace and provides more security to the people, elections will be impossible. At present there is no government presence in most of villages. Its reach goes no further than the capital and other urban centres. The new ministerial cabinet could face the same fate as the last one, which was unable to solve the nation's mounting problems.

A ploy

Janadharana, 3 June

जनाधारणा

The people's predictions came true: they suspected that the street agitation led by the five parties was just a ploy to have a hand in a new government. They didn't trust the parties who said they were fighting for the people's sovereignty. Disunity fractured the fragile co-operation among the major anti-'regression' parties, although for a time, the people also saw Girija Prasad Koirala getting along with his rival Madhab Kumar Nepal. It was quite surprising because Koirala is not a very amiable leader—we haven't forgotten his disrespect towards the late Ganesh Man Singh. He also undermined the status of KP Bhattarai and failed to maintain good relations with Sher Bahadur Deuba, who regarded Koirala as his mentor. As for Madhab Nepal, most of his cadre did not trust Koirala's professed friendship with the communist leader. Nepal has shifted loyalties now from Koirala to Deuba, having decided that the UML has little to gain from the Congress at this juncture.

Famine's door

Rajdhani, 28 May

राजधानी

ROLPA – For the past five months, the Maoists have blockaded Libang. Villagers cannot get in or out of the district headquarters. Warning banners scare off travellers and traders. The district is on the verge of starvation and neither the state nor the Maoists are concerned.

"There is no business here at all, but what is worse is that the villagers can't get food," says local shopkeeper Krishna Lal Shrestha. As no vehicles are let through to Libang, the only source of food is the state food depot, which is also running out. The depot has announced tenders for food supply thrice but suppliers haven't shown any interest—no one wants to take the risk.

While the villagers are facing starvation, Tsering, the Maoist chief of the district says the blockade is designed to starve the security forces and food can still be transported for the general public. But low-level cadre are preventing that from happening.

Locals are not allowed to sell their produce at Libang because the Maoists suspect that the food will eventually reach the security forces. The rebels, on the other hand, blame the state for first using food as a weapon. "This is just to counter that move against us," says Agni, a Maoist activist. He says the state should first lift the food embargo on the districts before they open the roads into Libang.

Over 18 VDCs cannot sell or buy food. Famine is imminent. Although the main targets were the security forces, they are largely unaffected. The lives of thousands of children and adults are at risk. The Maoists, meanwhile, are making a tidy packet by releasing seized buses and trucks after the owners pay a sum of money.

Press ambush

Editorial in Kantipur, 28 May

कान्तिपुर

Cowards fear the press. The Maoists showed their true colours by attacking a press van, killing the innocent driver and severely injuring a passenger. The attack on a vehicle belonging to *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* in Tanahu last Thursday clearly marks the Maoists' agenda.



Instead of offering constructive solutions to the ongoing crisis, the rebels trouble the people with blockades and bandas. They attacked the van because it flouted a strike declared in Gandaki. They knew fully well that only ambulances and press vehicles would be on the roads. Not even the security forces dared to go out.

The Maoists revealed their true face by scaling up violence at a time when all the political parties are working together. Obsessed with extreme leftist ideals, in just nine years the Maoist organisation successfully controls a large part of the country with their armed revolution. It is difficult to predict how much the Maoists will impact Nepal's politics once they lay down their arms. Their political ideals will be acceptable if they are democratic and respect the rights of the people. By attacking the press, we trust the Maoists' democratic credentials even less.

Powerful women

Hisila Yami in Kantipur, 30 May

कान्तिपुर

In a semi-feudal country like Nepal, the question of women's emancipation must focus on the struggle against the monarchy that aims at keeping both men and women in the shackles of slavery. It should not be limited only to gender. In this context, what women must understand is the role of private property in the

development of human society. Women became the first slaves. That means the liberty of women is possible only after the freedom of all other communities and classes. The first step is an unconditional right to parental property and equal participation in state power. Women have already shown great courage in the urban street protests and in the rural battles with the royal army. Now patriotic and democratic women must join hands with men and stand up against the fascist regime.

Terror tactics

Editorial in Kantipur, 31 May

कान्तिपुर

The outrage of blowing up a Baglung-bound Sajha bus in the Valley, killing one person and injuring nearly two-dozen passengers shows that the Maoists deliberately wanted to make an example of a cooperative that dared to ply during bandas. Along with the trolley bus, Sajha restarted its service at the request of



Left : Hail Republic
Right : Hail Republic

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 May - 14 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"The appointment of a new prime minister will not solve the present political crisis, it will only intensify the bloodshed."

Maoist supremo Prachanda in *Annapurna Post*, 2 June

the public even though a past government closed them down. Sunday's attack wasn't the first of its kind: a little girl died in a similar ambush of a public bus in Chitwan. In Mainapokhari at Dolakha, the rebels attacked another bus and tried to foist the blame on security forces.

Only the previous week, the National Human Rights Commission asked the rebels to respect international humanitarian law that ensures the people's right to travel, reminding them that the Geneva Convention prohibits attacks on civilians. The rebels were quick enough to express their commitment to these guidelines but their deeds don't match their words. The rebel attacks on public transportation are neither justified nor helpful in pressurising the government towards negotiations. These deeds just turn them into terrorists.

