No looking back

How long can King Gyanendra afford to fight two uprisings?

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It has been almost a year since the political parties began their agitation to force the king to restore the democratic process.

Twelve months later in the new year, the protests are still going on, the king hasn’t budged on demands to restore parliament or set up an all-party government, and the Maoists are stronger than ever before.

While the king is on a PR blitz in the hinterland, the parties’ agitation has taken an ominous new edge as impatient party activists storm barricades surrounding the palace. In the past year their demands have become increasingly more radical, with affiliated student unions openly questioning the relevance of monarchy. Now, it looks like the party leadership has no choice but to swing towards a republican stance.

“Informal discussions have already begun among the parties,” says NC leader Nairahi Acharya. “There is no other way out.”

King back

Political parties have planned the mother of all rallies on Friday to coincide with King Gyanendra’s return to the capital from his two-week tour of central Nepal. Organisers say it will be even bigger than the one last Thursday and will mark the anniversary of the 1990 People’s Movement. The protesters may try to force their way past the barbed wire barricades and march on the palace. After several senior leaders and dozens of protesters were injured by lathis, tear gas and rubber bullets last week, the government has shown some restraint. However, that self-control may vanish in case the parties decide on confrontation.

New Years Eve

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CEASE FIRE IN THE NEW YEAR

Things have gone beyond just hoping for a happy new year. For those who command the destiny of this country, the time has come to act in 2061. They have to seize the initiative and give the people hope on the faces of those who have turned up to greet their king is the prime minister’s office. It is high time that the government and the army have to make a mockery of those who sacrificed their lives for the restoration of democratic rights. It seems our military planners, leaders are inept, not adequately trained and lack foresight. Was Beni in flames due to the lack of support of the army to the police as pointed out by Yubaraj Ghimire? Or was the army stretched too thin for having to guard a strategic bridge in northern part of Myagdi district? An even more plausible hypothesis is that the army and the police forces were so busy with the security arrangements for the King’s felicitation near Pokhara that they were unable to aid Beni. The attacks in Bhokpur and Beni within two weeks of each other raised the concern that our security forces are incapable of dealing with the mounting insurgency due the lack of priorities/ directives/planning and of lack of security man power.

There is a deep reserve of this security and military manpower that is waiting to be tapped. The government and the Maoists have to be vigilant and should not be complacent. Bhokpur and Beni #189 was inconsiderate, unfortunate, misdirected and did not work. I was dismayed that someone of his stature would choose to pass simple act of a reconnaissance readying for attack, even a press the bravest and the laziest of our soldiers. It is high time that the government and the army have to make it amply clear that the nation’s woes and burden of the people are on the government’s and the army’s laps. It is high time that the government and the army have to make it amply clear that the nation’s woes and burden of the people are on the government’s and the army’s laps. It is high time that the Maoists and the government do not make a mockery of those who sacrificed their lives for the restoration of democratic rights.

Both the government and the Maoists are equally to blame for the continuing violence and bloodshed in Nepal. The brutal suppression of this week’s protest rallies by the political parties against repression shows the state’s true face. Citizens should not remain silent spectators to the situation. No protest is a waste. These atrocities are continuing unabated even after commitments and the establishment of the Human Rights Cell in the RNA and the prime minister’s office. It is common knowledge that the latter was established to bypass the mandate of the Independent National Human Rights Commission (HNCHR). If human rights is indeed “a matter of state concern”, the world community should act before the situation further deteriorates. It should pass a resolution for the restoration of democratic rights.

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Goodbye to year zero

Just as well this wretched year has ended

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stuck his neck out to urge warring sides in Nepal to talk and offered his good services. The palace reportedly refused to even acknowledge Annan’s letter of interest, forcing him to make the public offer of good offices.

Unless the 18-point agenda of mainstream parties, which broadly addresses most of the practical issues raised by the Maoists, becomes the main thrust of the UN initiative, there is no way UN mediation is going to have any impact.

