RIZAL

On Friday, Bhutani democracy activist Teknath Rizal will be on the fourth day of his hunger strike to protest Thimphu’s refusal to take back 100,000 refugees evicted 13 years ago. Rizal wants India and the international community to show more humanitarian concern and political will to resolve the crisis. Speaking on Thursday, “I feel a bit dizzy and am cold. But I am not going to give up until our people can return to their homeland. Nepali political party activists who launched their own anti-royal agitation, and human rights activists have been visiting Rizal to provide moral support.

Nepal’s three powers are off in three different directions. While King Gyanendra was hugging babies in Lamjung, political parties were marching on his palace in Kathmandu and the Maoists were coming to terms with new threats to their free movement in India.

The king tried to defuse the political anger in his Pokhara address on Sunday by calling for poll preparations in the new Nepali year. The parties immediately saw it as yet another royal trick, and launched a more aggressive phase of their agitation to mark the anniversary of the 1990 People’s Movement next week.

There is also a military stalemate. The Maoists proved they are able to inflict frontal attacks on hill towns and are gearing up to paralyse the country next week with a three-day banda.

Political leaders reflect these rifts. “The king and parties must come together to deal with the Maoists,” says Rajeswar Debkota, leader of the anti-Thapa RPP. “I see no problem with the king going around the country to meet his subjects.” Nepali Congress leader Sushil Koirala sees machinations behind the royal tours. “The felicitations show just how insensitive the king is toward the present political turmoil,” he told us on Thursday. “We are not going to budge until parliament is restored and an all-party government formed.”

Meanwhile, civil society groups this week unveiled a three-option roadmap for peace that includes elections, a referendum and constituent assembly. The ideas have been forwarded to the Maoist leadership, the political parties and the government.

KUNDA DIXIT

Parties are blocked while trying to march to the royal palace, while King Gyanendra tours the country.
It has been three years since the Maoists made their first attack on a district headquarters in Doni in September 2000. Since then, there have been Jumla, Mahottari, Sankhuwasabha, Sankhu, Bhujang and now Beni. They have also suffered defeats: Ramjugar, Kapurbhat, Katame, Kusim and Bhelungthor. Bhujang and Beni were not just a Maoist demonstration that they are not yet militarily vanquished. They were also the first attacks after the police, armed police and army have been put under a unified command. The Maoists have pin-pointed their warfare techniques and showed that their tactic of using overwhelming numbers to overrun district headquarters still works. Last January, when the Maoists agreed to a ceasefire, they claimed to have reached a ‘strategic equilibrium’ with the army. A year later, it looks as though they are now in equilibrium with the government to agree to a ceasefire, rebuild morale in their ranks and increase their strength. The three-pronged Maoist strategy has been to launch major offensives in the hill towns, support that with mobilisation along the tarai and sue attacks in Kathmandu Valley for publicity value. Mao’s ‘strategic offensive’ is a well-thought-out plan. They have learnt that the prolonging the strategic offensive allows government forces time to rearm and regroup. The Maoists have agreed to a ceasefire, rebuild morale in their ranks and increase their strength. The three-pronged Maoist strategy has been to launch major offensives in the hill towns, support that with mobilisation along the tarai and sue attacks in Kathmandu Valley for publicity value. Mao’s ‘strategic offensive’ is a well-thought-out plan. They have learnt that the prolonging the strategic offensive allows government forces time to rearm and regroup.

Maoist hummer last week in Sindupalchok announcing the ‘Juice Royal American Army’

Yubraj Hirmi's ‘Scandalous silence’ (# 188) highlights the dilemma faced by the mainstream political parties whose campaign against the so-called ‘royal regression’ is slow but surely losing steam. Owning up to their past mistakes (as some of them have done belatedly) will achieve nothing but further damage to their already shattered credibility. The Nepali people might be willing to forgive their wrongdoings, but very few people would trust them again with the reins of power. By saying the political parties must convince the people that they no longer think the king is the villain of this piece, but a partner in the problem, they seem to be swaying the clear message to the politicians if you can’t fight them, join them! ‘Arjun’, email

Maoist gameplay

All signs point to a protracted conflict in which the Maoists try to improve their bargaining position in future talks

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam

In the past, the Maoist threat was a ‘bloody, headline-grabbing attacks’. Whatever the Maoists may claim about their ‘strategic offensive’, it is clearly a military stalemate. Since it entered the fray in November 2001, the Royal Nepali Army has not really launched any major offensive against the Maoins. In fact they have been defensive, reacting with cordon-and-search and blocking manoeuvres after Maoist attacks, and raiding hideouts. Such limited action doesn’t shorten a war, it lengthens it.

At the international level, the Maoists are still engaging with the Nepali and the mainstream political parties. They allow royal solicitudes to come to the government, providing the opportunity for the king to talk to the parties. Then they waken up the mainstream political parties, trying to get them to stop the anti-regression street agitators to greater radicalism. All this while they kill and threaten grassroots political parties.

At the international level, the Maoists are still engaging with the Nepali and the mainstream political parties. They allow royal solicitudes to come to the government, providing the opportunity for the king to talk to the parties. Then they waken up the mainstream political parties, trying to get them to stop the anti-regression street agitators to greater radicalism. All this while they kill and threaten grassroots political parties.

But surely the Maoists have yet to toy with the mass movement for the past year without any result. It is very surprising none of the political parties, the Maoists or even the columnists and reporters in your paper have credited or realized that the ‘brown colour power’ that will ultimately decide the fate of the kingdom, is in the hands of the Maoists. It is the common people who took for the ouster of the panchayat with their life and ushered in the parties to power.

These very people are ignored, this time in their ‘anti-regression’ struggle. It is punishment for the 12 % of mindse. No matter how well your columnists present their thoughts, views and arguments in very readable articles with sound analysis and forecasts, it is the people who finally win or lose for right and country and they can’t be swayed by self-appointed opinion makers or outside pressure. These people, in their infinite
The call of duty, loyalty towards leadership and the privileges of patronage are values all totalitarian ideologies seek to cultivate. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia had Brother Number One, the Chinese Communists had their Chairman and North Korea’s Juche followers have their Dear Leader, Comrade Prachanda calls himself ‘president’.