Teacher killed

Annapurna Post, 2 June

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

NARAYANGHAT – Top Bahadur Khadka devoted all his life to spreading education so his students got the opportunity to do well in life. He was friendly, generous and a doting father of three young daughters and a son. On Saturday night at nine, while the family was watching television at home, eight men with pistols and khukuris burst



into the house. They asked Top Bahadur for Rs 50,000. When he said he didn't have that kind of money, they threatened to take away his 18-year-old daughter Dipti. "Then daddy said let me find the money, give me some time," recalls a tearful Dipti, "but they shot him and he fell to the floor." Dipti's younger sisters Pravinta, Pragya and 10-year-old little brother, Abinash, can't stop crying. Their mother, Ganga, is still in shock. The assailants claimed they were Maoists, but Top Bahadur's neighbours can't understand why such a good and innocent man was killed. The police are investigating the matter but say the Maoists are probably responsible. The rebels haven't claimed responsibility.

Red journos

Baburam Bhattarai in *Bimarsa*, 28 May-3 June

राजमार्ग (दुर्गम)

Without the active support of revolutionary journalists, any social revolution is doomed to failure. Most of the world's greatest revolutionaries sought the support for their ideals through journalism: Karl Marx started his career as the

chief editor of *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne and later worked as a correspondent for *New York Tribune*. Lenin was the editor of the communist newspaper *Iskra*. Mao was constantly involved in editing publications run by his party and wrote columns, opinion pieces and editorials during and after the Cultural Revolution.

The progress in our defence and offensive strategies has already made a huge impact at national and international levels. This is why the time has come for revolutionary journalists to be more committed in their responsibilities towards society and the nation. They need to be more objective and disseminate real facts and provide constructive analyses. They should also be adept at undermining the imperialistic propaganda spread by a capitalist global media that is penetrating Nepal. The only way to diminish the threat is by joining patriotic and nationalistic elements. As the revolution becomes more urban-centric, revolutionary journalists play a key role in clearing prejudices, exposing the crimes of reactionaries and boosting the morale of the 'people's army' and party members. The ideological struggle has been consistent throughout our movement. At present, the duty of revolutionary journalists is to play their part in taking the revolution to its logical conclusion.

Indian benefits

Annapurna Post, 2 June

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

There are expectations that the upcoming two-day visit of Indian Foreign Minister K Natwar Singh will promote Nepali interests. Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Pradeep Giri dubbed the new Indian government as "comparatively progressive" and said the visit so soon after the appointment of the Deuba government could prove crucial. In his view, the former BJP government was by nature profit-seeking and would haggle over minor trade deals. The Congress government will be better for bolstering bilateral ties, Giri added.

According to Sachhit Shumsher Rana, former army chief and the incumbent member of Raj Parishad Standing Committee, Natwar Singh's visit will help Nepal in its effort in resolve the Maoist problem. Former speaker Daman Nath Dhungana thinks the promptness on the part of our southern neighbour to help us was commendable. Saying that the Indian foreign minister's visit would not make any major difference in the existing relationship between the two countries, former Nepali ambassador to India, Lok Raj Baral maintained that the priority the new Indian government seems to have given to Nepal is praiseworthy.

(Nepalnews.com Translation Service)

Pen to rest



MIN BAJRACHARYA

UML leader Pradeep Nepal in *Rajdhani*, 30 May

राजधानी

Recently, I was accused of stirring trouble for the UML through my articles. The issues that I chose, which raised hackles, are absolutely legitimate. However, having heard the reservations of my party leaders, I must stop

writing if my work caused problems.

No country in the world grants total freedom to creative writers. Paul Robinson was imprisoned after he sang a socialist song, musician Bob Dylan was slandered because he opposed the Vietnam War: the state will not honour those who challenge its power. This could be why freedom-seekers don't fit into politics. I am not talking about my conscience here—perhaps state power is for those unable to commit to their convictions. Leaders don't have the luxury of disagreeing with the party line. A leader can't expect concessions just because he is a writer. Everyone must abide by the rules. If it stirs up trouble, they must stop writing. That is their duty.

I cannot leave the party at the moment, hence I have to give up writing. The present complexities mean enemies could use my comments as a weapon. People have insulted my literary work, some tried to assassinate my character by misinterpreting my comments, yet the party leadership never censored my content. Those who wish to see the end of the communist party demanded the party take action against me but the UML itself did not accuse me of writing against its policies.

Party leaders questioned me: "Have you written anything about the Congress, anything on a republic or about the king? We don't want to debate your freedom as a writer, but couldn't you stop writing for a while, taking the present political situation into consideration?"

This has forced me to rethink my role as a writer. I thank the party for allowing me to write for so long. But now, I rest my pen.

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MESS-OPOTAMIA

A neo-con collapse in Washington and Baghdad

JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

Fourteen months after reaching the zenith of their influence on US foreign policy with the invasion of Iraq, neo-conservatives appear to have fallen entirely out of favour, both within the administration of President George W Bush and in Baghdad itself. The signs of their defeat at the hands of both reality and the so-called "realists", who are headed within the administration by Secretary of State Colin Powell, are virtually everywhere but were probably best marked by the cover of *Newsweek* last week, which depicted the framed photograph of the neo-cons' favourite Iraqi, Ahmad Chalabi, which had been shattered during a joint police-US military raid on his headquarters in Baghdad (see pic, right). 'Bush's Mr Wrong' was the title of the feature article.

The victory of the realists, who also include the uniformed military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), appeared complete last Monday with the unveiling of the interim Iraqi government to which an as-yet undefined sovereignty is to be transferred from the US-led occupation authorities on 30 June. Not only was Chalabi's arch-rival-in-exile, Iyad Allawi, approved by the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) as prime minister, but neither Chalabi nor any of his closest IGC associates, especially Finance Minister Kamel al-Gailani, made it into the final line-up.

