

No child's play

Forty-one percent of Nepalis are under 16. That's a lot of people with no political voice.

I was bad enough that the substance of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's address to the United Nations General Assembly special session on children got caught in the crossfire of commentaries on his Oval Office consultations. What is distressing is the lingering quibbling over whether the prime minister should have left the nation when the state was bracing for some of its fiercest battles with the Maoists.

Could it be the minister for women, children and social affairs has provided an equally forceful reaffirmation of Nepal's commitment to the welfare of its young people? Or is the minister of government or a member of the United Nations members bothered to attend? In deference to our emergency-driven cash crunch, couldn't our permanent representative to the world body have been asked to steer the Nepali delegation?

As a former schoolboy who took long to figure out why Nepal Children's Organisation was the only class body left out of the pre-adult-franchise Rastriya Panchayat, I believe today's young should have a more mature perspective of national affairs. Isn't there more than a trace of hypocrisy here when some of the same people who get so easily worked up about child labour turned out to be the fiercest



critics of Deuba's excursion?

Did the prime minister really have to cross the seven seas to tell the world that Nepal could no longer digest the raw deal their children were getting? Of course, he did. He represents a country where 41 percent of the population is under the age of 16. That's a large cluster of people without a political voice. To get a better idea of the stakes involved, start pondering how many of them are

likely to lay their hands on guns before their voter ID if things remain the same. The use of child soldiers is far more than a humanitarian concern; its impact lasts far beyond the time of actual fighting and the scope of the problem vastly exceeds the number of children directly involved. The most of this practice reflect several tragic developments—from the brutal targeting of civilians in armed conflict to

the breakdown of the family unit, often the strongest pillar of many of the societies affected. The recruitment of wave after wave of untrained child soldiers allows the parties to keep conflicts going almost indefinitely—often escalating them until they become regional or international problems and threaten the peace in whole regions. These three sentences from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's speech to a session on

the sidelines of the main conference could easily have fit into Deuba's text.

At a time when Nepalis are waging significant troubles with the emerging new issues on poverty and terrorism, the prime minister was correct in underscoring the severe strains our resource base is facing. But there was more to Deuba's participation than the number of minors in the Maoist infantry. For one thing, we have a heightened regional responsibility. When the UN Children's Fund regional office for South Asia decided to move from New Delhi's Lodhi Estate to Kathmandu's Lekhnath Marg several years ago, we hailed it as a recognition of our commitment to the cause of children. The UN conference came as a test of our ability to honour our part of the deal.

Moreover, let's not forget that Deuba is the chairman of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Tying recalling how many of the 56 points in the Kathmandu Declaration have something to do directly with children. The two conventions signed during the summit were on combating the trafficking in women and children and promoting child welfare in the region. Nepal, like Deuba said, was

one of the first few countries that joined the UN Child Rights Convention (at a time when we had our own troubling troubles with the emerging new international political order, he might have added). The International Labour Organisation selected Nepal as one of three countries for a time-bound program focusing on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. The country was one of the vice-presidents of the special session and the Kathmandu Understanding represented one of the five main regional processes held in preparation for the conference.

Sure, the millions the prime minister's entourage used up could have been invested in child welfare programs. But here's the good news: UN experts estimate that there is a seven-fold return for society on every rupee invested in the development of children. If you still think, Deuba should have stayed home and joined last week's all-party rally in railing against the omnipresent threats from the fascist right and ferocious left, consider this: How many prime ministers does the world have today who were well into their second stint in office while their first child was in the first grade? ♦

17-23 MAY 2002 NEPALI TIMES

by PUSKAR BHUSAL



ECONOMY

BIZ NEWS

Maoist loot

There are now numbers for the Maoist take from banks, and the damage inflicted on banking infrastructure. By one count, the rebels have taken Rs 3.50 million from three public sector banks, damaged 152 offices and seized over 100 guns. The damage to banking records is difficult to quantify. The Maoists have hit 132 offices of the Agricultural Development Bank, 17 of the Rastriya Banijya Bank and 13 branches of the Nepal Bank Limited. The increased Maoist attacks have forced the ADB-N to reduce their number of branches by about half of its 546, the RBB has merged 56 rural branches with those in safer areas, and now has 214 branches. The NBL, which had 212 branches before the insurgency began, now has 150.

Sugar scare

A committee formed to assess the demand and supply of sugar has come to the conclusion that the government will have to arrange for importing 60 metric tons of the commodity to avoid the impending shortage during the festive season later this year. At a per capita consumption of 7.5 kg, the annual demand stands at 160 metric tons, against domestic production that is this year anticipated to be below 100 tonnes. Government was given the report about a month ago but has not yet decided what to do. Last year it sanctioned imports only when the sugar supply had already begun to fall, causing widespread shortages and black marketing.

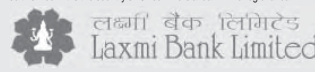


Surya Lights

Surya Luxury Kings, the leader in cigarette manufacturing in Nepal, has launched a new brand aimed at reaching smokers that want to do it in style and breathe clean. The company claims that its 'micro laser ventilated' Surya Lights come with a unique taste signature, making it the most exclusive 'right' cigarette in Nepal. A 20-pack will retail at Rs 49, the same as the regular Surya and Surya Mild. The company is also launching a special Surya Lights Treasure Hunt promo that will begin 15 June. Prizes include a holiday to Singapore and numerous trinkets. Surya's press release also comes with the statutory directive: Smoking is injurious to health.

Laxmi Bank

Laxmi Bank Limited, a venture of the Khetan, Sunrise, RL, Shanghai and Sikaria business houses, began operations from its Birganj office this week. It is the country's 16th commercial bank. The regional bank has issued capital of Rs 120 million, of which Rs 72 million has been paid up. The bank has permission to enhance its equity to Rs 500 million. Mohan Gopal Khetan is the chairman of the bank. CP Khetan, RL Shanghai, MS Agrawal and Suman Joshi are directors.