In totalitarian as well as authoritarian systems, there is no place for dissent of any kind. If the insurgents think certain human rights activists are sympathetic towards political parties, they will not be allowed to enter areas under their control. Ganech Chhetri was killed because he had the courage to warn the inefficiences of Maoist divisions. Authoritarian monarchists may show a higher degree of tolerance (the fact their lines are even allowed to be published is a sign) but they refuse to extend the minimum standards towards politics preaching the values of democracy. Unlike his earlier speeches in Biratnagar, Dhangadi, and Nepalgunj, King Gyanendra refrained from criticising the political parties in Pokhara. But palace-friendly propagandists are still as skillful in denouncing the struggle for the restoration of people’s sovereignty.

Prachanda speech failed to incite spontaneous applause from the sparse audience that stood in the fierce sun. Pokhara and its environs were closed down by a Maoist bandana, and the king failed to come up with ideas to resolve the conflict, or raise hopes for the restoration of democratic order. Other than a vague call on everyone concerned to “create the environment” for elections to be held within next twelve months, a royal commitment to constitutional monarchy and people’s sovereignty was missing. The result is that the king appears as resident at ever to protect the ‘historical legacy’ of his “great forefathers”. The alliance, not a promise in any way, of polls needs to be seen in that perspective. Such an assuaging adherence to tradition is quite natural for monarchists. Practitioners of democratic politics draw their inspiration from the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity). The monarchists’ chant of duty, loyalty, and paternalism also seems to have a Gallic origic: the Vichy dogma of ‘travail, famille, patrie’. These are values that King Gyanendra has been stressing since the day he took over on 4 October:

The Manins and monarchists may be fighting for their own interests, but their values are essentially the same primary of arms, the undisputed supremacy of the ruler, one ideology and an unquestioned command of the people. With such convergence, no wonder monopolies dry away from directly criticizing the Manins.

Politics, however, is about pluralism. In a dynamic society, values must compete. A clash of values and divergent views is natural in social systems. Totalitarian despots seek to crush such dissent through intimidation and terror. Authoritarian rulers try to suppress it through a combination of inducement and fear. But both have a common abhorrence for the contest of ideas.

News reports this week that Maoist leaders are in constant touch with the Royal Nepali Army top brass is therefore quite plausible. A temporary truce between the two isn’t as unlikely as it appears. The monarchists and Manins therefore have a fundamental disagreement with democratic mainstreamers: it is a conflict of values over the principles of governance, a contest between the power of the bullet and the ballot. This is an irrevocable dissonance.

The insistence by diplomats from donor countries that all constitutional forces must get together to fight the insurgents is flawed. The king has no patience for a constitutional role, and the political parties can’t see how a constitutional role can end the challenges to democracy. To balance anarchy and monarchy, mainstream politicians must be restored to centerstage. Pathways of progress are full of twists and turns. The king’s cry of peace—shaast ko riapaniko—is no road map. It is a mirage.

Elections are important, but the reactivation of constitutional processes through the reinstatement of parliament is even more imperative.
Fat food nation?

Selling sex to survive

Some have observed that the West of full of fat people wanting to be skinny, while people in developing countries would love to grow a paunch and wobble a bit. Like all aphorisms, there are elements of truth here. I'd like to take it one step further. In America, the poor are overweight and rich are slim and trim. Nepalis, Botswanans and Americans have wooden cubicles with a girl already9

Fat food nation?

HARESH NEHWAR

A recent study rings alarm bells for an overweight society. Much of the security let you in, are chockablock with restaurants offer, and shocked by the huge plates of food that

USA. Drive the backstreets of various Miami neighborhoods, as I do, and judge the quality of food energy. The less said about the national habit of dining out and then driving to a fast-food restaurant and chucking it. At cabin restaurants in Maiti Devi, several girls and women told us that they default in villages looking for

Maiti Devi, Kalanki, Rato Pul and Chaktal are bright with the glittering lights of restaurants blaring Hindi songs. Inside, the restaurants have wooden cubicles with a girl already attached to them. Some of the girls start teasing her: “Look at me, I’m skinny, while people from developing

Selling sex to survive

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Fat food nation?

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major concern. Migration, prostitution and unprotected sex are a deadly combination in a valley that is already known for 50 percent HIV infection among injecting drug users. “But there is no alternative for the girls, and the government is not coming up with solutions except arresting them in sweeps,” says an anti-AIDS activist.

He adds that girls use condoms all the time, but it is their clients who sometimes force them to have unprotected sex. The girls say the clients offer them more money if they don’t use a condom.

A surveillance study conducted by New Era research institute in 2003 revealed that 18 percent of the sex workers had regular clients. Only 38 percent were forced by using condoms consistently. Regular clients were mostly businessmen, civil servants, transport workers, police, army, adolescents and migrant workers. The study found that sex workers now come from all corners and castes, and Chetri and Bahun women ranked second and third.

“You can’t blame the women, it is the clients you have to target,” says Bhagwan Shrestha from the group Women Acting Together for Change (WATCH). Prostitution can’t be eradicated, but the exploitation and health hazards can be controlled, he says, adding: “Arresting the girls is not the solution, it will just stigmatise the girls and they will go back to it.”

Sita Ghimire from the group, Save the Children (Norway) agrees: “Without social sensitivity, no amount of foreign aid can solve the problem.” Most of the girls leave their homes after they are raped, molested, deprived of parental care or subject to social ostracism, she says.

We asked DSP Ganesh KC from the police why his force keeps arresting the girls, and he admitted it was only a stopgap measure. “There is no employment and alternative for the girls and after migrating from the villages they are vulnerable,” says KC.

At the forefront of the battle to support the girls are activists, health workers and educators. But they are not prepared for the shock of hearing a 17-year-old tell them that she has serviced 1,000 clients. Said one activist: “At first I thought she was joking. But she told me she has taken two clients everyday for the last three years. It is simple arithmetic.”

(right side)

Getting mobile

After two months, Nepal Telecommunications Corporation has started to distribute prepaid SIM cards for cellular phones. Thousands of subscribers have been rushing to the NTC offices in Jawalakhel since Tuesday to get to the limited supply of cards. NTC plans to distribute 40,000 cards by the end of this fiscal year. As for now, NTC will distribute about 10,000 lines. Preference was given to those customers who own a mobile set. The NTC offices have been packed, with lines that extended from inside the office building out onto the streets of Jawalakhel, exceeding the crowds that had formed when the prepaid cards were first distributed. Up to February, NTC had already distributed about 9,000 lines.