The neo-conservatives, a key part of the coalition of hawks that dominated Bush's post-9/11 foreign policy, were the first to publicly call for Saddam Hussein's ouster. Since the latter part of the 1990s, when they led the charge



in Congress for the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act (ILA), Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress (INC) was their chosen instrument to achieve that transformation.

Neo-cons, more than any other group, pushed hardest for war in Iraq after 9/11 and predicted, backed up by Chalabi's assurances, that the conflict would be, among other things, a "cakewalk" and that US troops would be greeted with "flowers and sweets". Within the administration, the neo-cons, again relying heavily on Chalabi's INC, developed their own intelligence analyses to bolster the notion of a link between former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda terrorist group, and exaggerated

Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to provide a more credible pretext for war.

While analysts and regional experts at the CIA and the State Department, which had dropped Chalabi as a fraud and a con-man in the mid-1990s, tried to resist the juggernaut, they were consistently outflanked by the neo-cons, whose influence and ability to circumvent the professionals was greatly enhanced by their access to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, who served as their champions in the White House and with Bush personally.

Their influence reached its peak in early April when Chalabi and

700 of his paid INC troops were airlifted by the Pentagon to the southern city of Nasariyeh on Cheney's authority against Bush's stated policy that Washington would not favour one Iraqi faction over another. The neo-cons' star began to wane last August when it became clear that their and Chalabi's predictions about a grateful Iraqi populace were about as well-founded as their certainties about Hussein's ties to al-Qaeda and his WMD stockpiles.

Sensing trouble ahead, Condoleezza Rice asked Robert Blackwill to return to the White House, where he had been her boss during the presidency of George HW Bush, the current leader's

father. By October, they formed an inter-agency Iraq Stabilisation Group (ISG) that gradually wrested control of Iraq policy from the Pentagon.

It was a process in which Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) chief Paul Bremer, who had come to detest Chalabi and his neo-con backers in Baghdad and Washington, was an enthusiastic participant and which was effectively completed with the announcement late last month that the State Department was taking over the \$14 billion in reconstruction money for Iraq that the Pentagon has not yet spent.

In the last month, the neo-con retreat has turned into a rout, particularly as reports of Chalabi's cosiness with Iran gained currency and, just as important, senior military officers indicated that a military victory over the Iraqi insurgency was not possible. The public attention given to a blistering attack on the neo-cons by the former chief of the US Central Command, Gen Anthony Zinni, on the popular television program *60 Minutes* also demonstrated that the media, ever cautious about taking on powerful figures, now saw them as fair game. When Perle, Woolsey and several other neo-cons visited Rice at the White House on 1 May to protest the shoddy treatment Chalabi was receiving at the hands of the CIA, Bremer and the State Department, participants said she thanked them for their views and offered nothing more. Neither Rumsfeld nor Cheney nor any of their neo-con aides attended. ● (IPS)

Given to rule

Two-year-old Aiko could end the world's oldest unbroken hereditary monarchy

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI in TOKYO

Media reports suggesting that Japan's Crown Princess Masako is suffering from severe depression—linked to heavy pressure to produce a son—has revived a debate over the idea of allowing an empress to reign over the 2,000-year-old Chrysanthemum Throne. Masako and her husband, Crown Prince Naruhito, have a two-year-old daughter, Aiko.

Japan's Constitution permits only sons to inherit the throne in the world's oldest unbroken hereditary monarchy. The emperor is considered a symbol of Japanese culture and a Shinto deity, a religion that has no female priests. But public sentiment appears to be shifting away from tradition. Surveys indicate that more than 70 percent of the public say they would be happy if Masako's daughter takes over the monarchy as she is the first and, currently, the only child of the crown prince.

While historical documents show that empresses did rule several centuries ago, Japan's Meiji Constitution speaks of the country being ruled by a line of emperors "unbroken for ages eternal". Article Three of the current constitution, which replaced the Meiji charter, states that only males can take over the Chrysanthemum Throne. Emperor Hirohito

ruled Japan before and during World War II as a living god, commanding a fiercely loyal military and public till Japan's defeat in 1945.

Against this backdrop, changing this law to allow an empress to reign—and given the alteration of notions of gender equality this would bring—is deeply disturbing for Japan's influential rightists. The conservative *Shukan Bunshun*, a leading weekly news magazine, quoted imperial household watchers as saying a law to usher in female accession to the throne would be too complicated and pose a risk to the continuation of the monarchy.

But this contrasts with support for an empress in Japan's increasingly Westernised society, one where more women are now delaying marriage and choosing to not have children. Aiko was born to Masako Owada, a former career diplomat, after more than eight years of married life and some infertility treatment. Pressure to produce a son intensified this past year as Princess Masako approached her 40th birthday, leading to her breakdown, according to news reports. She is now reported to be "resting", according to the Imperial Agency.

The media have published photos of a



Crown Princess Masako with Aiko.

villa in Karuizawa, a mountain resort, where she is living in seclusion with her mother and daughter. The problem surfaced earlier in May, when her husband crossed the lines of traditional restraint in Japan to make the shocking revelation during a press conference that his wife is "exhausted by trying to adapt to life in the imperial family since their marriage". Crown Prince Naruhito spoke on the eve of his departure, alone, to Europe where he attended the wedding of the crown princes of Denmark and Spain. He also accused the Imperial Agency of "denying Masako's career and her character".