INTERVIEW



What always affects us most is government policy and inaction. For example, now we have the quarantine problem with India. It shouldn't even be applicable to us—we share the same soil and climatic conditions. For a year and a half we've had this problem and government doesn't seem bothered. 80 percent of pulses mills are closed, three-quarters of exports to India and Bangladesh have been affected. Over 80 percent of Nepalis are in agriculture. If government addresses their problems, they will have more purchasing power and can buy from other industries and help pull them out of this slump.

Take another example. Replacing electricity towers costs only Rs 2 million each. They last 10 to 15 years, per meter, not per pole. We're ready to pay. Now, a month after some towers in western Nepal were damaged, the government has finally begun tendering for repairs.

What's at the bottom of the quarantine stalemate?
Our government isn't serious. When we talk with the embassy we're told the Nepal delegation had been called to India to finalise the issue. Somebody has to go. We kept getting sent back and forth between the agriculture ministry and the commerce ministry. Nobody seems bothered.

What exactly is the problem with quarantine?
We have a quarantine check post in Kakavita near the border. To export from Nepal to Lucknow, I have to drive goods 600 km to Kakavita and another 600 km back. That's impossible—margins in foodgrains are very small and affected by prices across the border. Until our requests for quarantine check posts at Birganj, Bhairahawa, Biratnagar, Nepalgarh and Dhangadi, or Mahendranagar are fulfilled, we should be allowed to export under our own sanitary certification. India hasn't been able to set up border posts and our government has not pursued that seriously. This problem is more serious than treaty renewal but few seem to understand that. Our herb exporters are now zero because of this, still no one seems worried.

You also produce vegetable ghu. Were the Indian changes against Nepali ghu exports justified?
When the treaty was signed in 1996, our import duties were zero. India's about 15 percent. We had additional freight costs from Calcutta and then to the markets. Our production was low and costs were high. Then, to protect its producers, India began raising import duties, first to 35 percent then to 55 percent. Meanwhile, Nepal also raised duties, from half-a-percent gradually to 10 percent, and there was a 4 percent Indian Special Addi-

Has security checks affected distribution?
Supply to hill areas has been delayed by checking. Otherwise, we haven't had major problems, especially in the tarai.

What about production?
We've been producing only what we can sell, so that's under control. But

ECONOMIC SENSE

by ARTHA BEED

Amrika-return

Just think what US-Nepal business ties could be.

The beed and most of our acquaintances have just got done having a little sight of relief. The prime minister has finished his trip to the US and the UK, and it is diffused in some important ways from the foreign trips of his predecessors.

For one, he took a smaller entourage than usual, and those who went with him didn't give the impression that they were simply on a junket. For another, our dear leader managed to not embarrass Nepal by putting up a bad show with CNN. This visit also differed from other visits abroad by Nepal's Head of State past—Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba—by putting up a bad show with CNN.

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Now was the bright side of the past week. That was the story of the story. Why didn't the prime minister dip in some more discussion on business? We finally had a chance to ask for not just more aid, but also trade and investment, and we didn't. Our delegation might have considered that Nepal urgently needs that kind of economic support, and that such a request might also conceivably add to the credibility of their claims and their commitment to making Nepal forward.

The US has been one of Nepal's



major partners in terms of trade as well as aid. The visibility of the latter has diminished over the years, but in terms of trade with investment in Nepal, the US is second only to India. Garments have been Nepal's key export item, but the industry is already in decline now that the US quota system has been reviewed, and with the imminent advent of the WTO regime. Carpets and pashmina have been moving along, but have hit other stumbling blocks—declining quality, poor market research and the like.

The US government has been showing a keen interest in encouraging American companies to invest in infrastructure, especially in the power sector, and in facilitating such investment. But the Nepal government can't seem to make up its mind whether it even wants such investments. There are efforts, notably on the part of USAID, to bring South Asian countries together to work on a joint power sector initiative. It's time we woke up to the fact that the largest segment for business comes from the West.

There are other areas that Nepal

to its US trying, post-Afghanistan, to widen its role and fine tune its strategies in South Asia. The military hub may be somewhere else, but Nepal has a sporting chance of being an economic and business hub. On the next state visit of our prime minister overseas, perhaps the agenda will be different.

Readers can put their views and discuss issues at arthaheed@yahoo.com

"The quarantine is more serious than the trade treaty."

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from ➞ p1

Will the Buddha be back in time for his birthday?



is very unusual for the museum to call the cops," he said. But it may not be so easy to get the necessary court order to bring the Buddha back to Nepal since, according to Austrian law, pieces brought in by ghouls are regarded as private property—even if they are stolen.

Even so, Shakra in Kathmandu and his colleagues in Vienna are working to quickly get the paperwork on the authenticity of the Buddha as well as proof of Nepali laws against the smuggling of religious artifacts to Vienna, so the court has the necessary documents to decide on the matter. Shakra is the author of the book, *Sacred Art of Nepal*, and he feels the court's decision to return the Buddha to Nepal will set a precedent and deter future theft of Nepali religious artifacts. He thinks it will have great symbolism to have the Dipankar back in time for Buddha Jayanti on 26 May.

The gilded cast copper Dipankar Buddha is one of the 108 Buddhas that are paraded through Patan and exhibited at the annual Sanyuk festival. There have also been stolen in recent years from garbha in Patan. Shakra says it is now important for the Nepali authorities to claim the return of the Buddha. "The more voices are raised in Nepal, the more the moral pressure on the Austrian courts to return the image," he says. Meanwhile the German gallery which had printed this picture (p6) under the Dipankar in its catalogue has removed all other Nepali images from its web site <http://www.hardt.de>.

Other art historians say the fact that the Buddha took only five months to surface after its theft shows how brazen art thieves have now become. Usually they lay out an object in a public place, and then after offering them for sale. "Art smugglers must feel very safe to try to sell it so quickly," said an expert in Buddhist sacred art in Kathmandu. ♦

What saved the Buddha was some very fast footwork between Schidgruber at the Ethnographic Museum, the University and Shakra in Kathmandu. This evidence was sufficient to convince the Austrian public prosecutor to confiscate the image on suspicion of being stolen property. A case against the German gallery has been filed in Vienna. Currently Austrian police are working with their German colleagues and the Royal Nepalese Embassy in Berlin to develop the case.