The cost for prepaid call service comes to Rs 1700 including call charges of Rs 500 for sixty days. Otherwise, there are also different demands for prepaid service in the eastern region of Nepal where NTC has already stopped distribution as the number of subscribers has exceeded NTC’s capacity to provide the service. The new distribution has already caused constant problems for the subscribers, who end up wasting calls because of connection breaks and busy network. The prepaid calls are far more expensive than the calls made with the regular stable service.
UN-interested in mediation

Nepal has been keeping the peace for the UN, the UN may now have to peacekeep in Nepal

A conflict between the security forces and Maoist rebels continues in Nepal; the issue for peace is also getting stronger. Joining the peace chorus last week was UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who not only called for an end to the conflict, but also offered help to mediate. The offer, however, has sparked a debate in Nepal about whether the UN can, or should, play such a role.

Most of the political parties of the dissolved parliament have welcomed Annan’s offer. They see it as crucial to protecting the peace process in the country. The UML, a champion of UN mediation, has been crucial in pushing the talks between the government and the rebels, and a vocal supporter of the UN’s role in mediation.

The Maoists have also welcomed Annan’s offer. They say that the UN can help to protect the peace process, and that the UN can help to protect the peace process.

On the other hand, some parties in the government and the rebels have expressed their concerns about the UN’s role in mediation.

India, China and the United States are all said to be against UN involvement. India, in particular, has been pushing the idea of a bilateral approach to the conflict, with India and China playing a more active role.

The government, however, believes that Nepal has not yet abandoned the idea of a bilateral approach to the conflict, and that the UN can help to protect the peace process.

Saving Sagarmatha

There isn’t much garbage now on the world’s most popular trekking route

MUDITA BAJRACHARYA

The international media has been doing a great job in trying to get the world’s attention to the world’s highest garbage dump, or the ‘world’s highest garbage dump’.

What is at stake is, however, to see if this is a time for the world’s attention to the world’s highest garbage dump, or the ‘world’s highest garbage dump’.

There are no politicians in the Khumbu region, and the trails leading up to Base Camp are clean and well maintained.

There is no pollution in the Khumbu region, and the trails leading up to Base Camp are clean and well maintained.

It is true that in the 1980s, things got a bit out of hand—administered by Lampa Sherpa of the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), “environmental awareness is very much needed.”

Established in 1994 by local Sherpas, the SPCC was set up jointly by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation in Kathmandu and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The SPCC was set up to stop the disposal of paint, oil, and other solid waste and to establish an efficient system of recycling or reusing waste.

Between 1994 and 2003, the SPCC has already removed more than 2,000 tonnes of garbage from the Sagarmatha National Park.

All along the trail, there are rubbish bins with concrete foundations. The help of locals is a vital asset in maintaining the trail. The garbage collection is deposited at incinerators in Tengboche, Namche and Lukla. Last year was the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest and saw record numbers of trekkers and mountaineers in Khumbu who dumped 227,000 kg of trash. Of this, 24,000 kg was incinerated, and the rest was taken off by the SPCC and bribed to the SPCC to recycle.

On this season, it looks like the numbers may hit an all-time high, but the SPCC science panel is up to the challenge. Each mountaineering expedition has to deposit their material at the SPCC office in Syangboche.

The SPCC is a source of income in a country with a stagnant economy. Establishing the Khumbu Icefall route on Mt Everest at the beginning of every season and maintaining it is expensive. In 2003, it cost $2,500.

In 2004, it cost $2,875. This season and maintaining it is expensive. In 2003, it cost $2,500.

In the spring of 2003, there were 13 expeditions to Mt Everest and the SPCC charged $2,525 per expedition in the case of trekking, which consisted of fixed-rope and ladder bridge sections. In the autumn season, the rate was $150 per expedition and the fee was charged $60.

In 2004, there were 13 expeditions and the fee was raised to $2,300.

Now, the SPCC is getting even more ambitious and wants to monitor garbage at Advanced Base Camp and Camp 1. It will also work with the Western Cret to check if the garbage levels are everywhere it brought up. One thing the SPCC would not want to know is, what’s the garbage level on the base of the mountain?
Victimised victims

NARESH NEWAR

Anytime, Ram Gopal Tamali was shot and stabbed by a group of Maoists after he refused to hand over his passport to a village leader.

He refuses to argue that he did not believe in violence, but was associated with rebels and guns. Embroiled in his controversies, hundreds of villagers proclaimed the Maoists and killed 10 others. Ram Gopal was hounded by policemen from his home and was denied treatment in Ilam Hospital in Nepalganj when he finally arrived. "Today I was dead," says Ram Gopal, showing his scabs. "I don’t know how I survived!"

After that incident, the villagers of Tamali killed Ram Gopal to leave because they feared the Maoists would return. And they did. About 50 Maoists came back and killed Ram Gopal’s uncle, Mulati Tamali, and his aunt, Sohan Yadav, too. They killed 40 villagers.

From his father, "Through his glasses," says Kul Bahadur Khatri.

"I used to meet with my 7-year-old daughter, Sunita. Ram Gopal Tamali to know his near and dear admirer."

Dharma Raj Neupane at the Maoist Victims Association. (filed by photos of killed victims)

Preyed on by Maoists, victims of violence face official apathy

Resister killed

The government’s move to arm villagers against Maoist rebels suffered a setback with the killing of the chairman of the Maoist Victims Association. Ram Gopal Tamali was murdered on 23 March, leaving his wife and three daughters are now left to fend

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Members of the committee in Chuluhi village had been receiving arms and training and, Chatri Raj Neupane said they were killed because they were "disloyal" to the Maoist cause. "They were disloyal to the Maoist cause," he said. "Our guns are not to kill anyone, they are to defend ourselves," he added. Even before the government provided them arms, the villagers were involved in armed battle with the Maoists. Neupane said the armed conflict between the Maoists and the government had caused many villagers to flee to the hills.

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Thinking small

Small players are neglected in Nepal, and nobody benefits

Lately, many small businesses in Nepal are looking for ways to compete with larger companies. However, many of them are facing challenges due to lack of resources and support. Some of them have discovered that the papers thus obtained are good as a sign of state approval in the event of all too common warrant-less raids. Financial institutions have also acknowledged that small businesses can have a significant impact on the economy. However, they are not receiving enough support to grow and thrive.

Finally, yummy airline food

A Lufthansa subsidiary invests in-flight catering in Kathmandu

Passengers flying into the Tribhuvan International Airport will now be able to enjoy LSG Sky Chefs' menu. LSG Sky Chefs is a subsidiary of Lufthansa, and they have started operations in Kathmandu. The company employs over 250 Nepali chefs, and they plan to increase their revenue to Rs2.3 billion this year. The facility at Tilganga will have the capacity to produce 4,000 meals a day, and they will start with 2,100 meals for Royal Nepal Airlines, Qatar Airways, Austrian Airlines, Indian Airlines, and various clients operating out of Kathmandu.

