NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Only three weeks into his new job, Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani is trying to see if he can plug the hole in the forthcoming national budget. He may have to start with the huge hole on the street outside his ministry (see pic right).

Lohani has his work cut out: the government security budget has grown four-fold to Rs 9 billion in the past four years, revenue is up but still below target, export earnings and tourism are down. If it wasn’t for the estimated $1 billion that came into the country from overseas remittances last year, this country could be declared officially bankrupt.

Lohani is caught in a Catch-22: more money than ever before is needed for development, but more of it is being siphoned off for security. The army says it needs to augment hardware to deter insurgents from going back to war. On top of that, chronic fiscal ailments and structural problems persist.

Even so, Finance Ministry officials see a silver lining: revenue has grown by 10 percent compared to last year and is now only Rs 3 billion less than the regular expenditure. Lohani is confident balancing the budget is within reach.

“We will increase revenue further and cut some more from the regular expenditure this year,” he told us.

If that works, the government will not need to rely on internal borrowing that grew by 24 percent last year in direct violation of the Nepal Rastra Bank Act which caps internal borrowing to only five percent of the budget.

The security situation has meant that a large chunk of the budget in this fiscal year has not been spent, which does not mean that the need is not great. (See: ‘Still standstill’, #145). The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank and some bilateral donors are shoring up the development budget by injecting some Rs 7 billion this year. “We have an improved scenario vis-à-vis the development budget,” says Shankar Raj Sharma at the National Planning Commission. “And if the peace holds, we can improve implementation.”

And that is the big “if”. Lohani’s plans for an investment-friendly and job-creating budget also hinge on peace and political stability. If this week’s isolated skirmishes between the military and the Maoists escalate, or the street agitation intensifies, his plans won’t be worth much.
Koirala is 46.59 percent NC's unsuccessful years of cause but are an effect of the want with the present agitation: selfishness. It's clear what they country over the past 13 years.

The country is falling apart much longer? The Maoists' violations with these public wash away the human rights. It's a good start, but they can't be that the good doctor got so serious about cleaning up the impression the security forces. The Maoists' hearts and minds programs are working. But both sides should realize that you don't win people's minds by killing them. Buddha Pant, Coventry UK

After reading 'Hearts, minds and haircuts', I wonder if the Maoists' violations with these public wash away the human rights. It's a good start, but they can't be that the good doctor got so serious about cleaning up the impression the security forces. The Maoists' hearts and minds programs are working. But both sides should realize that you don't win people's minds by killing them. Buddha Pant, Coventry UK

My internet poll (Poll #90) has internet voters overwhelmingly against GP Koirala. The Nepali Your internet poll (Poll #90) has internet voters overwhelmingly against GP Koirala. The Nepali

Looking at the results of your ongoing poll regarding who is best suited to lead the nation (Poll #90), it seems that your internet voters overwhelmingly want Baburam Bhattarai. If this has any significance, it behoves the king and other political parties to, for once, listen to public opinion and ask Bhattarai to lead the nation, and take us out of this ‘summer of discontent’. I notice that multiple voting is possible on your web poll. I wonder how you plan to filter out the bias. Could it be that the good doctor got so many votes because most of his followers are internet savvy; or is it just because he can count on pranksters like me who love to skew public opinion?

Deepak Neupane, email (No internet poll is ever totally scientific. The software used in internet polls such as Times Nepaliweb.com internet poll does not easily allow multiple voting, but there are solutions that are trying to work around these problems in determined people with lots of time on their hands - Ed)

HEARTS & MINDS
Reading Min Bahadur Charya's 'Hearts, minds and haircuts' (#149) we get the impression the security forces are serious about cleaning up their image. But they have a long way to go. People in the far-west are still afraid of the police and the army. In Ghanche, where I was a student, I was often harassed. It's a good start, but they can't wash away the human rights grievances in these public relations exercises. The people will want justice. The Maoists' hearts and minds programs are working. But both sides should realize that you don't win people's minds by killing them.

After reading 'Hearts, minds and haircuts', I wonder if the Maoist Nepal Army really cares about the people, or is it just a pretense? After decades of political inexperience, corruption, irresponsibility and dysfunctional bureaucracy, ordinary people were the least of anybody's concern. The elite leaders and rulers who hide behind the gated fences in Kathmandu should learn a lesson in winning the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens. You cannot do politics without the support of the people. I despair of the government of the poor, the forgotten, ignored and disadvantaged.

Roshan Paudel, Minneapolis, USA

MOONKEY BUSINESS
Friends of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCAN) is extremely concerned about the activities of the Washington National Primate Center and the Nepal Natural History Society (Monkey business), #148. As it is not enough suffering is being inflicted upon Nepal's animals already, this unholy alliance now eyes the country's primate, considered sacred and an integral part of the country's heritage by the population. The Washington center finds loopholes in the world's legal animal rights provisions, and in Nepal (one of the few countries in the world still without such legislation) it found ideal working ground. The plans to conduct tests on a secure breeding centre in Nepal were announced in a 2002 Washington workshop on the future of Nonhuman Primate Resources. Nepal is a proud primate's nation and does not want them to suffer unnecessarily. We certainly do not want our monkeys — sacred or not — to end up in an American lab, subjected to horrendous experiments. Friends of SPCAN call upon the media and authorities to:

1. Investigate how alliances such as these can enter the country in disguise, without permission and/or informing authorities (and make sure it won't happen again)
2. Clarify the country's stand on the protection of its precious fauna, including primates.
3. Pass animal welfare legislation as soon as possible, including a ban on testing on animals and export of animal species for scientific use.
4. Enact a law that allows conducting tests on Nepal's animal species, unless armed with approval from the government and genuine conservation.

Friends of SPCAN www.fospcan.org

EDUCATION
Re: 'Learning education' (Editorial, #150), it seems that the anti-education forces are not listening.

Last Friday, most schools in the Valley shut down early fearing the Maoists would force them to join...
Of Foreign Hands and Grand Designs

Instead of being paranoid about outside interference, a wiser course would be to focus on the conditions at home that encourage meddling.

For grand design conspiracies to work, it first requires a grand mind not visible in Nepal or the neighbourhood. Second, any such grand mind would need an unequally grand control of every lever and knob, knowing just how and when to produce the ripple effects of butterfly wings in New Delhi to create a cloudburst over Singhaj Durbar.

The reality is that interests and small all push their agendas, some with a two-day vision and some with two years. The ones with the longer view often come out winning, and to their more myopic rivals this would look like some sinister grand design. There is a simple explanation from political sociology for regular grand design alarms indicating that we are suddenly struggling with a multiparty system without a party culture of established procedures.