The void on the media scene this year can be judged by the fact that a television personality running a talk-show on the government channel was adjudged the best journalist of the year by a media organisation. It seems we have as much to discover the merits of independent media and investigative journalism in this country. Nepali literature too continued with its grand tradition of formalism by bestowing the title of ‘national poet’ upon a royal balladeer.

Nepal’s economy went into a tailspin in 2000. In private, everyone accepts that creation of employment opportunities through higher investment in public sector should get the topmost priority to wean away Maoist youths from violence, but the Nepal Development Forum is advocating unbridled privatisation without safeguards.

The hallmark of 2000 must be the ousting of Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. He has been having a hard time keeping awake. In these times, cultivated a sense of drifting away from public programs apparently helps. At the end of a traumatic zero year, hope may have to be sought in Hindu numerology where the number one, as in the binary code of digital language, is a positive force. Here’s to a better Nepal in 2001.

Likewise, the heinous crimes being committed by the Maoists deserves an equal measure of condemnation. In fact, for their crimes against humanity, the International Criminal Court (ICC) should intervene to arrest those who are resorting to violence in the name of revolution or whatever else.

S Sheetha, Kathmandu

● Pushkar Gautam’s guest column ‘Nepali gameplan’ (#190) is a brilliant analysis of what the rebel strategy really is. It also is a real assessment of the crisis that our country is facing. Abhishek Bikram Shah, email

● When I read Nepal Times online these days I am ashamed to say to friends here that I am a Nepali. There is nothing to be proud of anymore. Of course, I can’t blame the country. The problem is our rulers—politicians who have no shame, the same faces of crooks over and over again in parliament and now on the streets leading demonstrations for democracy. Give me a break. The important thing is to change the system, not the people. There is no shortage of committed, honest Nepalis with integrity and commitment to develop the country. And we are stuck with these corrupt people who have pushed our country back into darkness. Most of their sons and daughters are studying abroad, taking their ill-gotten wealth out of the country, while the sons of honest people are toiling in the Gulf and sending money home! Our future lies with hardworking Nepalis and not with these thieving liars. Ram Adhikary Melbourne, Australia

DYING

After reading ‘Dying for a son’ (#190), I was overcome with sadness for Kaushalya Parajy, a mother of seven—four whom are physically disabled. Yet, she is still trying to ‘present’ men to find out one who has no children of his own. The story shows just how far away we are from gender equity, social justice and maternal health in our country. Joyo Lama, Lazimpat

FUTILE

I completely agree with your editorial ‘Futile future’ (#190). What do the king and the political leaders think, that they can prolong their power struggle even when the country is burning? Even if one side wins, how do they expect to rescue the country from the Maoist totalitarianism on their own? The only way to deal with the Maoists is for the constitutional forces, and that includes King Gyanendra, to realise that they are all on one side against the outlaws. Let that be our hope and wish in the new year.
Sanjog Thapa, Chhauni
Down, but not out

Birgjan feels the pain

Seems like no one is safe,” says Pradip Gupta, a local shopkeeper. Gupta recalls how the city was hardly affected at all during the past bandhs called by the Maoists or other political parties. While the rest of the country came to a standstill during nationwide strikes, here life and business went on as usual.

Maoist extortion has hit an all-time high. The Maoists sent letters to all the industries, small business houses, hotels, department stores and shops for regular donations. “Not a single individual has been spared and everyone is paying,” says a local Marwar businessman who did not want to be identified. “We refuse to pay, the price will be heavy,” says a local banker. Mayor Giri was reportedly killed for refusing to pay Rs 500,000 demanded by the rebels. “Since the incident, everyone has cooperated out of fear,” says freelance journalist Chandra Kishore.

In the 22 VDCs outside the city, the Maoists operate freely, especially after the police stations were pulled back. Villagers are flooding into Birgjan to live like refugees just a few hours away from their homes. Villagers in Puri Danda district attempted to throw out the Maoists two years ago. They formed a committee of 50 members including all party politicians, community leaders and villagers. “There was strong unity and their morale was high, but it didn’t last long,” says Kishore. The committee collapsed after the Maoists, when members were attacked by the Maoists. Rama Kanta Giri, the leader, was killed.