Chinese word

China to Nepal

Air China inaugurated its new Chengdu-Kathmandu link on 30 March, making it the second Nepal-China air link. Air China has a hub at Chengdu and another at Beijing. Air China hopes to attract Japanese tourists to Nepal through this new route. Air China was the first airline to fly twice a week. From now on, Air China will fly three times a week. The airline calculates this as a big growth opportunity. Last year, the company organized a big promotional campaign targeting the Chinese tourists. The flight will fly the same route as Air China's Beijing-Kathmandu route. It will use a Boeing 737-800 for the flight.

Saving from overseas

Smart banking choices

A huge opportunity for Nepal in the domain of banking and financial services is the growing trend of digital banking. Nepal's financial institutions are currently focusing on digital banking to attract more customers and increase revenue. The country's digital banking sector is growing rapidly, and more people are starting to use mobile banking and electronic payment methods.

Waja confidently tackles the road

The Waja is a new car launched by Mahindra & Mahindra in Nepal. It is equipped with advanced safety features and is designed to provide a safe and comfortable driving experience. The car is a popular choice among Nepali customers due to its affordability and features.
Nepali viewers have benefited from competition among new TV channels

Nepali viewers have benefited from competition among new TV channels, particularly those in private hands. Since the government loosened its regulations in 2001, the private sector has invested heavily in licenses and broadcast equipment. In addition to two state-owned channels (NTV and NTV Metro), there are Kantipur Television (KTV), Image Metro, Channel Nepal, and Nepal One operated from India. There are currently 23 terrestrial channels, so we have to be different, especially during primetime.

The advent of private channels has forced state media to be more creative and professional. NTV news is still heavy on government viewpoints on politics, while private channels have balanaced entertainment content with news and current affairs. Channel Nepal and Nepal One compete with NTV and Nepali One in entertainment, but there is more freedom to report from the field and the studio talk shows are no longer sitting in front of their sets just to listen to government speeches.

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The addition of new private television channels has resulted in a big increase in the sale of television sets nationwide.

KHADGA SINGH

Call it an information kit, or an idiot box, but the television set has become a utility like other home appliances. Television has become a necessity in urban Nepali homes.

The proliferation of new Nepali channels and the spread of cable have booted domestic demand for tv sets, and distributors can’t keep up with demand.

Even those from the lower middle class have joined the bandwagon, and they have a wide range of choices: from black and white and colour sets manufactured in Nepal to cheap imports from China—all under Rs 10,000.

Then there is the upper end of the market with flat tubes, LCD and plasma screens. There are installment-payment schemes, which means even the more expensive models are suddenly affordable. Add to that the exchange scheme under which you can trade in your old tv for a new one and the choice are wide open.

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Then there is the upper end of the market with flat tubes, LCD and plasma screens. There are installment-payment schemes, which means even the more expensive models are suddenly affordable. Add to that the exchange scheme under which you can trade in your old tv for a new one and the choice are wide open.
screens,” says Saurabh Jyoti of Jyoti Group, which imports Philips sets from Singapore. To meet the soaring demand, his company has opened a brand new showroom in Kathmandu and started outlets in Pokhara and Birgunj.

Him Electronics sells Daewoo and Samsung sets and sees flat TVs as a value segment with bright growth potential. Its General Manager, Prabhakar Thapa, says 80 percent of the buyers go for ordinary colour TV but their tastes are changing. “Within one year, we expect to see that figure come down by half.” The company manufactures nearly all its products in Nepal.

The price range varies from Rs 25,000-40,000 for 21 inch flat-screen sets of different brands. For rural Nepal, getting a conventional colour TV is more than enough for now with prices that range from Rs 15,000-20,000. Dealers have seen that the government’s policy of expanding electricity with the participation of the locals has resulted in greater demand for TV sets even in villages.

“We see many more rural people coming to buy TV sets these days,” says Subash Sarangi of Distar, a Thai Company that has been selling 14 and 21-inch sets in Nepal. “Once the security situation improves, we are sure that there will be another big rise in sales.”

Despite the growth and the potential, TV dealers and manufacturers face unhealthy competition due to smuggling and parallel import of TV sets. The smugglers can cut prices and sell their products without proper VAT bills and invoices. “Such sellers price the sets very low because they don’t even pay customs duty, but we do and that adds up to 40 percent to the cost price,” says Jyoti.

Most cheap products are now coming in from China. This has left some dealers and manufacturers worried. But some think this will increase the size of the pie and ultimately the customers will go for better quality.

“The cheap brands are doing us a service by expanding the market,” says Sarbjeet S. Anbad of Chaudhary Group which assembles the Korean GoldStar brand. “Once people start watching colour TV, they won’t stop and their next purchase will always be a better brand. That means our market is secured.”

Kiran Panday
Mohan Baidya’s arrest
Jan Astha, 31 March

Because of his status in the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Mohan Baidya alias Kiran, was also given the responsibility of political commissar of the Maoists’ People’s Liberation Army Eastern Division. Although he was already in charge of the party’s eastern central command he was not among the rebels who attacked Bhopur on 2 March because of his age. The attack was made under the leadership of Commander and politburo member Bhandan Ram Pun, alias Ananta.

Better known as the second senior most leader after Prachanda, Kiran is said to be the main ideologue and philosophical leader. He was the one to propose the concept of Prachandapath, the party’s line, during the second national convention of the CPN (Maoist). He defined and explained Prachandapath, a concept that drew controversy in the communist movement of Nepal.

Before Prachanda had been chosen as the general secretary by the then Communist Party of Nepal (MaaSaal), Kiran held that post. The change of guard took place because of what was a ‘sector scandal’ dispute within the party 18 years ago. After the controversy, the party decided to demote all the leaders except Prachanda. That is how he got the promotion. Kiran was demoted to the position of politburo member. Prachanda was promoted.

Kiran was chosen as the party’s general secretary after the party took disciplinary action against Mohan Bikram Singh who was ousted. It was then that the party split into two rival factions. Kiran was once a Nepali language teacher in a high school in Pyuthan district before his family later moved to Dang. He has three daughters and his wife is a diabetic, has heart problems and is running a high fever. But he is determined to continue his fast to put the message across to the world that Nepali-speaking Bhutanis have been ethnically cleansed from their homeland.