Nepal's multiparty system has its underground culture of loyalty to charismatic figures rather than ideas or institutions. Such key groups require some fear, an external threat, to keep the hand of faithful within the prescribed boundary. In power, when they are the threat to ordinary citizens, much of their energy is spent in group infighting between rivals with mutual Machiavellian indifference. Enforcement of laws and formal rules is useless as a scapegoat explanation.

The solution to external intervention is a truism of better international social justice, business efficiency and administrative integrity. If an active civil society and innovative business were to promote enlightened political and bureaucratic leadership, we could even intervene abroad through economic diplomacy. Otherwise, foreign intervention is an easy walkover. D Dipak Gyawali was water resources minister in the Chandra government. This article is based on a talk at Napark Awaj on 17 June.
Gold rush in Dolpa

The Himalayan viagra harvesting season brings tens of thousands of fortune seekers to this harsh region.

Gender agenda at the Hotel Blue Sheep

Gold rush in Dolpa

The Himalayan viagra harvesting season brings tens of thousands of fortune seekers to this harsh region.

Gender agenda at the Hotel Blue Sheep

What contributed to the gender agenda at the Hotel Blue Sheep?

Chandra Shahi explains. Then he leans across and whispers: “It’s also very...”

Yarchagumba is known by its Latin name Cordyceps sinensis is a unique combination of a yellow caterpillar and a mushroom. Few scientists have studied the phenomenon, and its lifecycle is not completely understood. The Tibetan name means ‘summer grass, winter insect’. Just before the rainy season, spores of the cordyceps mushroom land on the heads of caterpillars of the Lepidoptera family that live mainly underground. After the fungus buries itself in the caterpillar’s body, it works its way out through the unfortunate insect’s head. The parasite seals up the caterpillar’s energy until it dies. Yarchagumba can be found when the snow starts to melt between 3,300-4,000m in parts of Tibet, India, Bhutan and Nepal. When Dolpa people find yarchagumba, they don’t ‘find a caterpillar, they find money,’ Chandra Shahi tells us. ‘Last year I made Rs 50,000. Even kids were making Rs 2,000 per day.’ This is big money in one of Nepal’s more remote and rugged areas. It is an intricate network of Kathmandu investors who finance local businessmen who in turn hire subcontractors or buy yarchagumba directly from gatherers. ‘Everybody who has a lot of money in Dolpa is involved,’ said Dineendra Shahi, a local businessman told us. This year the yarchagumba is bought from collection for Rs 120,000 per kg. Depending on quality and size of the product, the middlemen sell the stuff by the sackful in Thailand, Korea, China and Japan for $2,800 per kg. The Western market is also said to be getting bigger. Japanese scientists, who first came to Dolpa’s mountains in a helicopter, have even tried to grow yarchagumba back home in refrigerators to simulate Himalayan conditions. It didn’t work. Until recently, collecting yarchagumba was illegal in Nepal.


That changed two years ago, when the government allowed collection of the precious caterpillar mushroom outside of the Dolpa National Park boundaries. The government wanted a share of the lucrative pie. Businessmen now need a permit and the government collects Rs 20,000 tax per kg. However, most businessmen say they sell the yarchagumba directly to Tibetan traders, who come to buy the goods in DeTehr, Upper Dolpa.

Dolpa — What would the grand procession of events be, if not a study in contrasts? ‘Things may not go as we want them to. But they go, and go, and go. And then, little we can do about it.’

The things are the thoughts of the trekking trail, the mindless pound of booted feet on stone and forest floor, the numbing of the brain freeing up the soul to roam and reflect. Cynicism begone, let only idealism flow. Alas, in spite of my best efforts, these are the thoughts of the trekking trail, the mindless pound of booted feet on stone and forest floor. The numbing of the brain freeing up the soul to roam and reflect. Cynicism begone, let only idealism flow.

First encounter of note was a ‘gender specialist’ in the employ of a large, respectable European bilateral aid agency. ‘Note to few remaining friends at DfID: I don’t consider Britain “European”, not yet.) Anyway, said specialist was relishing tea at the Hotel Blue Sheep in Dunai. Old tea it was, left over from the last large trekking group through town. Last year some 30,000 people in Dolpa set off to find yarchagumba. The season lasts until the end of June. ‘It’s an unofficial holiday,’ says Narayan Parajuli. ‘I have only 10 students out of 65, most of them are out searching for yarchagumba.’

The Himalayan viagra harvesting season brings tens of thousands of fortune seekers to this harsh region.

Gender agenda at the Hotel Blue Sheep

Gold rush in Dolpa

The Himalayan viagra harvesting season brings tens of thousands of fortune seekers to this harsh region.

Gender agenda at the Hotel Blue Sheep

Gold rush in Dolpa

The Himalayan viagra harvesting season brings tens of thousands of fortune seekers to this harsh region.
In addition, they have to pay Rs 500 per kg. Maoists buy yarchagumba directly from the collectors as well as from local farmers. Maoists have also collected samples. The first year I sold 16 kg for Rs 12,500 per kg. The second year I collected 85 kg. Buda hasn’t looked back since, and he says yarchagumba is his main source of income.

When asked how he discovered yarchagumba, Comrade Leknath explains. The Maoists allow the Dolpal to collect a Rs 100 fee from every visitor, but if a Dolpal tries to take more than two cents from the Dolpa, he will be arrested. “A week ago there were more than 200 tenants here,” Sher Bahadur Shahi says. “Many people have gone to try their luck at this rate, yarchagumba may be driven to extinction. The gathering also destroys the park vegetation and leaves trails.”

The atmosphere is cheerful. Everybody sits around campfires. In addition, they have to pay Rs 5,000 per kg. Maoists buy yarchagumba directly from the collectors as well as from local farmers. Maoists have also collected samples. The first year I sold 16 kg for Rs 12,500 per kg. The second year I collected 85 kg. Buda hasn’t looked back since, and he says yarchagumba is his main source of income.

Walking up the small trail from Dunai to Thaage Lekh, an area near the Rukum border, there is a lot of to and fro of fortune hunters. Many are from Dolpa, but some are from distant districts, carrying baskets with tents and food. People going up are generally in a far better mood than people coming down. "I’m going home," says Bal Bahadur Rawal from Jajarkot. "Everybody told me to go to Dolpa, you’ll make lots of money." He took a loan and walked for six days, his food is finished, and he found only three pieces in three days. "I’m in big trouble," says Rawal.

The Dolpal don’t like the invasion of their district by groups from other districts, but the outsiders have the protection of the Maoists. "Everybody has the right to collect yarchagumba," Comrade Leknath explains. The Maoists allow the Dolpal to collect a Rs 100 fee from every visitor, but if a Dolpal tries to take more than two cents from the Dolpa, he will be arrested. "A week ago there were more than 200 tenants here," Sher Bahadur Shahi says. "Many people have gone to try their luck at this rate, yarchagumba may be driven to extinction. The gathering also destroys the park vegetation and leaves trails."
Why they love to hate GP

Girijababu's impatience with the left's timidity before royalty may carry a deeper meaning.