The remarks causing a stir in Japan,

forcing the stubborn and powerful Imperial Agency to quickly announce it would "take more care to do its best for the Princess". But on Friday the agency announced, in yet another sign of its powerful control over the imperial family, that it has not scheduled a press conference for the prince, who returned from Europe on 25 May. Still, Prince Naruhito's rare expression of displeasure has touched off a storm of new media reports that has continued for weeks. News magazines have been portraying the lives of the Japanese Imperial Family as being extremely lonely and having very little social interaction with friends. ● (IPS)

Making growth green

Our world is not only unbalanced, but endangered

When the world's leaders met at the Millennium Summit four years ago, they agreed on a set of goals aimed at cutting global poverty in half by 2015. They also set targets for the environment, because they understood its centrality to longterm economic growth, human development and the stability of the planet. Ten years shy of when the 2015

COMMENT
James D Wolfensohn



goals are to be met, progress

on the environment is alarmingly slow. So much more is possible.

The phase-out of ozone depleting substances through the Montreal Protocol, for instance, shows what can be done when the international community works together. Thanks to the protocol, it is estimated that up to 20 million cases of skin cancer and 130 million eye cataracts will be avoided. This kind of success should encourage us. But now we need to match our action with the scale of the challenge.

Our world is not only unbalanced, but endangered. Deforestation is increasing and carbon dioxide emissions are rising. Twelve percent of birds, 24 percent of mammals and 30 percent of fish are either vulnerable or in immediate danger of extinction. The environmental challenge is even more stark in developing countries. More than a billion people lack access to clean water. More than two billion have no access to basic sanitation. Five to six million people, mostly children, die every year due to waterborne diseases and air pollution.

We must recognise the fundamental imbalance in the global environmental equation. Richer countries do much of the environmental damage. Accounting for only 15 percent of the world's population, they cause 50 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions but poorer countries pay much of the "costs"—losing up to 8 percent of their GDP per year due to environmental degradation as well as suffering devastating effects on health and human welfare.

Rich countries' must shoulder greater responsibility for fixing the problem. That means changing the way they produce and consume energy and providing more resources to developing countries for environmental conservation. Between 1990 and 2000, financing for environmental concerns followed roughly the same path as overall development assistance flows: it stagnated. Aid for the environment averaged about \$2 billion per year. In terms of global



priorities, this figure compares with the \$900 billion that the world currently commits to military expenditures each year.

If the war on environmental degradation is to be won, we need a major turnaround. Three areas can help speed progress:

- Developed countries must set the example by moving toward environmentally friendly production and consumption patterns, including more control of greenhouse gas emissions and use of innovative mechanisms such as Carbon Funds to buy offsets (reductions in greenhouse gases) from developing countries. Richer countries must also increase bilateral and multilateral aid commitments.
- Developing countries must improve their policies governing the critical sectors of water, energy, transport and trade, including pricing policies. This would help reduce consumption of scarce natural resources. Beyond this, environmental concerns must be integrated more fully into development policymaking.

- The international community must make a much more serious commitment to renewable energy, efficiency and other environmentally friendly energy sources. We need the kind of common effort launched a generation ago in agriculture that led to the Green Revolution.

It will be too late 25 years from now to make the right choices. For the sake of our children and our children's children, we must act now. ●

(© Project Syndicate)

James D Wolfensohn is president of the World Bank.

'Sustainable consumption'

Consumerism a global phenomenon. There are as many consumers in China as in the US, as many in India as there are Japanese. The per capita consumption in these countries is lower, but is quickly catching up. "Consumption has been going up and there is no point at which it becomes satiated," says Chris Flavin, director of the Worldwatch Institute. The consumer society now numbers about 1.7 billion people, "and of these just under half live in developing countries," Flavin adds.

'Sustainable consumption' is now another buzzword. It was much debated at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The world has not begun to consume less since then. Much of the governmental world has interpreted sustainable consumption as meaning cleaner and greener consumption—not less consumption.

That will not be enough for society, says the New Economics Foundation (NEF), a London-based NGO. The idea of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to "dominate national policy and fascinate the media," the NEF says in a report. Instead it advocates a Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP) that bears a close resemblance to life-satisfaction data.

In the end, there is no getting away from the simple idea of simply consuming less—easier said than done. "The consumption mentality is deeply imprinted in the human psyche and in the commercial psyche," Flavin said. The system of taxation and subsidies also needs to be reviewed, he said. And the industry itself will have to take greater responsibility for what they are doing. That still begs the question, but how?

"The pendulum is going to swing back in a dramatically different direction in the US," he said. Behind the change is a faith that people are beginning to look at the right information and as they look at the right information, they will choose to do the right thing. And beyond that is the question of the larger faith. ● (IPS)



A bahun Gurkha



Jivanath Bhattarai lied about his age and caste to get into the British army and spent a decade fighting in Burma. He talks about the rush of battle, the hardships of war

and the terrible casualties on both sides. This is the last in the testimonies of Gurkha soldiers translated from *Lahurey ka Katha* by Dev Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*.

BIGBEN



Chitwan: The jungle walk

Official rules prevented bahuns from joining the army, so in 1935, at the age of 13, I lied about my caste and was enlisted in Gorakhpur as Tek Bahadur Chhetri. Luckily, I was tall enough to pass as an 18-year-old. After six months of training, we reached Burma in 1936, after travelling by ship for seven days and nights. We fought in Tajoji, Maymyo and Chhankhol and finally arrived at Pemuna.