India’s involvement is critical in this, but New Delhi is playing a passive role. Rizal had no other way to get the attention of the Indians government but by this fast. So far it has not reacted at all. India can’t remain aloof.

Rizal has already sent appeal letters to most world leaders calling their attention to the plight of his people. He also wants the Nepali government to facilitate the verification process, work actively with UNHCR and the Human Rights Council to repatriate the refugees and to internationalise the Bhutanese refugee problem. He wants the international community to continue giving aid to the refugees and the UNHCR to continue playing an active role to manage the refugee camps. If the international community, especially India, repeats their usual statement that this is a bilateral problem between Nepal and Bhutan, then Rizal’s sacrifice will have been in vain.

The refugees are being blamed by the Bhutanese regime for the staged incident on 22 December which led to the departure of the Joint Verification Teams from the camp. Rizal believes that the refugees had nothing to do with it, and are being victimized.

Beni’s civilians
Nepal, 28 March-4 April

The government’s intelligence failed again and it has become almost routine for the security forces to be unprepared for Maoist attacks. When the Maoist attacked Beni on Saturday night at 10PM, the security personnel were getting into their beds. After 12 hours, Beni was in ruins. The army’s morale had already sunk when the government was not able to send reinforcements and announcement while the battle was raging. By eight in the morning, DSP Ran Bahadur Gautam and 33 police were captured by the Maoists, who also ransacked all the ammunition and guns from the police station. By nine, almost all the government offices had been destroyed. Besides burning papers and documents of local bonds, the Maoists also looted a huge sum of money, the savings of many locals.

About 150 Nepalis lost their lives. Besides the Maoists and security forces, 30 civilians were killed and most of them from the air firing from the army helicopter. About seven soldiers were killed in Junayaud. Laxmi Karki was hit when she was washing her dishes outside. Hemal K.C., a taxi driver had no idea that was going on and got also hit while he was driving in Bhagwati-2. In the fire set by the Maoists, two doctors were killed in a hotel and the Maoists also shot dead an ordinary guard, Yogendra Gaur, of the DDC office. The Maoists also attacked their former cadre who had surrendered and taken refuge at the army post.

“They asked us to join them again. When we refused, they started shooting and killed several others,” says Chhatrapati Acharya, who survived.

Before Baidya, politburo member Matrika Prasad Yadav and central leader Suresh Ale Magar were arrested by Indian authorities and handed over to the government in western Nepal. Baidya, who had undergone a cataract operation just before his arrest in Siliguri, also suffers from asthma. He had been living in the same house in Siliguri for a while despite party workers suggesting he shift elsewhere.

The West Bengal state government was already apprehensive about the Maoist presence in the state because of the latter’s increasing relations with the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, a banned political outfit in India.

What’s more, the meeting between Maoist leaders and senior UML leaders some two years ago established Siliguri as a rebel shelter. It is believed that Indian security agencies were able to track Baidya down through his telephone. Similarly, Maoist leaders Yadav and Magar were also arrested last month after Indian security agencies tapped the phones.

Combined fatigue
Kantiapur, 29 March

Maoists in Rukum district are disheartened after watching their senior leaders being killed in the battle for Beni last month. A local teacher in the district said many rebels were having second thoughts about participating in raids like the one in Beni because of the high casualties. “They say they would not like to lose their lives anymore,” the teacher said.

“In fact, combat fatigue is setting in and many want peace.” The frustration among the lower rank rebels because evident after a Maoist FM station confirmed that 50 fighters were killed in the Myagdi clashes and one of the dead was Kal Bahadur Nath, vice commander of the western division. So far, he is the most high ranking rebel to have died in action.

The radio also said the Maoists had captured 33 SLRs, three light machine guns, 14 shotguns, one two inch mortar and 65,303 rifles. But even this has not been able to arrest the sinking morale.

Fast to death
Hari Prasad Adhikari in Rajdhani, 31 March

Thaduwa Rizal has fasted for as long as 27 days while he was jailed in Bhutan and this will be his fourth time to use this Gandhian tactic to put political pressure on the Bhutanese regime. This time, he has given a 5-day ultimatum to the international community to step in and help solve his people’s refugee crisis. He is prepared to fast until death.

At Rama Park, we can already see Rizal’s health is deteriorating. He is diabetic, has heart problems and is running a high fever. But he is determined to continue his fast to put the message across to the world that Nepali-speaking Bhutanis have been ethnically cleansed from their homeland.

The people in Beni are apprehensive about the Maoist presence in the state because of the latter’s increasing relations with the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, a banned political outfit in India.
Forced recruitment

The Maoists have been forced to wear green uniforms, and elderly citizens and women are ranging from young children to every household has been forced to campaign in the villages for only ten days.

Night ambulance

Ambulances have stopped their night services after drivers were harangued and attacked last week. As a result, many sick people and emergency cases have been jeopardised.

Looking for dad

Kevin Benet has been looking for his Nepali father for the last 20 years. Every time he comes to Nepal, he hopes to find him, but in vain. His English mother, Mary Benet, never wanted to talk about his Nepali father.

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Malaya & Ceylon
What the Sri Lankans could learn from the Malayan insurgency

Sri Lanka's bitter war of terror—one that practically invented the agony of the suicide bomber—had been showing signs of abating of late. But a bitter power struggle between Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and a schism among the rebel Tamil Tigers, now threatens to reignite the violence. Their political duel was re-ignited recently when the president, wary that her prime ministerial rival was "not fit" to lead the rebel Tamil Tigers, sacked three ministers and took over their portfolios. Now she has dissolved parliament and set new elections for April, three years before they are due.

Having lived through the Malayan war of 1947-1960, I am often wonder why Sri Lanka's war has been so much more difficult to end. On the surface, much about those two wars seems similar. In Malaya, ethnic Chinese fought British and Malay and police, which is roughly comparable to the Tamil's fight against the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. Like the Tamil Tigers, the Malayan Communist were also damned as terrorists, but the casualties they inflicted were small compared to the mass killings caused by both sides in Sri Lanka's war.

But then, Malaya's ethnic tensions produced communal riots in which both Chinese and Malayan were killed and Malaya was destroyed. These, however, were never allowed to degenerate into the outright communal slaughter that the war in Sri Lanka has so often produced.

Could Sri Lanka have learned anything from the Malayan experience? Could the Malayan military strategy to contain the rebellion have been imported? British expert from the Malayan emergency tried to help the "Americans in Vietnam"—briefly without success. Of course, one reason for that failure is that the South Vietnamese were not different enough from the North Vietnamese for the Malayan formula of identifying and isolating rebel communities by race to work. But Sri Lanka's war, with its ethnic origins, is closer to the Malayan experience and so this strategy could, perhaps, have been tested.