Girijababu's impatience with the left's timidity before royalty may carry a deeper meaning.
We withhold action on the proposed tourism boycott...
**The new new thing**

We need another policy-making revolution for the world's macroeconomic problems.

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**ECONOMY**

8 JUNE - 4 JULY 2003

**ANALYSIS**

by BRADFORD DELONG

The Great Depression brought John Maynard Keynes to the forefront of economic thought. The key "Keynesian" insight was that private investment spending is inherently unstable—due to fads and fashions among investors, or because of the "animal spirits" of businessmen, or because falling prices disrupt the financial system. Keynesian thought that prudent monetary policy—central banks raising and lowering interest rates to dampen fluctuations in private investment spending—could go part of the way toward stabilizing the economy. But they also believed that the government had to be willing to step in directly, through expansive fiscal policy, to keep the overall level of spending in an economy stable. Such a policy, they believed, would forever banish the specter of large-scale mass unemployment, as in the Great Depression. Moreover, such full employment might effectively be guaranteed.

The Keynesians foresaw that near-full employment raised the threat of inflation. After all, why should workers and unions moderate wage demands if governments will boost spending whenever high unemployment looms? One big danger was that high wage demands would be ignored by the government. Not, as economists now believe, that unions had no business trying to address.

But it offered no solution to the problem of structural unemployment that anew in Europe in the western part of the decade a half and demonstrated that central banks was equipped to deal with the challenges of falling prices in the context of highly leveraged firms and banks as the given prescription was to equip to deal with the challenges of inflation, the 1970s and as the 1980s, many (I was one) blamed bad decisions for the breakdown of the social-democratic systems' ability to control inflation. Politicians did not understand that expanding social insurance was the inevitable price of wage restraint, while union leaders did not understand that if corporate social democracy did not restrain inflation, political power would shift to the right and high unemployment would be used to restrict it.

The inflation of the 1970s was a natural failure of Keynesian political economy. The inflation that threatened Japan, Europe, and perhaps the US with the prospect of a long period of large gaps between potential and actual output is a natural failure of the semi-Monetarist orthodoxy that governed macroeconomic policy in the worlds industrial core since the early 1980s. We need another policy-making revolution like the Keynesian and semi-Monetarist ones, a revolution that will not literally lose sight of its predecessors' achievements, but will eliminate its natural failures. Where might that revolution come from? Perhaps the next revolution in economic will grow out of US Federal Reserve Governor Bernanke's current-long concern with asset prices, the role of adverse selection in credit markets, and the need for fundamental reforms in difficult situations to do more than consume short-term market operations. He believes that banks should try things like putting a floor beneath key long-term bond prices. Bernanke, anyone? D (© Project Syndicate)

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**Educate Sushila**

Sushila Chaudhary is nine-years-old and lives in Sonpur, Dang. She has three sisters and two brothers. Unable to take care of so many children, her family gave her away to work on a tea estate, in a household in Ghorahi. She has now been rescued and goes to school thanks to a unique sponsorship programme.

There are thousands of girls like Sushila all over Nepal who also need help. We are sponsoring the schooling of 65 girls in Dang, and all it takes is Rs 8,000 a year for each. So far, we have raised enough money to sponsor 30 of the girls, with your help we can help all of them.

This project benefits and empowers Nepali girls directly through basic education, and is undertaken by the United Nations Women's Organisation, the Dang-based Friends of Needy Children, and the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

If you want to support one, or more, of girls like Sushila, contact:

Vibha Singh at 44 71 836
Daljit Sudan at 9810 24352
Yangtzee at 9810 38264

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**Tight balancing act**

This year, the budget faces the same fiscal constraints of the past. Ineffective VAT collection is one of the biggest setbacks in improving revenue. "Regulating VAT billing remains the top challenge," admits Badri Prasad Shrestha, the previous finance minister who was working on the budget he thought he would get it present, but had to hand over to Lohani. VAT contributes only three percent of Nepal's GDP, while income tax represents barely two percent. The slight increase in revenues compared to last year is not enough to cover the Defence Ministry's demand to add Rs 2.8 billion to its budget this year. The extra money will be used to buy aircraft and equipment, and recruit soldiers, says Defence Secretary Madan Prasad Aryal. "We need to upgrade our defence capability, but let's see what Finance says." We put that to Lohani, who replied: "It will go up, but we can't compromise on security." As if that were not enough, the government is burdened with maturing foreign loans the country borrowed almost 50 years ago.

"Finance ministers are often not bothered about such loans because they have longer grace periods," says economist Bidurwam Gyawali. "But sooner or later, we have to pay them back." Debt servicing already eats up seven percent of the regular budget, and now that it is time to pay the principle the strain will show.

The World Bank and the IMF are stepping in with nearly $70 million each to bail us out through their Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. But there are strict conditions: effective implementation of reforms, privatisation and trimming the bureaucracy. These are conditions that the presently shaky Thapa administration may find too risky to push.

The two lenders also want Lohani to keep to the budget that Badri Shrestha was working on. Before finalising our aid for the PRGF, we will confirm if the budget comes out the same way we had agreed upon with the last government," Saltdwinder Singh of the IMF's Nepal office told us. Since the World Bank is working closely with IMF in the poverty reduction scheme, it will certainly follow suit. D
ECONOMY

27 JUNE - 3 JULY 2003

BIZ NEWS

Nathu La and Nepal

The agreement between India and China to open the ancient trade route between Sikkim and Tibet has sounded alarm bells for Nepali businessmen who trade with Tibet. The 4,600 m pass connects the two countries by a high-altitude motorable road. While Indian and Chinese leaders toasted each other in Beijing during Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit, Nepal's trans-Himalayan traders are worried that their business will dry up. They believe Nepal's export of rice and wheat to Tibet will decline drastically. "Tibet will increase its imports from India while our export will go down," foresees Tribhuvan Dhar Tuladhar, Vice President of Nepal Trans-Himalayan Trading Association. At the Federation of Nepal Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), businessmen foresee a gloomy picture and perhaps a repeat of the fate Kerung when the Kodari route was opened in the 1960s. Nepal imported goods worth around Rs 53 billion from Tibet during fiscal year 2000-2001.