When told that he was peddling a stolen object, the art dealer reportedly said: "I'd rather not sit a hornet's nest."

An ethnographic expert in Kathmandu told us it is rare for a museum curator to turn in stolen objects, and was full of praise for Schidgruber. "It

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FORE!



"Golf is a game whose aim it is to hit a very small ball into an even smaller hole with weapons singularly ill-designed for the purpose." - Winston Churchill

enticed to join him, and the club was revived. Sonny Shrestha and Manindra Shrestha were the forces behind changing the browns to greens at the RNGC, uplifting the level of golf in the early 1990s. The new clubhouse completed late last year transformed the ambience overnight into a venue more worthy of the cause it champions.

Golf development in a country does not go far if facilities are all concentrated in one area. The Dharan Golf Club provided such a diversification of venue from the late sixties onwards. Then, indisputably the most stunningly unique course in Nepal, the Himalayan Golf Club in Pokhara, carried the torch from 1984. It was almost fifteen years later that the Fulbari Resort launched their nine holes, where astounding views of the Annapurna stretch from east to west, overwhelming your senses.

About the time the Himalayan Golf Club opened, the Nepal Golf Association was formed. After some years of silence, it has plans for 2002. It will conduct, on behalf of the Mount Everest Golden Jubilee Celebration, a comprehensive six-day tournament starting 9 November, and involving four of Nepal's five golf courses. With a target participation of 300 golfers, of which 200 would be foreigners, it is by far the most ambitious golfing event ever envisioned in the country.

Nepal's golf development would not have been possible without its corporate patrons. Surya T. Tobaco in 2001 offered the highest prize money ever for a professional tournament here. Known as the Gauchar Golf Club in the late fifties, and formally established with royal patronage in 1965, the Royal Nepal Golf Club is moving onwards. Despite troubles over the years—losing land to the expanding airport, among others—members persisted in their efforts and today have a nine-hole par 34 course. Shambhu Acharya was in the process of reviving golf in Tilganga by making a few holes, when old RNGC members were

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TOP NEPALI PROFESSIONALS

Deepak Thapa Magar (34)
Deepak Acharya (26) started playing golf when he was five and took it more seriously in 1983 (age 8). Father was a golfer at the RNGC.
Toran Shrestha (25)
Ramesh Nagarkoti (early 30s)
Pashupati Sharma (29)
Radheshyam Thapa (27)
Ghanashyam Thapa (mid 50s) RNGC professional since 1968. Left for Mumbai in 1984 for eight years. In 1992 returned to Nepal, left the next year to go to Germany as a teaching pro, returned to Nepal in 1999.

TOP AMATEURS

CB Bhandari (mid 20s) handicap 1
Yelambar Adhikari (19) handicap 3
Deep B. Basnet handicap 5

Raj Pradhan handicap 4
Tashi Ghale handicap 4

UPCOMING TALENTS

Sean Einhaus (12) handicap 3, Florida junior tournament 72/72/73/85. His mother Sangita Shrestha Einhaus (handicap 28) encourages him.
Abhishek Amatya (17) handicap 12.
Spendan Lama (20) handicap severely cut after winning two tournaments recently with incredible scores.



1917 Rana prime minister's delegation returns from Scotland with some golf clubs. Started playing at Gauchar, where the present Tribhuvan International Airport runway is located. Golfers of those days were Rana Generals like General Babar Sumshere and General Laxa Sumshere. It is believed that they had 18 holes at that time, with sand and other based greens (so called browns). Some golf tournaments were initiated around mid 1920's.

The Lava cup was started.

1955 The golf course at Gauchar was shortened once airplanes started landing in Kathmandu, as the runway occupied half its land. In those days even King Tribhuvan and members of the royal family played golf occasionally. Prince Basundhara was a keen golfer.

Late 50's General Kiran Sumshere established the same golf course by naming it the Gauchar Golf Club.

5 September 1965 The Gauchar Golf Club received royal patronage from King Mahendra. The Club was inaugurated, and since then it has been named the Royal Nepal Golf Club (RNGC). Prince Basundhara became president and held the presidency until 1978. Golfers in those days were mostly expatriates, diplomats and from the Shah and Rana families.

Late 60's The Dharan Country Club was established by British Gurkhas in Dharan. The course had nine holes and grass greens (not browns).

1982 All the RNGC's land was occupied by the expanding airport. There were no golf courses in the Kathmandu Valley for over a year. The only golf course remaining in the country was the Dharan Country Club.

1983 The RNGC was revived in Tilganga on Pashupati Development Trust land. It had only 6-par 3's holes and golfers played it thrice to complete the requisite 18 holes.

1984 The Gokarna Safari Golf Club was established at Rajnikunj Gokarna in Kathmandu. Nine holes with browns (not greens) were made.

The RNGC expanded up to nine holes—8 par 3's and one par 4. The Nepal Golf Association was established.

1986 The RNGC received land from Civil Aviation and built 6 new holes and

used 3 old holes.

1988 The first Bermuda greens were made at the RNGC.

1993 The first professional international tournament was held in Nepal. The Surya Nepal Open began at the RNGC and was held yearly thereafter. Crown Prince Dipendra gave his patronage to the RNGC. The Gokarna Safari Golf Club ceased to exist.

1994 The stunning nine-hole Himalayan Golf Course was established in Pokhara.

1996 Work started on an international standard 18-hole Golf Club at Rajnikunj Gokarna.

1997 The Green Canyon Country Club, a nine-hole par-3 course was established at the Fulbari Resort, Pokhara.

1998 Construction of the Army Golf Course started behind the airport in Kathmandu.

The Nepal Professional Golfers Association was established. The NPGA currently has 18 professional golfer members.

1999 The Gokarna Forest Golf Resort (GFOR) opened up with Nepal's first international standard 18-hole golf course. The Surya Nepal Masters professional tournament upped its prize money and moved the event to the GFOR.