A second similarity comes from the fact that the British were the imperial power in both countries. At independence, national leaders in both countries inherited similar sets of laws and administrative practices. Indeed, at the time Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) achieved independence, it was far more committed to democracy and the commons-law legal system than Malaya.

So why did multi-communal politics ultimately work in Malaya, and born in both Malaya and Singapore, and fail so badly in Ceylon? One key reason must be the historical experience of the Sinhalese. For two thousand years they had to defend themselves against attacks by expansionist Tamil kingdoms from the Indian mainland. As a result, the island admiring its ancient capitol, not the ones sacked by Tamil kings, and Buddhist shrines are set up to counter the impact of Hinduism. I began to understand the trauma endured by the Sinhalese. Sadly, the Tamils were living in the Jaffna districts in the northern and eastern parts of the island are probably descended from Tamil who were also victims of the same external attacks.

Another factor arose from the fact that Tamils, on the whole, had been open to a succession of Portuguese, Dutch, and British administrations from the 16th century onwards, while most Sinhala lived under their own king the Kandyan kingdom until the 19th century. In particular, the Buddhist priests, who are the guardians of the faiths and have wielded much influence in Sri Lanka politics since the mid-1950s, were the least touched by foreign rule. They are determined to limit Hindu Tamil power in Sri Lanka affairs and encourage the Tamil community to make few concessions to Tamil autonomy. Furthermore, the degree of Sinhalese involvement in the Tamil insurgency is in part due to Tamil's discrimination and the Tamil's sense of grievance.

The British, who did not depose the Tamil kings in Kandy, made sure that the native position of the Malayan was constitutionally secure from the start. Once the Chinese recognized their place asnewcomers, they had to accept that becoming full nation of the new nation state was a status that needed to be earned. Although most Chinese in Malaya now feel that they deserve the full rights of citizenship, they have not insisted on absolute equality. In any case, they never claim to be indigenous to any particular locale, not even in Singapore, where ethnic Chinese make up three-quarters of the population.

Sri Lanka's tragedy reminds us how many things can go wrong when oral Asian politics seek to establish modern nation states. It becomes even more difficult when the complex historical baggage calls for sensitivity and tolerance while the protagonists are determined to see every concession as surrender. •

Project Syndicate

Wang Gungwu is Director of the East Asian Institute, University of Singapore.
The decline of America

Five reasons why America’s political power is slipping

Jeffrey D. Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

The United Nations health agency underscored the rapid expansion of drug-resistant tuberculosis, with the first anniversary of the war in Iraq, America’s reputation continues to sink. After trying to bully the world into supporting an unprecedented war a year ago, the US could finance the control of AIDS, and its allies have been proved either fools or liars. But this has not stopped the US’s thuggish behavior. The US could be a great force for good. With an $1.1 trillion annual national income, America could finance the control of AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other killer diseases for a small fraction of the money it wastes in Iraq. Instead, US aid to the world’s poor as a share of national income is the lowest of any donor country. The US can be a force for good. America’s current military budget of about $450 billion, roughly equal to the rest of the world’s combined military spending. The US military power buys security, even though terrorism has increased since the Iraq War. But despite its wealth and military might, America’s ability to project political power—for good or ill—will decline in future years, for at least five reasons:

- America’s budget is in crisis. Thanks to Bush’s tax cuts and a $150 billion increase in military spending, contributing to budget deficits of $500 billion per year, the US will have to raise taxes and limit budget spending, whether or not Bush is re-elected.
- The US is borrowing massively from abroad. Japan alone has foreign exchange reserves of around $750 billion, mostly in US treasury bills. China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan together have another $1.1 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. The US is in deep and growing debt to Asia. Only mass buying of treasury bills by Asian central banks has prevented the dollar from falling even more precipitously than it has.
- The rest of the world is catching up. America’s big technological lead will narrow relative to Brazil, China, India and other major developing economic regions. China will have an economy larger than the US economy within 25 years. Although considerably poorer on average than China, by 2050, India will conceivably have an economy the size of America’s.
- A narrower economic gap will reduce America’s relative geopolitical power. China and India, which together account for about 40 percent of the world’s population, will begin to play much larger roles on the world scene. The current xenophobic reactions to “outsourcing” of jobs to India’s software engineers reflects the underlying anxiety of a US population that wants to stay in the economic lead. With or without America, Asia’s technological capacities and incomes will grow. Prosperity will be more widely spread, even if America’s ego gets hurt in the process.
- Demographics will weaken America’s militaristic approach to the world. Much of Bush’s support comes from white fundamentalist Christian men. This, in my opinion, is a social group that is fighting a rear-guard battle against the growing power of women, immigrants and other religions. The religious right’s backward-looking agenda is doomed. The US Census Bureau recently found that by 2050, the US population will be 24 percent Hispanic, 14 percent African-American and 8 percent Asian. In the face of these factors, the US right-wingers dreams of a global empire will most likely fail. This may happen sooner rather than later if Bush loses this November in an election that is certain to be very close. But whatever the outcome, the US cannot postpone forever its inevitable decline relative to the rest of the world.

(Times (London) #190 INTERNATIONAL)

TB megacrisis

GUSTAVO CAPDEVILA in GENEVA

World Tuberculosis Day found the scientific community divided on the status of the disease: the optimism of the World Health Organisation (WHO) contrasts with the gloomy forecasts of Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) or Doctors Without Borders. Meanwhile, every year nearly nine million people are infected with TB, and the disease kills around two million more.

WHO’s global TB report says there has been progress in the number of patients diagnosed and treated through DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment, Short-Course), a strategy launched a decade ago. But the non-governmental MSF says, “We are losing the battle against tuberculosis because we rely on archaic diagnostic tests and drugs.”

The independent Paris-based group, which demands greater investment in TB research and development of medicines, noted that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has magnified the tuberculosis problem. The weakened immune system that accompanies AIDS creates fertile ground for TB infection.

Research is under way for new medications and diagnostic methods that are intended to improve control of the infection, said epidemiologist Catherine Watt, of the WHO’s tuberculosis division. However Olivier Broutet, head of the MSF tuberculous mission in India, said that the best TB drugs were developed during 1940 to 1960. According to MSF, pharmaceutical companies are conducting research and development related to TB, but have generally cut their investments in investigation of antibacterial treatments.