FNCCI sponsors girl education

Nepal business is showing it has a social conscience by launching a campaign to sponsor girl children from underprivileged communities in Dang. This unique partnership between FNCCI and the United Nations Women's Organisation (UNWO) in Nepal will work with local groups in Dang to sponsor 65 girls. Businesses and individuals can sponsor one or more girls at Rs 6,000 to see them through a year of schooling. "In the long term, business will benefit from having an educated and productive workforce, for us it should be an investment in our future," says FNCCI's Suraj Vaidya. Candy Karcher of UNWO said the project was a unique partnership in which Nepal business could help Nepal children. "Education is the most important gift you can give a child, because it empowers her for life," she said.

Small is beautiful

Laxmi Bank has taken the initiative to reach small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These entrepreneurs can now supplement their investments to start a small business or to achieve growth in capacity by borrowing term and working capital funds from the bank. The financial institution has created a full-fledged SME cell to cater to their financial needs. The bank's foray into this new area follows after a successful implementation of SMEs. SMEs cater to their financial needs. The bank's foray into this new area follows after a successful implementation of manufacturing and suppliers of raw materials catering to local and multinational companies.

Fortified relaxation

The Fort Resort in Nagarkot has launched five-star packages for "over worked individuals". They range from Rs 900 per person to Rs 14,500 per couple for a day out at the resort with a three-meal plan.

Solar power

Solar batteries may be the perfect answer for areas still outside the national grid. Charging the batteries has been made easier by Sunrise Energy and Accessories. Its solar charge controller has a microprocessor that lets you choose how to juice up your battery. The device is designed and made in Nepal, and has been successfully used all over the country in the past decade.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Come together

The ANA Biplalis are gearing up for their annual do.

A fter last year’s conference in Washington DC, the Biplalis—baidins/Nepalis— in the Americas are looking forward to their annual jamboree, this time at Denver. Organised under the auspices of the Association of Nepalis in Americas (ANA), this is the highlight on many calendars. As the rate of Nepali immigration to the Americas grew in the last few decades, a diverse populace of Biplalis came into being, encompassing everyone from gas station attendants to software engineers. With only tenuous links to the motherland, finding common ground for them to relate to each other became increasingly difficult until the ANA was formed in 1983. This umbrella organisation is a forum to network and reaffirm a shared socio-cultural experience for an increasing number of Americans of Nepali origin working in the US are beginning to network informally amongst themselves. The Chalpah group in Boston is a good example. The time has come for Biplalis to realize they wield substantial potential to form a pool of human, intellectual and financial resources to be leveraged both in their adopted and native homes. Instead of executive committees ad nauseam, might the Beed suggest an informal guthi type network, with a rotation of leaders so nobody feels short-changed? That way, at Denver we can get togethe and get down to business that benefits both Biplalis and Nepalis too.

Readers can post their comments or suggestions to arthabeed@yahoo.com

It's not just soap, it's skincare!

Soft, silky & moisturised, does your soap actually deliver this feeling?

For the most part, Biplalis are patriotic and proud of their identity. Our rate of application for US citizenship is relatively low. Of course this could stem from the fact that US citizenship means forgetting Nepal’s, therefore cancelling property and ownership rights in the latter. Dual citizenship must be made possible. In our context it would be an economic and not a political issue. A floodgate of funds and opportunities can be channelled from the economic North. The Nepali government should look into the matter of dual citizenship on a country-to-country basis, beginning with the US. Our basic outlook has to change. Professionals of Nepali origin working in the US are beginning to network informally amongst themselves. The Chalpah group in Boston is a good example. The time has come for Biplalis to realize they wield substantial potential to form a pool of human, intellectual and financial resources to be leveraged both in their adopted and native homes. Instead of executive committees ad nauseam, might the Beed suggest an informal guthi type network, with a rotation of leaders so nobody feels short-changed? That way, at Denver we can get together and get down to business that benefits both Biplalis and Nepalis too.

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NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Who said the cinema could be a perfect escape. But thanks to the enormous leaps made in digital technology you can watch the latest movies from the comfort of your own sofa. All you need is a state-of-the-art system, a universal remote control, a flat LCD or plasma screen and several strategically placed speakers equipped with a Dolby surround system. These systems are now available in Kathmandu, the prices for the top-end systems may be way too high but they are not much more expensive than in Singapore or Bangkok.

Intimidated into never upgrading your couch potato tools? Afraid to invest in technology that becomes obsolete almost as soon as it is introduced? Unless you like to have the first of everything new on the market, the most practical route to buying a new entertainment system is to research the best-selling technologies. Although obsolescence is guaranteed, at least you’ll know you can upgrade and the manufacturer won’t discontinue your product. Those who bought the Betamax over the VHS in the 1980s, and LDs over CD players in the early 1990s have learned this lesson the hard way. Don’t get caught with a dead technology.

Shopping for a new entertainment system, or even just...
upgrading a few peripherals, can be an intimidating experience. You wander into a showroom and very often all you can go by is size. The fancy acronyms might well be Greek. So you let the salesman make the choice for you. Research is key, so is window shopping and sticking in the budget. Happily, many big companies offer installment schemes that don’t knock the bottom out of the budget.

Price is a big factor. The tag on a conventional flat TV is almost the same. The difference in cost is a mere Rs 2,200 between a Philips 21-inch colour TV priced at Rs 24,000 and a flat screen of the same size. Although bigger is not necessarily better, the shock-and-awe quotient of the Crocodile Hunter is certainly boosted when seen on a 50-inch plasma screen which can set you back a cool Rs 1.5 million. Some are almost as big as a car and they can take up places and rooms you would never consider.

Analogue entertainment—the way of the Cathode Ray Tube screen, VHS and cassette tapes—don’t have a punch on digital quality. The pictures are sharper, the sound crystal clear and you can manipulate exactly what and how you want everything to be set. Besides, rewinding is a cinch. So is setting it up. There are no endless wires snaking under the carpet and for the most part it’s as easy as plug-and-play.

Manufacturers are getting smarter. TV sets are being manufactured in such a way that it can easily be made compatible for the technological advances in the future. Saurav Jyet of Jyoti Group, the authorised dealer of Philips, believes consumers should think about the future. “These TV sets can be adapted for receiving digital transmissions if Nepali broadcasters start down that road,” he says. Should that happen, all we need to change is cable, from coaxial to fibre optic, and possibly even wonderful wireless technology. Even if Nepal doesn’t get on the information highway, it is likely that the information highway will come to us.

Of course this doesn’t mean we are stuck in the past. Distributors and retailers are seeing a marked change in consumption patterns. Nepalis are rapidly educating themselves and adopting newer technologies. Video Compact Disc (VCD) players have almost completely replaced the VCRs that used the VHS systems. Digital Video Disc (DVD) is catching on and when that reaches critical mass you can be certain the rest will go the way of the dinosaurs. Jyet predicts very soon DVDs will take over VCDs.

“People can tell the difference in quality and know a better buy when they see it,” he says.