Our team of 17 was lead by Jamadar Krishna Bahadur Khadka of Baglung, but he hid and evaded his duty. I was a sergeant at the time. We patrolled at night in complete silence, each holding on to the gun of the soldier in front. We encountered a Japanese patrol once. The commander hid but fought and captured an HM gun, three rifles one sten gun and five grenades. Later, in our report, we said two companies went in and defeated the Japanese troops although only 15 of us were there.

A bomb dropped from a plane fell nearby, shrapnel hit me on the chest and blackened my flesh. Another time, a bullet took a chunk of flesh out of my chin, leaving a permanent scar. Surprisingly, during action in Pemuna I didn't even realise when a bullet hit my leg. One of my companions told me I was hit, and only then did I realise that my leg was bleeding badly. I suppose this was because during battle you are

very excited and there is a lot of confusion.

The Japanese forces had outnumbered us and were driving us back. They entered Manipur through Kaleya River, and were aiming for Dimapur. However, in Kohima they were in trouble as the British forces started arriving both by ship and via the Tidim road, squeezing them from both sides and eventually defeating them. At least 150,000 soldiers perished at Kohima alone. Even though they were defeated, the Japanese are a daring people. We could not match them. Once, they dug a tunnel, came up behind us and attacked before we even realised what was happening.

There were piles of dead men, sometimes up to 10,000 lying together. They looked like dead fish. No one can say exactly how many died, and even then it was often unclear if the fallen was one of us or a Japanese. Sometimes we saved ourselves by lying under layers of corpses. Even in minor encounters at least 200 people lost their lives. In Burma alone, we lost about 50,000 men, compared to the 60,000 casualties the Japanese suffered. I myself killed between 20-30 Japanese. The khukuri was useless, there was never time to take it out. Even if we drew it, only one or two adversaries could be taken at a time. Bullets and bayonets were better. When the enemy gets

close you can strike him down and spear him with the bayonet. I killed about 10 men like this, but in battle, it is hard to say.

You are scared only until the fighting begins. After that, as the bullets start flying around, fear vanishes. The only thing you can think about is killing or being killed. I forgot about everything besides staying alive. At times like that, I was so focused that I never thought about home or my family.

Water was scarce, and no one was allowed to take water from the supplies without the commander's permission, even if we were dying of thirst. In Pemuna we went without food for 11-12 days. When we found some bananas, I almost choked and died in my haste to eat them. A while later, we came upon a cucumber and gourd plantation where an old woman was cooking rice. All of us rushed to her and I didn't get even a mouthful. Sometimes our rations were dropped by plane, but often it fell into enemy territory and we starved. We got lucky with a consignment of meat in Tao. We ate so much that we got severe diarrhoea and nearly died.

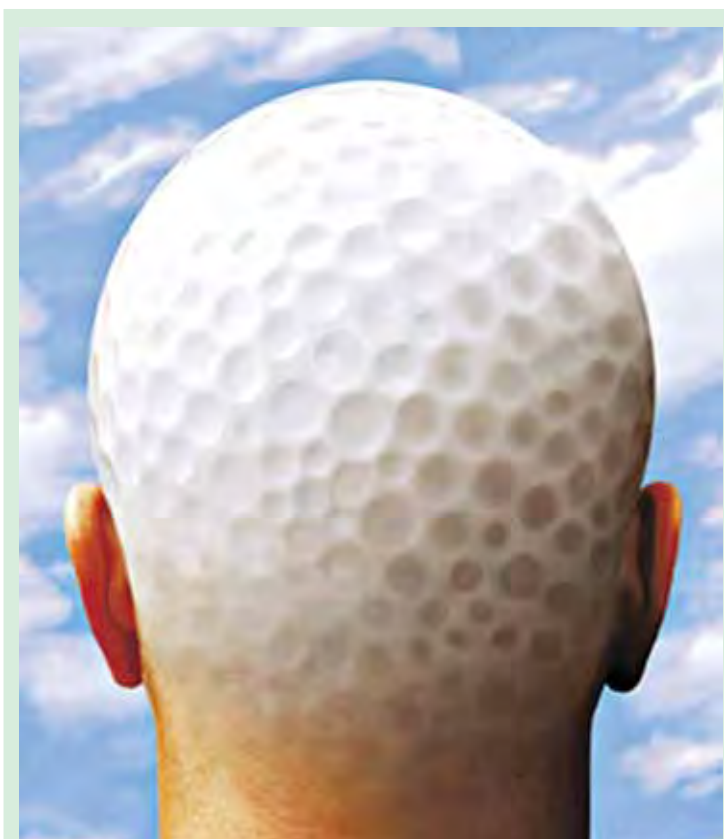
We were still fighting in Burma when, at the end of 1945, there was a radio announcement that the war had ended. I returned to our headquarters on 26 October 1946. Then, 12 years after my enlistment, I went home. No one recognised me: my mother had to ask my sister-in-law if I was her older or younger son. My wife, who was still a child when we married, didn't know who I was. When I paid my respects to my father, tears rolled down his face and fell on my bowed neck.

Army service is not what it is made out to be. You can send a letter home saying you are well, and the next instant a bullet can kill you. This, and the treatment we got from the Indian government later led me to dissuade my son from joining the army.

After the war, the troops were distributed between Britain and India. Following my allotment to India, I took part in quelling the uprisings in Kohima and Manipur and fought in India-Pakistan border skirmishes and in Tripura. After that, I was assigned as a trainer to the Assam Rifles and held that position till my retirement.

We offered our lives for India, yet India has not done us justice. They derided and ridiculed us.

The Nepali government never did much about the promises the British made to us. Now, even though our pensions are inadequate, it is all we have to sustain us and prove that we didn't fight for nothing.