The drug industry “cannot be relied on to bring a new TB drug to a market that mainly consists of people with very little purchasing power,” adds the organisation.

The number of reported infections grew much more quickly in African countries with a high prevalence of HIV, said WHO’s Brian Williams, who also stressed that the main problem is that the shortest treatment for the disease is a six-month program and it is difficult to convince people to take a medication for such a long period.

The United Nations health agency underscored the rapid expansion of the DOTS method. Some three million people receive DOTS today— an increase of more than a million in the past two years, and is claimed to be one of the major public health successes of the past decade.

The WHO’s goal for 2005 is to detect 70 percent of all TB cases and to cure 85 percent of those. It calculated that in order to meet its objectives for detection and treatment in the 22 “high burden” countries, except Russia, it will need to spend $655 million in 2004. The budget for 2005 would be 1.1 billion dollars compared to 2003’s $865 million.
In his oral testimony, Tul Bahadur Pun recounts how he was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in the battle for Mogaung in Burma in June 1944. Pun single-handedly fought off dozens of Japanese defenders, even while the rest of his platoon was wiped out. This and other testimonies of living Gurkha soldiers are taken from Lahurey ka Katha by Dev Bahadur Thapa, published by Himal books, and translated for Nepali Times in this space every week.

I was pulling out my gun again when our commanding officer, a short man, appeared and said, "Well done, Pun." He asked if I was all right, and I replied that everything was not all right. I told him that there were quite a lot of enemies inside the trench. He promised to send the flame-thrower, then vanished. On the lower side there was a British regiment which sent a flame-thrower. The flame even keeps burning on water, and if it falls on stone or iron it just turns them into soil. This weapon is best for trench warfare. The fire is so dangerous that if it falls on cloth or a piece of flesh, it just sticks to the skin. Many enemies were mortally wounded. Others, buried under stones and bricks, a few were buried under the influence of alcohol and a few were buried under stones and brick. A few were buried with axes or rifle butts. There was a sense of the confusion one sees during a festival.

However, they didn't get far. Most had only stuck their feet and then fell down. The enemy troops were wiped out and we entered the town. There was such that the enemy troops and our own men in hand-to-hand combat, making it impossible to tell the wounded warriors. Some of the soldiers started firing, while others began fighting with their hands like people under the influence of alcohol. A few were buried under the influence of alcohol and a few were buried under stones and brick. A few were buried with axes or rifle butts. There was a sense of confusion one sees during a festival.

Butts. There was a sense of the confusion one sees during a festival. If it falls on cloth or a piece of flesh, it just sticks to the skin. Many enemies were mortally wounded. Others, buried under stones and bricks, a few were buried under the influence of alcohol and a few were buried under stones and brick. A few were buried with axes or rifle butts. There was a sense of the confusion one sees during a festival.

This was followed by the harsh sound of a whistle blown by our commander. They stopped fighting and emerged from the midst of soldiers who had been taking shelter in the town started escaping by jumping into the river. The water was already half full of them away, but the rest managed to reach the other side. For a while the whole town was awash with human bodies. The civilians had already abandoned the town, and following the flight of the enemy soldiers, we captured the town.

In the evening we had an assembly, where respective commanders discussed strategies for the next day and also assessed who had fought well and which tactics had worked. Reports were collected on who did best in that day's capture of the town. Our platoon sergeant reported that except for two men, the rest of our platoon had been killed. He mentioned my name, and told them that I had done excellently during the siege of the bridge and also mentioned that I was the first to get to the enemy trench. The commander added that he was present at the time and had seen the event with his own eyes. A strong recommendation letter was written and dispatched to the war office.

On one day I had been assigned to bring the ration, which were carried by mules. When I arrived at the headquarters, a message had arrived from the war office. The clerks on duty took me aside and said, "Pun, one of the soldiers from your company has done an excellent job. I have collected the message. In all probability he will get a gallantry award." He gave me the message and told me to give it to the company, I glanced at it, and saw my name on it.

The following day, the commander sent for me. I saluted him, and then he put me on the back and told me he had received the reply to his letter. "Well done!" he said. "You will receive a gallantry award, but I can't say what class of award it will be. Probably you will receive a very high order gallantry award." He gave me the message and told me to give it to the company, I glanced at it, and saw my name on it.

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T he recently concluded cricket series of one-day matches between Pakistan and India provided a win-win series of matches between the two arch rivals played this month. On Sunday, the two cricketing nations began the third of the three test matches they will play in Pakistan. Each test match lasts for five days.

The cricket series is the first being played out in Pakistan as part of confidence-building measures after nearly 14 years when armed militancy in Kashmir first surfaced. Pakistan came to India for a test series in 1999 and the two countries have met in venues such as Sharjah, but the Indian government has until now suspended its cricket team to a country accused of waging a proxy war in Kashmir. As such, any competition between two traditional rivals India and Pakistan, which have been locked in an adversarial relationship for the last 57 years, this was no ordinary clash. It was a test of their maturity to compete by demonstrating grace in victory, and dignity in defeat.

Cricket can once again be promoted as a country’s image, as it did in Pakistan’s case, since a cross-section of the Indian elite visiting Pakistan was bewildered and literally bowled over by the sporting behaviour of the Pakistanis.

The Pakistani spirit was on display with warm hospitality and unassuming postmatch courtesy manifesting the essence of what is, at the core, the good-natured, large-hearted Pakistanis. Newspaper reports being published over how Pakistan taxi drivers turned down cab fares from visiting Indians, and how Indians, making use of easier movement between the two countries of late, were able to visit the British-ruled Kashmir—many for the first time.

Many thought the idea of a cricket series was a gamble given recent conflicts and mutual suspicion. But the cricket matches brought out the best among the Pakistani people, even though the cricket team lost the series by a close margin. Germany turned sour, with Pakistan’s defeat becoming a near certainty. On 24 March India beat Pakistan in a thrilling final of the one-day series of five matches between the two arch rivals played this month. On Sunday, the two cricketing nations began the third of the three test matches they will play in Pakistan. Each test match lasts for five days.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

The number of bread trees on the Valley rim are indications of dryness of the dry season has broken. When meteorology doesn’t help, we have to turn to the rare fruits and that is what people are doing for this pooling of the Manakamana. Looking at the satellite picture taken on Thursday morning, it shows Nepal is caught between low pressure system over northeast India and an equator-based high pressure system over the Arabian Sea. Such weather means is an influx of moisture and, with rising temperatures, it will lead to convective systems over the Himalayas, which means, bringing storms and sporadic rain, mainly in northwestern Nepal. Expect temperatures to climb next week as the heels thins and the sun shines to be more direct.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Kathmandu is a city of smog. Ktoo.com football is a small enough to endanger the human body concentrations in the Valley increased by 7 per cent. In addition to the 7 per cent increase, we expect to see more dust. This is partly because of the boost from the Valley. The number of dust particles is enough to raise the air pressure. The dust is most significant by the afternoon, where the average PM 10 levels exceed the national standard of 200 micrograms per cubic meter. PM 10 are the particles in the air that can damage the respiratory system as well as the cardiovascular system.