The more-for-less approach is always a winner for consumers and DVD players today are uniquely positioned for this. They are compatible with VCDs, CDs and MP3s, which is why buyers are splitting for a system that does it all and paying upwards of Rs 40,000. A branded DVD player costs a little over Rs 10,000 while a Chinese knock-off is between Rs 7,000-8,000. A surprising new trend, the techno-savvy lot at Jyoti International tells us, is buying multimedia projectors for the home. Restricted earlier almost exclusively to corporate use, these projector can interface with DVD, VCD and PCs are addictive. “Once you develop a taste for watching movies on these you’ll never really go back to anything else,” says Dr. Anand Bajracharya at Jyoti who has sold about 60 Optoma projectors in a year. At Rs 180,000 it’s obvious the buyers don’t put a premium on their entertainment.

In the past most people paid more attention to the visual part of the audio-visual equation. Not anymore. They are fine-tuning their entertainment systems for optimum sound quality which is why ‘home entertainment’ packages thrown in five Dolby 5.1 system equipped speakers and a hooter to boost the already brilliant DVD quality. Of course it doesn’t come cheap at Rs 50,000 for the Samsung model, but for connoisseurs it is truly being cradled by perfectly balanced sound. By installing them at home you will have what you hear while watching movies in Jai Nepal Cinema, says Sheshar Golecha, the authorised dealer for Samsung and Daewoo.

If you want better, why then, you need only ask—Dolby Digital DTS and DTI AC are all available. The demand for a theatre experience at home is growing, and competition is stiff among suppliers although all of them average annual TV sales between 50,000 and 60,000. Major international companies have showrooms in Kathmandu: Samsung, Philips, Daewoo, Sony and LG. This works to the advantage of the consumer in terms of price, after-sales services and warranties. Think about it: no more queues, no more cell-phones ringing in the middle of the show and no spoilsport giving away the ending. Now all you have to do is organise a long, tall drink, roll down the blinds, let the dogs out and enjoy the movie.

The quality of sound… I found best on Samsung.”

Abhin K. Bhattarai
The Iraq quagmire

Terrorism can obtain microbes and viruses from inadequately protected foreign laboratories, or by bribing scientific workers in the remnants of the Russian biological warfare system, or from international sources. The World Health Organization has created a global network of national laboratories that do early detection work, and manages on a meagre annual budget of roughly $400 million.

Another crucial area for assistance is the Cooperative Threat Reduction effort, which provides funds to help improve the control and destruction of weapons-grade materials in former Soviet countries. These programs, too, are under-funded, although there was an agreement in principle at the G-8 summit in Canada last year for ten countries to provide an additional $10 billion over the next ten years.

Somewhat more controversial is the question of what aid to development is appropriate for the former Soviet states. Such investments are a clear case of coincidence between self-interest and charity. A particularly important type of assistance is in helping other countries to develop capabilities to deal with weapons of mass destruction. In the case of biological agents, world public health has become a security issue.

In such instances, military assistance may be relevant. In others, intervention may be necessary. Intelligence sharing and police cooperation is often the most effective front line of defence. Because of the sensitivity of sources and the dangers of disclosure, much of this work is carried out through bilateral arrangements. Multilateral cooperation is possible in tracing financial flows, which can help to deprive terrorists of resources as well as provide useful information. Devoting more resources to under-funded agencies like Interpol can also enhance information sharing. Working to raise the thresholds that terrorists must overcome requires a systemic approach, such as plugging one hole can simply divert terrorists to others. Our societies are as vulnerable as the weakest and least internationalized systems. It makes no sense to keep a huge airport secure in London if a terrorist can enter the system easily in, say, Rome or Lagos.

Because modern societies are similar in their vulnerabilities, countries have a great deal to learn from each other’s mistakes and best practices. Governments should establish regular contacts and joint exercises among agencies responsible for both the technical and policy decisions of homeland security. Homeland security is an international issue. Aid and assistance can be used to strengthen the capacities of poor countries already involved in these transnational systems. Such investments are a crucial tool for “draining the swamp.” But sceptics challenge whether poverty lies at the root of terrorism. They point out that most of the terrorists who attacked America on September 11 were middle-class citizens of a relatively wealthy country. If we must wait for development assistance to raise the world from poverty as the answer to terrorism, we will all be dead. Both sides of this argument have been weakened by the belief that policies of development are out of line with the time horizons of counter-terrorism, but terrorist groups are often led by well-off deviants who—like Osama bin Laden—may be pointing out the world’s injustices. Development assistance that helps terrorist groups can help deprive terrorist leaders of such arguments by showing that policies are aligned with the long-term aspirations of the poor. It is important to provide the prospect of hope, both in material terms and in our policies towards intractable conflicts such as those in the Middle East and Kashmir.

US military success in Iraq was dazzling, but the metaphor of a military victory is divorced from context. Forget peace: this is a large difference in being made. But technological destruction on the subcontinent is aazzling military victories, and no silver bullet in the struggle against terrorism.

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Indian troops to Iraq?

Cauthed between the two forces, the Indian government is desperately looking for a 'flagship' such as authorisation for the troops' dispatch from the UN Security Council. For this, it is a test case for diplomatic fancy footwork and spin-doctoring. New Delhi would like to depict military cooperation with the occupation powers in Iraq as a variant of a peacekeeping operation. It would like to get around the problem of a US-dominated command structure by asking for an autonomous operating area or zone for Indian troops. Coalition partners of the ruling pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, including Defence Minister George Fernandes' Samata Party, are opposed to the proposal.

The reason why the Indian government wants to collaborate with the United States in Iraq has to do with its eagerness to seal a long-term military alliance with Washington and oust Pakistan. India is also keen to buy top-of-the-line US and Israeli military equipment, including missile-defence systems and the 'Patriot' missile.

The United States is keen to hold joint exercises with Indian forces and establish access to military bases. According to a Pentagon report, quoted by US defence specialist John Carbaugh: "American military officers are candid in their plans to eventually seek access to Indian bases and military infrastructure."

A new beat

BANGKOK – Thailand's national police force will soon have another beat—the support and 'protection' of the development of a long-disputed gas pipeline project with neighbouring Malaysia. The estimated 400,000 – 500,000-bedroom industry explains why the police have to deal with the groundswell of opposition to the Thai-Malaysian pipeline project from local communities.

The security force will help in the surveillance of a two-inch gas separation plant inSongkhla, is due to be completed in 2006 at an estimated cost of $565 million. But available reports point to some 10,000 lives being lost.

A study conducted pointed out that "realisation of this labour is not a viable option unless new avenues and opportunities are created." One impediment is that there are few work alternatives and few pay as much. Children are the mainstay of the industry. The current wages are between three and five cents per bag of 350 bunches. In a day, an individual may pick between 20 and 35 bunches. The average monthly household income for families whose children are employed was estimated to be $30,000.