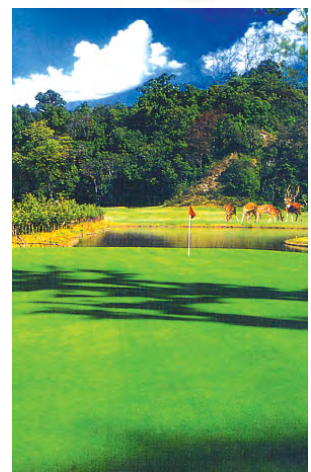
2000 The nine-hole Army Golf Club was established in Kathmandu and soon became known to the less fit as The Commando Course.

GFOR opens up its practice driving range in August. Bafal Driving Range opens in December near the Soaltee with lights for night practice, facilities for video analysis, and a cafeteria.

2001 The Dharan Golf Club was leased out and revived as Nirvana Country Club. The 230 yard-long Pokhara Golf School driving range opened in April.

2002 The Fulbari Resort remodelled and lengthened its course and renamed it the Annapurna Golf Club. The GFOR started expansion of its Clubhouse and recreational facilities to cater to a growing membership.

2003 Tiger Woods plays golf in Kathmandu.



Nepal one of the most anticipated and progressive events. This has been probably the biggest setback to corporate golf sponsorship in Nepal. Other corporate amateur tournaments include, at Gokarna, the Surya Master's Pro-Am, the Famous Grouse Shotgun Foursomes and the Shanti-La Open. The San Miguel Cup, Carlsberg Cup, and Soaltee Cup are held at the RNGC.

By most definitions, "perfecting" your golf game through practice is pretty much impossible. But, expatriating though perfection might be, practice driving ranges contribute immensely to promoting golf at a national level. In December 2000, Raj Pradhan, one of Nepal's leading amateur players combined his passion with his livelihood, and opened the Bafal Driving Range. Following this, in April last year, a group of enthusiasts got together and started the Pokhara Golf School.

This is all to the good, but something was still lacking. Nepal, with its 22 million, was probably among the last medium-sized countries in the world to not have a full-length

golf course. In early 1999, the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort changed all this with its international-standard 18 hole course designed by Glenclaves of Scotland. Kathmandu finally had a golf facility that rivalled any comparable project in the world—close to the heart of Kathmandu, just minutes past Boudhanath, in the valley of the primordial Gokarna forest. With lush fairways and possibly the best putting greens in South Asia, this has become a haven for the existing golfing community. Many others who dived with taking up this infamously frustrating sport and given it a miss now found themselves enticed, spellbound by the surreal environment so close to a big city, yet so far removed from the hustle of daily life.

Will things now get better, as they should, given these developments? Hopefully, the RNGC will be encouraged to give golf and tourism in Nepal the next impetus the two need. And if it's not, there will be one more brilliant idea that will benefit more than just golf, trickling down the tourism food chain. You hold your breath. I'm off to play some golf. ♦



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Prime minister or nationalist puppet?

“A small chink in the prison wall”

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"The fake offer of a ceasefire is a government conspiracy."

News of the offer of a unilateral month-long cease fire by Maoist leader Prachanda raised hopes that the violence between the security forces and the Maoists would end. But the Nepal government shattered people's hopes, saying it did not trust the Maoists, and that it would not go by an unsigned press release. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba who has refused the offer of peace talks, is visiting the US in the hope of seeking international support against the Maoists.

News of the ceasefire was published in Indian papers two days ago. Events took a dramatic turn when a person called "Bikram" said via email that he had sent out the emails and faxes with the ceasefire offer. In an exclusive interview with the BBC's Hindi Service, in New Delhi a Maoist politburo leader Dina Nath Sharma denied the statement and called it a government conspiracy. Excerpts of Sharma's retraction of the ceasefire as told to Renu Akar of the BBC:

Dina Nath Sharma: It is a conspiracy hatched by the government. One after another, the government is losing (in battles), and so it has created this conspiracy to weaken the morale of the people who support our war, and confuse our cadres. Our party president will deny the news today.

BBC Hindi Service: The news appeared in the Indian papers two days ago, and in the Nepali press the following day. How can an individual without access to a large network disseminate news left and right like this?

We never said anything along those lines. We don't know what was published or not published in the papers. We are not in favour of a ceasefire now, because we're winning the battle one after another. We are winning.

Is it possible that you've changed your stance after hearing the reaction of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, his rejection of the offer of ceasefire?

No, that's not so, that is definitely not so.

Please tell us what success you've achieved, what is happening?

The government has said more than 500, more than 300 Maoists have been killed. Our people are safe. We are winning the war. More soldiers have been killed. Our friends are safe, the fighters are safe. We had eleven casualties.

Is it part of your policy to destroy people-friendly infrastructure, like such as water purification systems, as is happening now?

It is not our policy. It is not our policy to destroy hydroelectricity projects. In the name of war, the government is killing innocent people who are not involved in the war. The people have done this (attacks on infrastructure) in retaliation. Where there is oppression, there's reaction. **They say women are suffering atrocities at the hands of the Maoists. Could you comment on that?**

This has never happened. We've been fighting this war for seven years with the utmost moral strength, discipline, and maturity. That's why we're winning battle after battle.

Where does the support for your struggle come from?

The war is being fought by the Nepali people on their own strength. It is an internal matter of Nepal. It is the people's concern, the concern of democracy. This is a war for democracy and against feudalism, monarchy, and imperialism. We don't have the support of anyone.

Where did you get your weapons, your training?

Whatever weapons we have, we looted from the army and the police. Our weapons are those given by imperialists to the Nepali government. We take weapons from them and fight against them.

Will this continue to be your policy? Or will you return for talks?

We have expressed our principle: we are for talks. We are ready for talks. But if the government continues to behave like this, how can we talk?



A Nepali rally

Mukesh Babu Karki in Purnajagaran 14 May

The much-publicised all-party general meeting on 10 May was reminiscent of the "Pancha rallies" that used to be organised against campaigners for the multiparty system before 1990.