Head start

How your head should move during your swing

"I can't turn my shoulders."

"I have no proper weight shift."

During my coaching career, many have come to me with such problems. Strangely, I discovered that an oft-repeated piece of advice—"Keep your head down"—was to blame! You may well ask how this can be. Here is what can go wrong by blindly following this advice.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



While keeping your head down and as still as possible throughout most of the golf swing, you end up using smaller muscles like the arms

to swing back and through, which causes a lot of stress on other parts of your body. You may risk straining your neck muscles, creating unnecessary tension in your neck, back and arms. You also restrict upper body rotation in the whole swing.

Preventing your head from swiveling has the effect of limiting your upper body rotation, both on the back and down swing. When this happens, the natural centrifugal force created in the swing weakens and prevents your arms from extending to their widest position, making it more likely for you to top the ball.

By trying to keep your head down and completely still, you end up very rigid, impeding the correct transfer of weight. Proper weight transfer and a correctly executed turn is the source of power in the golf swing.

How to do it right

For a successful backswing, it is likely that your head will swivel slightly to the right, depending on the flexibility of your neck muscles. By doing this, your swing arc becomes wider, making it easier for proper shoulder and hip rotation.

Having hit the ball and between half and three quarters of the way into the follow-through, your head will naturally turn left and your eyes will catch sight of the ball on its way to the target. This motion encourages you to extend your arms right from the time of impact. (Don't forget, your hip and upper body needs to keep rotating at this position as well).

In any kind of ball sport, it is the eyes and not the head that coordinates the body's movement. What is vital to understand is that while there is some slight head movement in the backswing and the downswing, the eyes remain focused on the ball until impact.

Try this, feel more flexible and enjoy hitting the ball better every time you swing your club.

Deepak Acharya is a Golf Instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com



Scintillating seven

These are the players to watch during EURO 2004



Francesco Totti (ITALY)

A maker as well as a scorer of goals, not least from free-kicks, Francesco Totti can operate from a variety of attacking positions but it is in the free role behind the strikers that his magnificent skill and technique are best showcased.

Knee and thigh injuries meant that he missed the first three qualifiers for EURO 2004, but Totti started both Finland games, scoring in the 2-0 away success. Italy's Player of the Year in 2000, he helped AS Roma secure their first league title since 1983, scoring 13 Serie A goals.

Anderson Luís de Souza-Deco (PORTUGAL)

When you are described as a 'near deity' and nicknamed SuperDeco, you must be doing something right. That is the status Brazilian-born playmaker Anderson Luís de Souza-Deco enjoys at FC Porto. After being granted Portuguese citizenship in March 2003, Deco crowned a spectacular debut for the EURO 2004 hosts Portugal with the winning goal in a 2-1 victory over his native Brazil, their first over the South Americans since the FIFA World Cup of 1966.



Jérôme Rothen (FRANCE)

A small, speedy left-winger, Jérôme Rothen has started to fulfil his immense promise. His direct running and accurate crossing is one of AS Monaco FC's most potent attacking threats. He made his debut for France in March 2003, coming on as a substitute in the 6-0 qualifying victory against Malta and was part of the France squad that lifted the 2003 FIFA Confederations Cup. The Paris-born player was whisked off to first division side ES Troyes Aube Champagne in the summer of 2000 where he was a resounding success. He was lured to Monaco in a Euro 4.5m move in January 2002.

Fernando Torres (SPAIN)

A technically-gifted attacking player with a dazzling turn of pace, Fernando Torres possesses self-confidence and ability in equal abundance. Torres enjoyed a magnificent career with Spain's representative sides, earning a place in the youth football pantheon by scoring the only goal of the 2001 UEFA European Under-16 Championship final against France and repeating the feat against Germany at Under-19 level the following summer. Torres has been a key component in Club Atlético de Madrid's attack since scoring on his debut against Albacete Balompié in June 2001 aged 17.



Tomáš Rosick (CZECH REPUBLIC)

A playmaker combining speed, creativity and technical ability, Tomáš Rosick has shown remarkable maturity and composure since bursting on to the European scene.

Having starred for the Czech Republic's youth teams, Rosick made his international debut against the Republic of Ireland in February 2000. He registered in the opening 2-0 victory against Moldova at the EURO 2004 qualifier, surprisingly his only goal. After just 14 appearances with AC Sparta Praha, Rosick elected to join BV Borussia Dortmund for Euro 13.3m in January 2001.

Rafael van der Vaart (NETHERLANDS)

AFC Ajax supporters caught their first glimpse of a superstar-in-the-making when the left-sided footballer Rafael van der Vaart took his first-team bow in the 1-1 draw at FC Den Bosch in April 2000. And nothing has happened since to persuade them otherwise.

Having appeared for the Netherlands at the FIFA World Youth Cup in Argentina in the summer of 2000, he stepped up a level to make his full international debut against Andorra in October 2001 and is now a regular in the national set-up. As for comparisons with legendary Johan Cruyff, he dismisses them: "It's nice but Cruyff was really fantastic and I am still young."



Steven Gerrard (ENGLAND)

A powerhouse of a midfielder player with remarkable mental strength and confidence for one so young, Steven Gerrard can play in a variety of positions but is at his devastating best in the centre of the park. It was hugely disappointing for both Gerrard and England that injury ruled him out of the 2002 FIFA World Cup finals, especially as he scored one of England's goals in the famous 5-1 defeat of Germany in a Munich qualifying game.