"We have to deal with the groundswell of opposition to the Thai-Malaysian pipeline project from local communities. The Thai government has granted a 20-year licence to a joint venture involving two Thai companies and a Malaysian firm to construct, operate, own and finance the pipeline. The Thai-Malaysian pipeline project has been in limbo since the Thai-Malaysian pipeline project was approved in 1998. The Thai government has been under pressure from local communities to scrap the project."

Indian public opinion and the political opposition is set against sending troops to Iraq and bestowing legitimacy on what it regards as a US-led battle for Iraq. Public opinion was made known by the Save the Children report "Poverty and Power: The real significance of the war on terror." The report states that poverty leaves the families with few options for the family other than work. The economic reality, the Save the Children report concluded, is that poverty leaves few options for the family other than for the children to lend a hand in income generation."

Bangle manacles

NEW DELHI: The national police force will soon have another beat—the support and 'protection' of the development of a long-disputed gas pipeline project with neighbouring Malaysia. The estimated 400,000 – 500,000-bedroom industry explains why the police have to deal with the groundswell of opposition to the Thai-Malaysian pipeline project from local communities.

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The long road home

Ajoy Kala


Kiran Pokhrel: What is your reaction to the results of the classification of Bhutani refugees?

Tejawati Rizal: After suffering so much in Bhutan and living as refugees in Nepal for the last 15 years, Bhutan has put us back to square one. The results of the classification are not satisfactory. It’s not just us here in Nepal, even within Bhutan people are against this.

But now it is clear that Bhutan acknowledges the problem. Shouldn’t this be taken positively?

I thank the Nepali government for this. Its efforts made Bhutan accept that they err. No matter what reason they give, whether they say we are retreated from Bhutan or came here of our own free will, they have at least accepted that we are Bhutanis. But there is not enough. We have lost our relatives, our property. The sacrifices we made for the Bhutani monarchy have not been recognised. Although I am satisfied with what the Nepali government has done for us they cannot leave us hanging in the middle. What I do not like is the government of Nepal offering us citizenship. If Bhutan will not take us back...

Will the 293 out of 12,000 refugees from Khudarubani certified as Bhutani return to Bhutan?

No, they will not. How can just these 293 people return? We will have to leave some members of our families behind because they did not qualify. When we were driven out we were separated from our families, now if we go back we will be further divided.

What is the next step?

This is what I wanted to ask you in the media. What can we do now? We have never gone against an issue or been silent. I am only talking of our basic human rights. They shot us, beat us, put us in jail and finally drove us out. The world remained a silent witness. The king has absolute power. He can appoint a poor or a minister and demand them to do so. Those who drive us out are the ones who are in power. They are the same people who come here to say who is Bhutan and who is not. Will they take responsibility for us when we return to Bhutan?

There is not a single representative from southern Bhutan in the courts or the administration, no one to speak for us. If the UNHCR, the Indian government or UN stands guarantee for our safety and sees to the return of our ancestral land and property, then we will certainly return to Bhutan.

So you will agree to go back if the UNHCR is involved? Won’t there be an international agency to monitor things anywhere?

No, Bhutan will not involve any international observers because the king is orchestrating all this. His ministers are involved in the verification and classification process, which is acceptable, but we must give us in writing that we were his subjects before, we still are, that we had to suffer because of the mistakes his ministers made. He must personally guarantee our dignity and safety. There have been many cases of people returning to Bhutan for nothing.

How crucial is India’s role? Until and unless India is involved the problem will never be resolved. India made Bhutan what it is. The Indians implemented the fourth development plan for southern Bhutan, not just in the technical aspects but also in the administrative side. They know everything, but they choose to keep their eyes closed. Yesterday Bhutan drove us out by creating a green belt. Today they are using the terrorist belt to drive people out again. Indian terrorists are entering Bhutan and creating havoc.

Until and unless India is involved the problem will never be solved. India made Bhutan what it is. The Indians implemented the third development plan for southern Bhutan, not just in the technical aspects but also in the administrative side. They know everything, but they choose to keep their eyes closed. Yesterday Bhutan drove us out by creating a green belt.

How can the situation be remedied? The Nepali government and the government must now attempt to get the ball rolling again. His Majesty’s Government has already sent a formal request to the American Senate to reconsider the tax subsidy bill. Entrepreneurs, you must launch a movement through their lobby explaining that Nepal was under pressure from our northern neighbour to deport the refugees. We must convince America that our actions were prompted by immense distress from other forces and we are willing to work at creating a positive atmosphere.

What is our position in the American market? We have always looked towards Europe to export our carpets, but trade hasn’t been what we expected. What is our position in the American market?

“Not incompetent”

Nepali Samacharpatra, 26 June

Excerpt from an interview with Sher Bahadur Deuba.

His Majesty labelled you incompetent when he dismissed your government last year. Why should an incompetent government be reinstated?

I am not incompetent. I dissolved the House of Representatives and announced election dates. Even at the election we were prepared to go ahead with elections but the political parties failed and said the situation wasn’t right. They suggested we form a government that would include them and possibly the Maoists. All of them had collectively agreed on this course of action. I acted according to them because I was following through on their suggestions. The events that followed the royal move have proved that the accusations the king levelled against me were false. If I was really worried about elections he would have announced a date on the very day my government was deposed. He should have been able to hold the elections I couldn’t. My removal from office had nothing to do with elections, which is why my government should be reinstated.

Then why were you made to step down?

The main reason for my removal was the king’s desire for a return to absolute monarchy... I will not hold grudges against the king, neither will I call him incompetent…

Will the present agitation by the political parties turn the tables?

I would not like to point fingers at anyone, but the truth is that when I was dismissed, all the main leaders of the other political parties hoped to become the next prime minister. The scales fell off their eyes only when the king approached them. Lekendra Bahadur Chaud with the post. Then they understood that Deuba’s removal was motivated by the king’s desire for power. In a way their struggle is good.

Will it be enough to bring back the people’s power? The Maoists spend for war and did the king. The people want peace at whatever cost. Nepal and Nepal still suffer from terrorism. That is why political parties cannot mangle peace and go to war. It is critical they choose peaceful ways of showing their dissent.

Nepal is swaying between calls for a republic and a possible return to monarchy. The country is not ready to become a republic. Our party is not willing to push for a republican system. We hope to put the king in his place through a peaceful resolution.

Trading places

Rajdhani, 26 June

Excerpts of an interview with Prahlad KC, representative of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce in America.

What happened to the Nepali garment import bill?

Unfortunately the bill that was proposed in the American Senate for a tax subsidy to Nepali garment imports was rejected because of the controversy surrounding the 18 Tibetan refugees being sent back China. Hollywood is enamoured of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and it wise from that lobby that the must pressure came to squelch the bill. But it wasn’t passed only because of the deportation of the refugees.