In those days, the Panchas used to organise such rallies and meetings in the safety of the capital city, surrounded by hundreds of security personnel. The all-party general meeting organised in Kathmandu's khulha market (open forum at Ratna Park) had security forces guarding the leaders. The all-party meeting might have had some meaning if it had been organised in insurgency-hit districts such as Rukum or Rolpa. The general public and even the Maoists could have seen that the democratic forces were unified. The general public might have got some reassurance that they are safe in their villages. The all-party meeting failed to spread any such feelings among the people.

None of the political parties have made public how much they spent on this all-party meeting, but the ruling Nepali Congress had the most number of flags on display. The misuse of Nepali Congress flags was also very visible—the flags with four stars were used at snack stalls to shoo away flies, members of the audience used them to cover their heads when it rained, and many of them spread the NC flags on the floor to sit down when the speeches were being delivered.

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party were the two parties with the largest number of flags on display after the Congress. Surprisingly, the main opposition CPN-UMI had put up and given out very few flags. Since the flags of the UML and the other small communist parties are similar to that of the Maoists—red, with hammer and sickle—they might have thought that opposing the Maoists with a display of flags might give the wrong impression and cause some confusion about whose symbol exactly they were opposing. But for that glitch, the expectation that red communist flags would be dropped all over the city might have come true.

The crowd booted and hooted at the Nepal Sadbhavana Party president Badri Bahadur Mandal when he tried to address them from the podium in Hindi. Twelve years ago when Girija Prasad Koirala addressed a crowd from the same podium when the multiparty system was declared, the crowd heckled him too, and the late Ganesh Man Singh had to come forward to calm the crowd down. This time Koirala did not make a similar move to quiet the crowd booing Mandal. Perhaps he was scared that the gathering might turn on him if he interrupted.

The incident made it apparent that the Hindi-film crazy crowd is unsympathetic to the Nepal Sadbhavana Party. It might well be

a sign of the widening emotional rift between the palace and madhesi populations.

Maoist machinations

Deslumar, 12 May

The recent offer of a month-long ceasefire (on 9 May) by the Maoists, and a denial of this by the Maoist leaders the following day, clearly signify that the Maoist party, which has been waging a violent insurgency for the past six-and-a-half years, has arrived at a difficult moment.

An unsigned press release offering a ceasefire was issued to the Nepali press [last] Thursday, a day after the Indian press received it. On Friday Maoist party chairman Prachanda said the release was a fake, and refuted its message.

Prior to this, the party has been sending out press releases via fax and email. And even though the recent release expressing the Maoists interest in talks was unsigned, it was not refuted.

Less than 24 hours after the press release was issued, Dina Nath Sharma, a politburo member of the Maoist party, denied that the party had offered a ceasefire. In an interview with the BBC's Hindi Service, Sharma said it was a conspiracy hatched by the Nepali government and that the party chairman would deny it. But until late yesterday (11 May), nothing of the sort had happened. It is intriguing that Sharma would question a release issued by Prachanda.

Sources say that the party has begun doing intensive homework on offering a ceasefire. The moves the Maoists wish to make have been affected, since security forces have blocked their transport routes and upset their channels of information. Pressure from the US, the UK, Europe and China have also affected the Maoists. As a result, Maoist leaders who were once ready to prolong the war with the security forces, appear to be working towards entering the present democratic system. Pressure from other political parties, the palace, has also steered them in this direction.

Some say that once human rights groups got an indication that the Maoists were preparing to offer a ceasefire, they pre-empted their move by issuing a press release. It was an attempt to gauge the reaction, the psychology of government, civil society, political parties, and the international community. But once they read the negative reactions, the Maoists decided to deny what was said in the release though Sharma, since the party would lose credibility if it did so itself.

A high-ranking source says the ceasefire offer may be a Maoist ruse to throw security forces off guard while they regroup and get reinforcements for their fighting force. It appears as if in the days to come, the situation of the Maoists

will not be comfortable—they are bearing heavy losses at the hands of the security forces. Initially they had the support of the main power centres and India, but now it appears that they

are getting sucked into a whirlpool. A ceasefire announced by the People's War Group in India, to which the Maoists have close ties, may have encouraged them to declare a ceasefire, too.

Expensive censor

WHOF in Hinal Khubani, 29 March–13 April

The Censor Board has prohibited Suresh Pokhrel's new feature film Atangabadi ("The Terrorist") from being screened (in theatres). The Ministry of Information and Communication has raised the alarm over a scene in which the national flag is shown flying on a minister's private car and another in which the minister is disgraced in court. The Censor Board has directed that these scenes be edited out, but Pokhrel says the film tells the story of a corrupt politician, which makes it impossible to cut these scenes.

This is not the first film that has been censored. Some part of most films are averted by the Censor Board, but there is only talk about it when too many scenes are given the snip. Hattayara Ra Ago ("Weapon and Fire") is another example. Cinema halls cannot show films without the authority of the government. And before permission is given the film have to be passed by the Censor Board and cut scenes wherever demanded. The MoC's Audio Visual Department is the authority in charge of this. Hemraj Poudel, Assistant Secretary at the ministry says, "The seven members of the board are the ones who actually censor the films."



One artist who did not want to be named alleges that none of the members of the Censor Board are really knowledgeable about cinema. "The Board is filled with bureaucrats," he says. "There are only people nominated by the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communications, and the Minister and Secretaries of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism." Censor boards in foreign countries know a lot about music, literature and art. When they censor films, they give detailed accounts of the frames and shots they object to, and even the age number of negatives. "But here if they don't like one shot they cut the whole scene," says another film industry person. Jyoti Pokhrel of the Film Development Board told us, "We have even suggested that the Film Development Board be represented, but they haven't yet accepted our proposal."

The censors have a special preview theatre that was built for them by the Film Association. The Association helps the Censor Board in technical matters. The process of screening films for the Censor Board must be paid for by the producer of the film and once screening can end up costing about Rs 20,000, which includes rental for the theatre, allowances for members of the Censor Board, the fee to the Board, refreshments, and transport. And after all this, no one checks to see if the scenes the censors asked to be cut are actually edited out before the film goes to the theatres. No surprise then that some producers and directors who feel the censor board is an unnecessary, expensive headache.