One of four England players to feature in seven qualifiers for EURO 2004, Gerrard scored in the home draw against FYR Macedonia but missed the corresponding fixture, a victory in Skopje.

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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a goatee can be a hero.)

On May 19th, nine brave men and women of the Himalayan Enfielders Club (Lazimpat) left for Mt. Everest base camp via motorbike.

As of printing, only eight have returned.

9 8 Stay Tuned

KE GARNE? WHATEVER. Be a Herojig: Don't Climb - or Ride - Alone.

"There is precious little in civilization to appeal to a Yeti" -- Sir Edmund Hillary

Next Change: Herojig O.D.'s on Diamox, but survives!

HeroJig's Adventures with Tiffen can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ Infinity's Journey till 15 June at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ Paintings by Krishna Manandhar till 15 June at Buddha Gallery, Thamel. 9AM-8PM
- ❖ A Simple Office Environmental arts and design exhibition, 5 June at Eldot, Jhamsikhel. 5531954
- ❖ Faces and Aspects of Boudha Photos by Mani Lama, 3 June onwards at The Saturday Café, Boudha. 2073157

EVENTS

- ❖ Monsoon wine festival at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440
- ❖ Reiki for Beginners 5-6 June, 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM. 5249270
- ❖ Campion Fete 2004 5 June at Campion College, Lagankhel
- ❖ 4th Bagmati River Festival 5 June - 21 August
- ❖ Ganesh's Trunk Pre-monsoon Bazar 11AM - 5:30 PM, 6 June at Babar Mahal Revisited.



MUSIC

- ❖ Ani Choying's Concert 6PM on 5 June at Bluestar Hotel, Tripureswor.
- ❖ The Beatles Revisited at Dechenling Beer Garden, Thamel. 7PM onwards on 12 June. 4412158
- ❖ Full Circle 7PM Fridays at Bakery Café, Jawalakhel. 4434554
- ❖ JCS Trio at Fusion every Friday, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488

FOOD

- ❖ Dosa Festival till 5 June at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ Summit's Barbecue Dinner with vegetarian specials. Summit Hotel.
- ❖ Vegetarian Creations at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ Executive Lunch at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu.

GETAWAYS

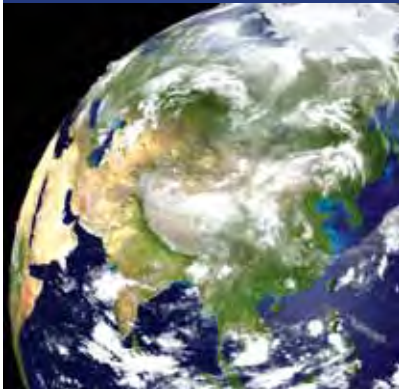
- ❖ Bird watching escape at the Shivapuri retreat. 4253352
- ❖ Wet & Wild Summer Splash every weekend at the Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The pre-monsoon this year exceeded the monthly May mean by almost 60 percent. After this wet and early pre-monsoon, it looks like June will be just as wet. This satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows the Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon massing up in southern India and the Bay of Bengal branch swirling into eastern India. This cloud mass is now going to play a tug-o'-war with the lingering westerlies. And the outcome of that contest will determine whether the real monsoon will start next week or not. Our bet is that it will. Either way, Kathmandu can look forward to overcast, humid days relieved somewhat by night and evening rain.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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BOOKWORM

Globalization and Development Studies: Challenges for the 21st century
Frans J Schuurman (ed)
Vistaar Publications, 2003
Rs 440

This text provides a comprehensive introduction to the concept of globalisation and its challenge to the contemporary study of development. A key underlying theme is whether a seeming transition from development studies to global studies offers anything new and fruitful. This is essential reading for all students and academics of development, politics, international relations, geography and socialisation.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@csl.com.np



Hum Tum is old wine in a new bottle. The up-to-the-minute attitude has a very traditional Bollywood heart. The packaging may be contemporary, but the content is pure, unadulterated Indian emotions. Kunal Kohli's movie is a romantic comedy starring Saif Ali Khan (Karan Kapoor) and Rani Mukerji (Rhea). Essentially, girl meets boy, girl hates boy, girl meets boy again, they fall in love. Hum Tum is fun in a 'men are from Mars and women are from Venus' kind of way. Luckily opposites attract and despite the foibles, we get a happy ending.

JAI NEPAL CINEMA



Hum Tum

From 22 May.
Bookings open 21 May.

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www.jainepal.com

Dig into dosas

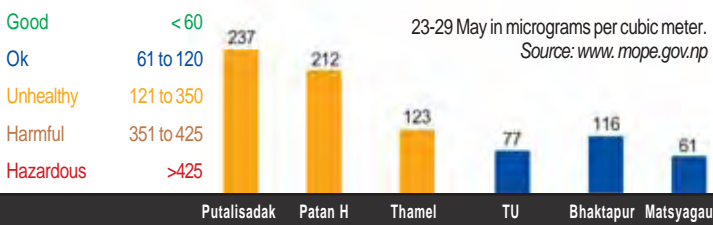
The old saw of variety being the spice of life lends itself extraordinarily well to the dosa. Even here in the Himalaya we are familiar with the standard plain and masala versions of south India's strongest culinary import. Now sample dosas beyond the standard-issue, newspaper like roll-up with Master Chef V Karupswamy from Tamil Nadu at Hotel Yak & Yeti. Fillings range from classic spiced potatoes to pepper lamb for the carnivores.