How can the situation be remedied? The Nepali garment industry and the government must now attempt to get the bill rolling again. His Majesty’s Government has already sent a formal request to the American Senate to reconsider the tax subsidy bill. Entrepreneurs, you must launch a movement through their lobby explaining that Nepal was under pressure from our northern neighbour to deport the refugees. We must convince America that our actions were prompted by immense distress from other forces and we are willing to work at creating a positive atmosphere.

What is our position in the American market? We have always looked towards Europe to export our carpets, but trade hasn’t been what it used to be in the past. Nepal must therefore look to America and spend as much time and money investigating the market here as we have done in Europe.
Back at Sundarijal >38

‘I miss GM a great deal.’

7 April, 1977
Sundarijal

I don’t know how GM is passing his time in the next jail. He has no books except one Nepali to Nepali dictionary. He is perhaps writing. He sent for some paper clips and pins from me. I think he has a... of fuselage size paper and a dot pen with a refill. When he was being taken away he was told by the officer that he would be brought back again to his jail to be lodged with me after a week or so. And he even suggested that he could leave his things which he won’t need for a few days urgently. Hence GM’s suitecase, a handbag, and bedding, hold all and some dolai are left in his room here. But the kind of arrangement that has been made for them in the new jail specially constructed for him in a record time doesn’t suggest that he has been taken away only for a short duration.

I miss him a great deal. He is not very pleasurable company because he is too strongly self-willed, which not a very endearing qualification of companionship, and he tried to impress his style of life on others. But he is a man of sterling quality. He is absolutely free from any superiority complex. I don’t believe it is not to do manual work if occasion demanded. Of late he has given up considerably using strong language against his opponents and has considerably softened in his rigid political stand. He has been a source of a great political strength to me. He is totally identified with my line. He has one great quality, he takes long to be convinced, but once he is convinced you can depend on him to adhere to it to the end. In the beginning, he was not convinced of the reasoning of our present political line, but once he was convinced, he hasn’t shown any sign of wavering. As a matter of fact, even when I am sometimes assailed with doubts, he remains firm in his conviction. The govt has deprived me of his company and now I have nobody to discuss my ideas with. I don’t think he will be bought back here to rejoin me. I hope and pray that GM will be all right.

I am feeling lonely today. In the afternoon there was no electricity, hence I couldn’t prepare my tea. I prepare my tea—altho it is only for one—and that too to be taken in loneliness. I prepare with some elaboration—the way Mahabir does things. Since I can’t prepare the afternoon tea for there was no electricity. I suffered from a sense of worklessness and the time hung more heavily with me. I spent the day with extreme boredom and loneliness.

BP Koirala worries about Ganesh Man Singh in the next cell, and wonders how he is faring. He also analyses his comrade-in-arms and pays tribute to Ganesh Man’s tenacity, conviction and commitment to the cause. Since both are now in solitary confinement, BP rues: ‘Now I have no one to discuss my ideas with.’ There are continuous worries about BP’s health, he coughs blood and a doctor is brought in.

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Sudhas Rai has been drawing ever since he can remember. The draughtsmanship in itself seems to come easily to him, but like all professionals he grapples with the universal dilemma: does my work make any difference?

Journalists who work with words go through throes of such existential angst, too. After ten years of writing, they sometimes assailed with doubts, he remains firm in his conviction. The govt has deprived me of his company and now I have nobody to discuss my ideas with. I don’t think he will be bought back here to rejoin me. I hope and pray that GM will be all right.

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A cartoon is worth a thousand words

Subhas Rai’s cartoons and graphics have been the common feature of HIMAL. Khabarpatrika and this newspaper for the past four years. By training himself in the latest computer graphics techniques, Rai’s illustrations have a worldwide class finish. But he has never abandoned the basic skills of an artist to the short-cuts and gimmicks of Quark Express. Rai’s basic work is still done laboriously pen-in-hand on a piece of paper, and scanned for computer printing.

Subhas Rai is one of Nepal’s most versatile cartoonists. In the collection of his cartoons on peace (Peace Keeping) released this week, he drives home the message of non-violence and tolerance more than words could ever do.

Rai’s distinctive and relaxed touch, and vivid imagery are familiar to readers of Nepali Times. But in this book, Rai expands field of interest to include conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iraq, India, Pakistan and Nepal. Every image forces us to reflect on the subject of peace and non-violence, and the humour gives hope for the future.

HISTORY AND CULTURE
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Review
by SANJEEV MISHRA
**NEPAL TIMES #151**

**Neaplace Cartoons: a portfolio of cartoons of Nepal by representative cartoonists**

Ram Karna Pandey
Ratna Puriak, 1997

**The cartoons as a genre of satirical drawing in the occidental and now universal sense appeared late to Nepal. The modern history of the cartoons, through short, has a strong functional basis. The author, a writer and cartoonist too, presents contemporary Nepali cartoons in a timeline and accompanies it with a lively analysis.**

**CLASSIFIED**

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**NEPALI WEATHER**

*by NAGAMINDRA DAHAL*

After a weak start, the monsoon is picking up strength and has now covered the whole of Nepal from east to west. This satellite image taken on Thursday afternoon shows that the rains will take a breather, and the next monsoon pulse will arrive early next week. 19th then, expect clear bright mornings, warm days and showers towards the evening and night. The Bay of Bengal branch of the monsoon is getting distracted and dropping its moisture over northeast India, while the Asian sea branch has been vigorous and pumping water vapour into western Nepal.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

- ** radio@radiosagnamtha.org, www.radiosagnamtha.org**
JANAKI GURUNG

ne fall out from the 50th anniversary hoilis of the ascent of Everest last month is that many Nepali youngsters suddenly want to learn to climb. And they are not just Sherpas.

So, the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) climbing school in Manang (see pic, below) is gearing up to meet the rush. In addition, a group of veteran Nepali climbers have set up the Nepal Mountaineering Instructor Association (NMA) with the view to encourage Nepal's youth to discover the wilderness, learn basic climbing techniques and undergo survival training.

NMA was set up last year by three-time Everest summiteers, (from left to right in picture taken at the NMA launch this week, below) Ushapa Sherpa, Pemha Gyajin Sherpa, Ang-Nobu sherpa and Dorge Lama. The group's professional instructors carry out training on rock climbing in Cheowar in Sohi Khumbu and in Nagautan and Hatiban in Kathmandu. Ice and glacier traverse training is done in Langtang, basic mountaineering courses are carried out in Manang while advanced mountaineering courses take place in Thame.