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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

To give up arms is to surrender. That will resolve the problem automatically, there will be no need for talks.

— Prakash Jwala, CPN-UMI, MP, on 12 May in Garbhithi



(Newspaper Headlines)
Government-Maoist peace-talk is impossible—Deuba
Government-Maoist peace-talk is a must—Koirala

"It seems like you have been reading my old speech!"

प्रकाश जवाला The Himalaya Times, 12 May



ABOUT TOWN

FILM

- ◆ **Nepali Film Festival 2001** 17 May: Panchi, Bhowroyal Hall, 8AM. 18 May: Darpan Chhaya, Hirantra Hall, 8AM. 19 May: Makkas, Kaleri Hall, 8AM. 20 May: Basanti, Ashok Hall, 8AM. 21 May: Samyukta, Kumbhari Hall, 8AM. 22 May: Kalyan, Kalyan Hall, 8AM. 23 May: Rako, Prithvi Hall, 8AM. Organised by the Film Journalists' Association.
- ◆ **Kathmandu Documentary Film Association** presents People Like Us: Social Class in America, a funny and provocative look at class and race in the US. 23 May, 6PM. Rs 200, with 50 percent off for students. Indigo Gallery, Mike's Breakfast, Naxal.

EXHIBITION

- ◆ **Football on show** Posters, national team jerseys, equipment, football newspapers and magazines, stamps, memorabilia, photographs and lots more. Also sport websites of the Nepal Football Club, the British Council, and World Cup sites. From 26 May, British Council, Lainchour.

EVENTS

- ◆ **AWON's Tika Box Sale** Gently-used clothing, shoes, books, kitchen items, games, toys and more. 8AM-12 noon, 18 May, Lincoln School, Rabi Bhawan. Entry Rs 25 per head.
- ◆ **Phillips Saturday Bowling Tournament** Each bowler rolls three games, the bowler with the highest average score wins Phillips CD players. 18 May, 12PM onwards. Rs 500, or 10 percent less for entries before 13 May. Bowling Boulevard, Kantipath. Register at mg@mail.com.np

MUSIC

- ◆ **1974 AD Concert** The band will be performing and releasing their new album in the solo concert at Bhandara International Convention Center, 25 May 2:30PM. Tickets Rs 1000, 500, 300, 200. Contact Jatra - 433859, Bijaya - 525115, 536598, Bharu - 525240
- ◆ **Club Rumba** Latin band, salsa food until midnight on Thursdays. Early bird discounts between 8-9:30PM. buy one, get one free. Hotel Shangri-La, 412999
- ◆ **Dinesh & Pemba** Live every Friday 7PM-9PM, Himalaya Cafe, Thamel, 262526
- ◆ **Down Memory Lane** Wednesday nights with Teseeta. The Bar at the Hyatt regency Kathmandu.
- ◆ **Live music** by Catch 22, Friday nights at the 40,000 1/2 ft Bar, Rum Doodle Restaurant, Thamel, 414336

DRINK

- ◆ **Coming soon** Fusion at Dwarika's
- ◆ **Metre of Malt** Single malt Scotch exhibition. Shot on the rocks, or 12 single malts economically packaged for Rs 999. Piano Bar, Hotel Yak & Yeti, 248999
- ◆ **Beer Mug Club** Talk beer, drink beer. Monday nights, Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 491234

FOOD

- ◆ **Kababs** for lunch and dinner at The Fun Café and Corner Bar at the Radisson Hotel from 18 May, 411818
- ◆ **Ice creams & sorbets** Single, double or triple scoops of ice creams and sorbets, some with alcohol. The Café, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu
- ◆ **Wood fired pizzas** at the new Roadhouse Café. Completely redesigned with separate bar seating and coffee bar. The Roadhouse Café, Thamel.
- ◆ **Weekend Brunch** Rs 350 per head, special package available with bowling. Oriental and continental lunch or dinner by the pond. 1905 Boardwalk, Kantipath, 225272
- ◆ **Vegetarian Specialties** and clay-oven pizzas at Stupa View Restaurant & Terrace, Boudha, 482022
- ◆ **Saturday Live Buffet** with unlimited draught beer and live music by the Rusty Nails. The Fun Café, Radisson Hotel, 11:30AM-2:30PM, Saturdays, 411818
- ◆ **Authentic Thai food** Everyday at Yin Yang Restaurant, 425510
- ◆ **Paddy Foley's Irish Pub** A wide range of drinks and food. Live music on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday nights, 416096.

GETAWAYS

- ◆ **The Great Godavari Getaway** Special weekend packages including room with breakfast and dinner, 25 percent discount on health club facilities. Godavari Village Resort, 560675
- ◆ **Chiso Chiso Hawana** Summer package with two days, one night with breakfast, dinner, transportation and activities. Rs 1,500 per person with twin-sharing. For Nepalis and expats only. Club Himalaya Nagarkot, 414432, 680063
- ◆ **New swimming pool** open! Rs 500 per person. Rs 800 per couple, 50 percent off for children, monthly rates available. All day swimming plus discounts on food and beverage at Dwarika's Hotel, 479488
- ◆ **Bardiya's Best** Four days, three nights, jungle activities, transfers and food from the menu at Royal Bardia National Park, \$120, all-inclusive, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com, 061-234022
- ◆ **Summer Splash** Use of pool 15 May - 15 July, 10AM-6PM. Over 18 Rs 4,000 plus tax, schoolchildren under 18, Rs 2,000 plus tax. Hotel de Annapurna, 221711
- ◆ **Taste the difference** Cosy Nepali-style house on an organic farm in Gancha, south of Thimi. Up to Rs 1,200 per person per night including meals. asa@wink.com.np
- ◆ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** 30 minutes from Kathmandu, staff guides to monastery, peak and reserve. Rs 1850 per person with dinner and breakfast, Rs 925 per child 5-14 years, children under five free. info@ecapetonepal.com

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The westerlies have started their annual tug-o-war with the pre-monsoon circulation from the Bay of Bengal. The westerly disturbances are getting weaker, and that is when the moisture from the east turns into the monsoon-like showers we had early this week. The transition period will see more of these bursts of localised rain. There is a particularly nasty low pressure circulation off Bangladesh, and we may feel its presence early next week with more driving rain. There will be a commensurate drop in daytime temperatures with an increase of humidity cancelling out the net effect.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
31-17	30-17	28-15	30-17	30-16

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



BOOKWORM

Arresting God in Kathmandu Samrat Upadhyay

Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2002

Rs 195

The long-awaited special to Nepal edition of award-winning author Samrat Upadhyay's collection of short stories. Upadhyay brilliantly explores the nature of desire and spirituality in a changing society. With assurance and unimpeachable wisdom, Upadhyay records the echoes of modernisation throughout love and family. In a city where gods are omnipresent, privacy is elusive and family defines identity, Upadhyay's men and women find themselves at the mercy of their desire but at the will of their society.