Dosa Festival with Master Chef V Karupswamy till 5 June at the Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Unlimited dosas for Rs 500 plus tax.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Closing down completely seems to be the only way to keep pollution down in the Valley, as the abnormally fresh air we had during the banda days in mid-May was replaced last week by usual PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) concentrations, with pollution in Putali Sadak increasing by 44 percent. The only relatively good day last week was Wednesday (26 May), when pollution levels dropped by 32 percent. However, with meteorologists predicting an early monsoon and the first two weeks of June peppered with bandas, we can expect clean air in the days ahead.



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HAPPENINGS



KIRAN PANDAY

HEMCOMING: Newly appointed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba enters his home in Budhanilkantha with his wife Arzu on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

TRIUMPHANT EXIT, GATE WEST: Sher Bahadur Deuba leaves the royal palace after his audience with the king where he was declared prime minister on Wednesday morning.



KIRAN PANDAY

HEAVY TRAFFIC: A billboard travels along part of the Democracy Wall at Ratna Park during a lull in protests on Tuesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

CRYING CAUSE: Thursday's rally-drama, organised by Friendship Forum Nepal and titled "Children's tears for peace", reaches Bhadrakali.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PHOTO OP: Polish Cultural group Cepelia Poznan pose with armed police under the overhead pass at Jamal on Tuesday.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Shining Sangina

As a child, Sangina Vaidya spent hours watching Bruce Lee movies. Like most Nepali children at that time, she was impressed by his kung-fu skills and wanted to follow in his footsteps. Unlike them, she was made of sterner stuff.

Sangina started with Wu-Su in her teens but a month into her training and after a few demonstration games, she turned to taekwondo. For the next 12 years she dedicated herself to the discipline and now it is paying off for the 29-year-old.

Sangina won gold medals for Nepal in the last two South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. Now she is getting ready for the ultimate challenge of her career as the first Nepali to formally qualify for this year's Olympics in Athens. Yes, we've competed before, but only in events such as swimming, shooting and athletics that allow 'wildcard' participants. Sangina is the only taekwondo participant from South Asia. Other Asians participating are from China and Malaysia.

Sangina gives her family full credit. "They were very supportive from the beginning and let me go when and wherever I needed," she says. Sangina wonders if

restrictions put on young Nepali women by their families and society isn't partly why more girls don't compete.

Recently, six top Nepali business houses—Vaidya's Organisation of Industries and Trading House (VOITH), ICTC, Nepal Lever, Jyoti Group, Nabil Bank and Dabar Nepal decided to pitch in with financial aid for Sangina. This will help the Sports Council with expenses like visa fees, airfares, medical treatments, sports gear and a daily allowance. The corporate sponsorship will cover 85 percent of Sangina's costs, including an endowment fund and promotional expenses. "Sangina is our

representative and we want her to feel Nepal is doing something for her. Maybe she'll bring home the gold," says Sabina Shakya of VOITH.

This week, Sangina is off to Korea to train in the lead up to the Olympics. The pressure is immense and every moment she can get away, Sangina is on her Yamaha heading for the hills to unwind. "My dream is to win a medal for Nepal," she says. "For me the future only stretches as far as the Olympics."

Sangina, and her country, certainly deserve a gold. ●

(Sradha Basnyat)



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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Couch potato



A long, long time ago, when the world was still young, our forefathers had just shed their tails and learnt to walk erect when they discovered that one needn't actually get up and physically transport oneself to the television set in order to change channels. One could do it from the comfort of one's prehistoric sofa while balancing a large helping of Doritos on one's belly. What exact sequence of events led to the invention of the remote control we will never know for sure,

but it probably had something to do with necessity being the mother of invention. This dramatic discovery of the wireless wand was to have a profound impact on

UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



human beings and determine their current shape and size.

The possession of a remote control was a symbol of where executive authority actually resided among our cave-dwelling forebears. Whoever controlled the remote control was in control. And, usually, it would be the patriarch. It was unthinkable for him to pause on one channel for more than a split second, so he would surf ad infinitum and the entire clan was forced to watch what he watched. They got a tour de horizon of the programs on offer, but he never stayed on MTV long enough. His grandchildren had been taught to respect elders so they tolerated this for a while, but they soon realised that the only way to change such a hereditary feudal system was to rise up and physically wrest the remote control away from grandad's hands. Which is what they did.

Thanks to parliamentary democracy and advances in modern science, it is hard for us to imagine that in those primitive times a remote only controlled the television set. Today, there are remotes for the DVD, cable decoder, airconditioner, radio, laundry machine, garage door, dishwasher, vacuum cleaner and even the remote controlled toilet seat so that one needn't physically be present in the bathroom while attending to calls of nature anymore. Come to think of it, there was really no need for Homo erectus to learn to walk upright at all, we can regress to all fours and grow back our tails.

I don't know about you, but the real challenge these days is to manage all the remotes around the house. There are so many of them that finding the right one for the right gadget itself eats up a large chunk of time. Some ideas:

Master Remote: This is essential piece of household equipment allows you to locate lost remotes using an in-built GPS and also be programmed to simultaneously control your remote toothbrush while having a remote shave.

Husband Remote: Modern housewives can use this like a cattle prod to zap their husbands with laser beams in their vitals when they fail to get up in the morning or vegetate for a whole month in front of the telly watching Euro 2004.

Super Remote: Can be incorporated into your mobile turning your cell phone into an omnibus remote that can do everything from changing channels at home while you are at work, thawing the lasagna in the microwave from five km away and adjusting the volume control on your live-in mother-in-law.

Royal Remote: This is the remote that controls all other remotes remotely.



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