"Mountaineering in Nepal is changing, it is no longer just about high altitude poring to make a living," says Padam Singh Ghaley of the instructors' association. "Many Nepalis now want to climb for the love of it, and there is tremendous lack of proper training.

"There are a lot of benefits. Managers learn to work together, they gain self-confidence and they become better at problem-solving," says Ghaley. "This is not just about climbing, it prepares them to deal with life's adversities, and they also gain knowledge about the survival, search and rescue and altitude sickness. We hope the book will spread knowledge about safe climbing to a larger Nepali public," Ghaley told us. "NMA is already self-sufficient because of the royalty it receives from trekking peak fees, and a part of its mandate is to popularise mountaineering activities among Nepali students and youngsters, according to its president, Ang-Tiering Sherpa. "We want to spread awareness at both the national and international levels to preserve the beauty and challenge of the Himalaya," he says. NMA is currently fundraising for its training programs, and is subcontracted by the NMA to carry out some of its courses, like the one in Langang and Manang. "It is a mutually beneficial partnership," says Dawa Gombu. NMA also wants to branch out and offer hiking and trekking experiences for schools in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bhutan so that Nepali children can learn about their country. "The program will introduce Nepali children to trekking, mountaineering and basic techniques and wilderness survival training," explains Ghaley.

There are also inquiries from corporate groups in Nepal to organise challenging outdoor activities for their senior managers and executives. Business houses in Britain, France and the US regularly bring senior staff to Nepal for trekking to train them in teamwork, and NMA thinks it can do the same for Nepali corporate houses.

There are a lot of benefits: managers learn to work together, they gain self-confidence and they become better at problem-solving," says Ghaley. "This is not just about climbing, it prepares them to deal with life's adversities, and they also get to learn a lot about the diversity of their own country which is an added bonus," he says. NMA is currently fundraising for its training programs, and is subcontracted by the NMA to carry out some of its courses, like the one in Langang and Manang. "It is a mutually beneficial partnership," says Dawa Gombu. NMA also wants to branch out and offer hiking and trekking experiences for schools in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bhutan so that Nepali children can learn about their country. "The program will introduce Nepali children to trekking, mountaineering and basic techniques and wilderness survival training," explains Ghaley.

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CORRECTIONS

It is our duty, as journalists, to adhere to the truth as far as humanly possible. But, now and then, we make mistakes. Who doesn’t? And when we do, it is part of our strict journalistic Code of Ethics to be honest and hope no one noticed. Just kidding. Actually, we issue a correction and publish it at the bottom of page 37 where you need a magnifying glass to see it.

It may be a tiny typo or a huge grammatical error, either way the important thing is to alert all unsuspecting citizens about the blunder, acknowledge our short coming, and learn from our mistakes so we can move on to make even greater ones. Such is life. This is why it is incumbent upon the Nepali media to examine and rectify its erratum. For the public record, we hereby publish the following corrections:

1. A small typographical error crept into an article last Saturday about Kathmandu being developed as an International Humour Centre. Heh-heh. Sorry for that funny mistake. In actual fact, the city is developing into an International Tumour Centre.

2. A picture caption in the Entertainment Section misidentified a new eatery in New Road as the Revolutionary Restaurant and Bar, it is in fact the Revolutionary Restaurant and Bar run by the ANNUS(R). The terror is deeply regretted.

3. Due to confusion in the newsroom, the prime minister was incorrectly identified in yesterday’s editorial as Sher Bahadur Thapa. The present premier is actually the Right Honourable Lokendra Bahadur Dhakal. We apologise to both prime ministers.

4. Several readers have been rushed to the ICU after trying out the weight-loss formula in our Lifestyle Section last week. The sentence ‘Take 6 oz of Kathmandu water straight off the tap, remove all unidentified floating objects, and drink it. The ensuing dysentery will guarantee you will lose 10 kg in one week.’ was supposed to be a joke, silly. Any incontinence is regretted.

5. The Five-Party Alliance against Regression (FPAR) has just informed us that a news item in yesterday’s edition announcing the launch of the 148th Phase of their street agitation was a huge mistake. They shouldn’t have done it.

6. Because of an editing error, an article by Chicken Little on page one of the Sunday edition gave the impression that the world had ended. We are happy to report that the world is still very much around, according to a higher up authority. “We’ll let you know if and when we decide to terminate the world,” the Almighty said in a statement, read out by a spokesperson.

7. Several readers have been rushed to the ICU after trying out the weight-loss formula in our Lifestyle Section last week. The sentence ‘Take 6 oz of Kathmandu water straight off the tap, remove all unidentified floating objects, and drink it. The ensuing dysentery will guarantee you will lose 10 kg in one week.’ was supposed to be a joke, silly. Any incontinence is regretted.

8. We apologise to the UML General Secretary for a major national crisis triggered by our headline “Thrashed Badly”. The article was actually about the major national crisis triggered by our headline “Annus(R). The terror is deeply regretted.

9. A huge mistake. They shouldn’t have done it. Due to a fact-checking error, reports in our Obituary Section yesterday of the death of Mr. Twain were exaggerated. After a strenuous workout, Mr. Twain actually felt only half-dead.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Many Nepalis are doing well for themselves in the field of Information Technology. Some work for Nokia in Finland, others are up-and-coming names in Silicon Valley. But few ever uproot themselves and come back to their homeland to make a difference. One such Nepali is Suresh Ojha (pic. below). A wireless systems design engineer on the fast track at Hewlett Packard, Suresh lives and works in the San Francisco Bay area. At the age of eight he moved to the US with his parents, and in all the years that followed he never quite forgot his childhood memories of growing up in a Newar neighbourhood in the Valley. “I decided I couldn’t face myself if I didn’t do anything for Nepal,” he says.

After a visit to Nepal, Suresh was convinced that Nepal had great potential in the IT field to bridge the digital divide. He set up the Nepal Information Technology Task Force of Silicon Valley with the help of a few other Nepali engineers and American friends. The purpose was to usher in the wireless revolution, and let Nepal’s IT industry leapfrog technology. “Given Nepal’s terrain and financial restrictions, wireless technology can be hugely beneficial,” says Suresh.

The conviction led his group to bring in $500,000 worth of radio frequency and microwave testing equipment for the Institute of Engineering (IoE) at Tribhuvan University. The IoE will now have a wireless lab that is more sophisticated than most labs at US universities. Suresh is currently taking time off till December to teach wireless engineering here. “Very soon wireless technology will replace cable-based technology all over the world. The beauty of it is that though it is more sophisticated than cable-based technology, it is less expensive and most suited to Nepal,” he says.

He is convinced Nepal is on the edge of something wonderful. “I believe in the calibre of Nepalis to succeed, but it requires effort. This is a test case, there are people willing to help us. In the end, it is the Nepalis alone who can make it work.” (Alok Tumbahangphey)

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