A Nepalese Journey: On Foot Around the Annapurnas Andrew Stevenson

Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 2002

Rs 1,425

Following the stages of three key routes—the classic Annapurna Circuit, the short but sensational Annapurna Sanctuary, and the epic trail north into Mustang, Stevenson's photographs, map and text record a mesmerising journey. Stevenson captures the stunning changes in landscape, talks to the people he meets, reveals the spirit of the trek and tells the stories of those who have gone before him.

The Book of Chakra Healing Lal Simpson

New Age Books, New Delhi, 2002

Rs 952

A comprehensive guide to the ancient Indian system of chakras, the centres of "spinning energy" in the body that help maintain one's physical, emotional and mental balance. This volume offers a practical way to work on your chakras and shows you how to unblock and rebalance your energy. Understanding chakra healing involves colour, knowledge of ancient myths, archetypes, bodywork, crystals, meditation, visualisations, open questions and affirmations.

Tantra in Practice David Gordon White, ed

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 2001

Rs 792

This volume includes plays, transcribed interviews, poetry, parables, inscriptions, instructional texts, scriptures, philosophical conjectures, dreams and astronomical speculations, each illustrating one of the diverse practices and traditions of tantra. Each chapter reflects the wide geographical and temporal scope of tantra, including 36 texts from China, India, Japan, Nepal and Tibet, from the 7th century to the present.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 227711, mandala@ccsl.com.np

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NATION

The Battle of Gam

MIN BAJRACHARYA IN ASQUEY DANDA

Bhakti Gharti Magar's family covered all night in the family's cattle shed as deafening sound of gunfire and explosions reverberated up and down the valley. At times, the explosions were interspersed with booming thunder as a storm lashed the hills.

A rocket bomb landed on the roof, bounced off, and exploded nearby. At dawn, after the gunfire died down, Bhakti perched out of the door to see Maoists carrying off their wounded and dead in dokos. Some of the dead were dragged to the edge of a cliff and tossed over, others were thrown into the fires raging in some of the houses.

Across a deep valley from the village of Gam in Rolpa district is Asquey Danda, the scene of a savage battle in which a new security forces garrison was overrun by Maoists on the night of 7 May. Maps retrieved from the bodies of Maoists killed in the attack showed it was planned with their characteristic precision. A diversion lured away 60 members of the security forces before the main assault, which took place from the forested slopes behind the barracks. The map shows at least 17 pre-planned attack positions.

Soldiers in an anti-ambush patrol on a ridge across the valley from the base held out for 800-1,000 rebels took part. The troops watched helplessly as the fighting raged, but they were four hours' walk away and so were unable to join the battle. The Maoists used typical storming tactics with frontal charges to try and get the security forces to exhaust their ammunition. They used improvised explosives against sandbagged bunkers, and even shouted Maoist slogans and beat drums to sow confusion

and set off panic firing.

"I was preparing to go to bed when the firing began," police constable Bhawan Chhapagain told us. "In the daylight I found that my army colleagues had already been hit. The soldier gave Chhapagain his SLR and told him to keep shooting."

The commander, Major Nikantra Khadka shouted orders to his men through his loudspeaker: "Keep firing, don't retreat. Block their entry." Hukam Bahadur Bhandari, a forestry official, ran into an army bunker where Raj Kumar Khadka was manning a machine gun. Khadka had already been hit, and was trying to staunch the blood gushing out of his leg. Bhandari tore his trousers and tried to make a tourniquet.

About an hour into the battle, Major Khadka already seemed to realise that his unit was running low on ammunition. He was heard shouting: "Control fire, identify your targets before shooting. Don't throw away your weapons."

The army had recaptured Asquey Danda a month ago, and the fortifications were still under construction. The trenches along the perimeter were only half-dug, and did not provide enough protection.

Within three hours, it was all over. Seventeen of the 110 people in the base survived 70 were killed and 40 are still unaccounted for. The survivors either played dead or hid in the forest. The army lost 24 soldiers, including base commander Major Khadka and his deputy, who was tortured before being killed. Forty-one civilian police and five armed police were also killed. Three civilian servants who had been flown in for the government's "hearts and minds"



PLANE: A Maoist cloth map of the army-police base at Gam detailing the 7 May attack, recovered from a backpack of a dead rebel.



CHARGE OF GUARD: Soldiers boarding a helicopter before being airlifted on a paratrooper into the hills around a village, headquarters of Rolpa district, where security forces said they were expecting an attack.



RELATIVES: Bhakti Magar's 50-year-old wife was woken up by the explosions, and spent a terrifying night protecting her four children.



PHOTO CAPTURED BY THE ARMY: (Left to right) Prakash Dahal (son of Chairman Prachanda), Dr. Bahum Bhattarai, Hilda Yami (Dr. Bhattarai's wife), Ram Bahadur Thapa alias Badal who is an expert of military strategy and explosives, and Pashpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda, the party chairman.

programme to provide drinking water and other development services also died. Two others are still missing.

A week later, the smell of death still lingers on the steep slopes around Asquey Danda. Half-buried Maoists are being dug up by security forces personnel wearing masks. The stretch is overpowering. Over the edge of the cliff, there are dozens of crumpled bodies visible. All in all, the Maoists lost about 150 fighters in this raid. Some policemen and civilians were taken prisoner, but managed to escape. They told tales of rebels burying more dead along trails leading north along their escape route.