Nepal Orcharies in Pictures René de Millelker and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha Malla Prashad, 2004

An extensive guide to 140 indigenous species and varieties of orchids in Nepal, including information on the blooming seasons of each and the altitudes and temperatures that they can be found at. While the tables and details may appeal more to botanists and conservationists, the some 250 colour photographs of these beautiful flowers that follow are enough to enchant even the most casual of floral fanciers.

Call 4442220 for show timings.

www.jainepal.com

BOOKWORM

The Last Samurai is set in Japan, where Civil War veteran Captain Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) trains the Emperor’s troops to use modern weapons as they prepare to defeat the last of the country’s samurais. But Algren’s passion is swayed when he is captured by the samurai and learns about their traditions and code of honour.

JAI NEAL CINEMA

Nepal Orcharies in Pictures René de Millelker and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha Malla Prashad, 2004

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Glimpses of Kathmandu City
Paintings by Sarita Dangol

Glimpses of Kathmandu City Paintings by Uma Shanker Shukh until 12 April at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419503

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The numbers of bread trees on the Valley rim are indications of dryness of the dry season has broken. When meteorology doesn’t help, we have to turn to the rare fruits and that is what people are doing for this pooling of the Manakamana. Looking at the satellite picture taken on Thursday morning, it shows Nepal is caught between low pressure system over northeast India and an equator-based high pressure system over the Arabian Sea. Such weather means is an influx of moisture and, with rising temperatures, it will lead to convective systems over the Himalayas, which means, bringing storms and sporadic rain, mainly in northwestern Nepal. Expect temperatures to climb next week as the heels thins and the sun shines to be more direct.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Kathmandu is a city of smog. Ktoo.com football is a small enough to endanger the human body concentrations in the Valley increased by 7 per cent. In addition to the 7 per cent increase, we expect to see more dust. This is partly because of the boost from the Valley. The number of dust particles is enough to raise the air pressure. The dust is most significant by the afternoon, where the average PM 10 levels exceed the national standard of 200 micrograms per cubic meter. PM 10 are the particles in the air that can damage the respiratory system as well as the cardiovascular system.

Nepal Orcharies in Pictures René de Millelker and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha Malla Prashad, 2004

An extensive guide to 140 indigenous species and varieties of orchids in Nepal, including information on the blooming seasons of each and the altitudes and temperatures that they can be found at. While the tables and details may appeal more to botanists and conservationists, the some 250 colour photographs of these beautiful flowers that follow are enough to enchant even the most casual of floral fanciers.

Call 4442220 for show timings.

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BOOKWORM

The Last Samurai is set in Japan, where Civil War veteran Captain Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) trains the Emperor’s troops to use modern weapons as they prepare to defeat the last of the country’s samurais. But Algren’s passion is swayed when he is captured by the samurai and learns about their traditions and code of honour.

JAI NEAL CINEMA

Nepal Orcharies in Pictures René de Millelker and Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha Malla Prashad, 2004

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What a load of bull

Whatever people may tell you, unlike some other parts of this paper, we don’t make anything up on the last page. No sir, out here we adhere strictly to the vows we took when we were ordained as journalists, the most fundamental of which was the rule on page 126 which said: “Thou shan’t bullshit.”

Jokes aside, it is one of the basic rules of journalism that you shouldn’t make anything up, unless it is an emergency, in which case you qualify the sentence with the all-purpose adverb (or is it a gerund?) ‘allegedly’. Eg: Newspapers allegedly tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

Unfortunately, the sad fact is that mediapersons these days are such compulsive liars that even when we finally get around to telling the truth, no one believes us. So you better believe me when I tell you about this true incident that allegorically took place at Jorpati intersection, and we have pictures to prove it:

Bull falls into pothole
BY OUR BOVINE CORRESPONDENT
The resident bull of Jorpati Intersection, Kalu, 17, inadvertently fell into a pothole Tuesday and it took emergency services all day to rescue him from the pit.

Large crowds of curious onlookers, including several of Kalu’s concubines, had gathered to cheer on the rescuers as they undertook the complicated extrication procedure which lasted, oh let’s see, six hours or so. “As an endangered species of street fauna, it is important for the authority figures to rescue the animal and restore him to his native habitat as fast as it is humanly possible,” said the warden of the Pashupati Forest Reserve.

However, as it turned out, rescuing bull from potholes is easier said than done. At first, local Good Samaritans from the Pashupati area decided to take the bull by the horns and pull with all their might. But to no avail. Next, a squad from the Unarmed Police Force arrived and tried to bribe the bull by dangling yummy bits of national daily broadsheets, the favourite snack of Kathmandu’s bovines. Having, by this time, worked up a bit of hunger, Kalu made a lunge for the newspapers but, alas, could not overcome gravity.

Finally, someone got the bright idea of calling for an eight ton bulldozer (so named for their ability to dredge bulls) which was finally able to winch the animal out of the hole that he had got himself into.

Kalu was euphoric after his rescue, asking television reporters: “Will I make it on the seven o’clock news tonight?”

Officials from the Department of Roads and Craters said that Wednesday’s incident had proven beyond reasonable doubt that the dimensions of Kathmandu’s potholes now meet ISO9002 criteria. “Our potholes used to be of substandard size, now that we have proved that a bull can comfortably fit into them it is only a question of time before a bus falls into one of our potholes.”

Bull in China Shop
BY A MAD COW
A bull that snuck into the China Shop at Bagh Bazar was not there to shatter the ceramics, but was only looking for knockoff DVDs from Khasa, authoritarian sources said Thursday.

The manager of the store raised the alarm when he spotted an ox allegedly behaving in a suspicious manner in the consumer electronic section on his close circuit monitor.

“We are always on alert here for bulls running amok in our shop because of our name and we don’t take any chances,” he added. As he was led away by security forces, the bull, who didn’t want to be quoted by name, said: “Given the state of the country, I thought it was Gai Jatra already.”