The attack had typical lessons. Security forces said the lack of air support and proper equipment was a major factor in the base being overrun. They also blamed the location and inadequate fortifications.



SENTRY TOWER AND TRENCHES: The remains of the base camp on Asquey Danda. On the right is a steep cliff, 100 meters or so deep, where journalists could see mutilated bodies that were still to be recovered and unidentified. Some of the trenches on the perimeter were less than a feet deep.

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Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Golf for beginners

Contrary to popular belief, golf wasn't discovered in Scotland, but in Nepal. Legend has it that during the last Ice Age, the saint Manjushree travelled over the Himalaya to Kathmandu when the valley was still a glacial lake. While practicing his swings, he made a "whuff", i.e. Manjushree swung and completely missed the ball.

In so doing, he tore off a fat chunk of Chobhar Hill and (although it is considered proper etiquette to always replace the divot, and step the turf back into place, Manjushree totally forgot) and thereby he accidentally drained the valley, creating a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood—known downstream in the Bagmati Basin to this day by its acronym, GLOF. Over millennia, the spelling got corrupted, and the name of the game we know today as GOLF was born.

Another theory is that the word "golf" is actually an anagram of the word "flog", which is what you do in this game: you flog the ball all over the countryside while trying to get it to go into a small hole. Thousands of years ago, a prehistoric plenipotentiary from Neanderthal wanted to invite his cave mates to a round of flog, and (being badly hungover from a diplomatic reception the previous night) he uttered the word backward by mistake. There was great merriment, and his fellow-players had a good laugh. "He said golf, hahahahaha," they roared in a characteristically prehistoric manner. But the word stuck, and that is how the game is still known to this day.

Whatever the origins of the name itself, it is now an established fact that from its humble beginnings in the Himalaya, the great game of golf has spread world wide. And the rules have not changed: it is the only game in the post-modern world where the player who has the

lowest score wins, and it is a game that is suited to the lazy pace of life in our neck of the woods. Take this running commentary to an exciting finish at a recent golf tournament which was televised live to 2 billion viewers around the world.

Sportscaster (in a hushed tone): "There is pin drop silence as Tiger Woods walks up to the ball and examines its position from a grassroots level. There he is on all fours crawling like a tiger sniffing out his prey, lining up the ball with the pin at the far end of the green. He has a bad lie. But he is lying there, and still has the chance to par on the 17th. Oh, no. What is Tiger doing? He has taken off his cap and his scratching his head. That is a bad sign, I have never seen him do that before. Tiger looks at this Mum in the stands, and waves his putter. She waves back, and blows him a kiss.

Tiger needs to concentrate, but this is a difficult shot from the rough with the ball even with the pin but off to one side. He has a better bet not using his full swing during his pitch shot, but it must be a longer swing than a chip shot. Tiger is definitely in the horns of a conundrum. He's also thinking about the alligators in the water hazard, what if they snap at his legs while he is taking his shot? He has to do this quickly, if he is to survive. Don't Go Away. We'll be right back after these messages. This programme is brought to you by Johnny Walker: The Drink that Goes With Your Drive and Polo Mints: You Have a Hole in One!"

See what I'm getting at? Watching a golf match on tv is not for the faint-hearted. But we're not complaining, it is a game after our own hearts and admirably suited to our languid pace of life. Care for a round of flog? ♦



NEPALI SOCIETY

Jungle girl, Sushila

At a time when projects are closing down, development workers are quitting field work and heading back to Kathmandu or even emigrating, there are some who just won't give up.

"Conservation can't wait," says biodiversity expert Sushila Nepali who works with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the Royal Bardia National Park. Despite the counterinsurgency operations in the jungles, Sushila lingered on with her work in the national park. Her parents in Kathmandu are in a constant state of panic that she might get caught in the crossfire. "It's a scary situation, but that doesn't unduly bother me. Local community support is the source of my courage," Sushila told us. And from the way she says it, you know she's not just

putting on a brave face or saying it for effect.

Sushila started out working with the army and park staff on biodiversity. Sushila has "seen action" many times: teaming up with the park staff to hunt and shoot a man-eater, saving sick tiger cubs, rescuing gharials stuck in an irrigation canal. Not an easy job for a woman, but for Sushila it's all in a day's work.

"Real conservation happens in the field, not in an airconditioned office," she says. How about her personal life, family commitments? "All that can wait. I can't even think of getting married right now," she says. Her parents are

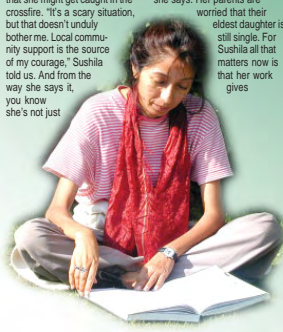
worried that their eldest daughter is still single. For Sushila all that matters now is that her work gives

her immense satisfaction, and a deep sense of personal accomplishment.

And it's not just wildlife she has to deal with. Much of her work is actually to work with local villagers and convince them that conservation is beneficial in the long-run. There was a time when the Bardia community cared little about saving tigers, wild elephants or the forests. The national park staff, on the other hand, saw villagers as a threat because of heavy poaching and land encroachment during the early 1980s. Sushila went house-to-house to motivate locals to join in the conservation work, and was able to form more than 80 forest user committees and women's groups. There is now a real sense that the park is public property and the villagers need to jointly protect it.

Sushila's next big challenge is to work on Nepal's visionary trans-boundary Tarai Arc Landscape program, being jointly undertaken by national parks in India and Nepal with WWF. The project joins Nepal's Parsa Chitwan National Park with Bardia and India's Rajaji-Corbett National Park.

Sushila's dedication has been rewarded by WWF, which recently named her International Conservation Woman of the Year which comes with \$5,000 in cash. For Sushila's parents, the only problem with all this international recognition is that it will keep their daughter in the jungles of Bardia. ♦



SURYA LIGHTS

INSPIRED BY NEPAL

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