Ironically, in some villages the presence of the Maoists is the only deterrent against bandhs from Bihar. Gangs from lawless northern Bihar regularly cross the border to raid Nepal villages. Since the police post was relocated to the city from Thori, 70km from Birgjan, bandhs have increased. Locals have been angered by the marauding bandh gang that comes armed with pistols and rifles. “If the government gave them permission to keep arms at home, they would have protected us,” says Shreshtha, who fled from Thori after threats from Indian gangs.

Two years ago, when Pratap was elected chairman of the local Bouffer zone of Royal Chitwan National Park, he took action against timber poachers from Birgjan Thori village of Bihar. “It was just too much to bear for the villagers after they raped three of our young girls. It was time to teach these criminals a lesson,” says Shreshtha. He gathered 150 villagers and forest guards and headed for the Indian village. The looters were surrounded and the two villages agreed that the looting would stop. Nine months later, it began anew and the next day Shreshtha came looking for revenge.

Names like Mehlabs, Lambu Chaudhary and Shambhu Chaudhary make the villagers quake with fear. They lead the notorious Birgjan Mehlabs Gang which is engaged in smuggling and illegal timber trade and timber poaching. When the Indian police started the gang’s activities at election time, they target villages in Nepal for easy money.

Moreover, when state authority weakens, the weak suffer. Ask yourself who were the overwhelming victims of the crumbling Nepali government’s offensive against the Maoists, and be damned if you don’t answer, “the weak, the innocent, the ordinary.” Of the nearly 10,000 dead in the long Maoist war, 60 percent are youth, women and combatants, citizens, people next door. Similarly in India, when the Kashmiri uprising was raging in the early 90s, Indian security forces tended to go after the softest of targets. Human rights abuses abounded. Whole villages were rounded up and people were never seen again. Women were raped, schoolboys subjugated. It got better as the decade wore on. The Indian army and paramilitary forces learned the value of intelligence, something that demonstrably isn’t happening in Nepal. A distant elite in a cloistered capital is hardly able to penetrate fiery, ideological movements based on rural alienation. So the solution for those least able to protect themselves, or have their bully boys in uniform do it for them.

Now look at America. And consider the case of Kari Rein. She’s a Norwegian-born US resident who lives in the fair state of Oregon. Her husband and her two children are full-fledged US citizens, born on American soil. She holds a green card and has for nearly two decades. Last year, Kari’s American dream went sour. She and her family were returning for a vacation abroad when she was stopped by the immigration authorities at Seattle airport. Her husband and sons didn’t see her again for nearly three weeks as the US government held her incommunicado, without charge, under some draconian provision in the immigration act, bolstered by the current obsession with homeland security. Then a lawyer cracked the government’s wall of silence and discovered that Kari was being held as a “dangerous drug offender”. Fourteen years earlier, she and her husband had been convicted of growing a few marijuana plants. They’d paid fines, done community service and avoided drugs ever since. But now, post 11 September, America is on guard against dangerous foreigners. And Kari Rein is going to be deported. That’s right, deported. Various committees have come together to empower immigration officers to take action against any foreigner with a drug offense in his or her past, no matter the circumstances. So it’s back to the U.S. for Kari Rein. Her adopted hometown in Oregon is up in arms and is raising money for her legal defense. The state’s best paper is campaigning hard in her favour. She’s out of jail but bound by a court order to inform police of her movements.

Reporters say the local police force is embarrassed to have to turn her back at all, considering her an exemplary citizen. But a floundering Bush administration in Washington is rounding up and deporting people like Kari simply because they can. They are classic soft targets. There are still thousands of people—mostly, but not all, Muslims—in US jail who were rounded up after 9-11 and not charged with any crimes. They are suspected of immigration acts, but there’s no definitive pending deportation. Some have drug convictions, like Kari. They’re a danger to America and they’ll be kicked out.

Soft states are dangerous. To themselves and their citizens. A healthy body politic is less so but it bears watching nonetheless. It’s yet another reason to get democracy back in Nepal.
Safe and sound

The unexpected release of 37 hostages taken from Beni (seen being boused out of Kathmandu airport, right) by the Maoists has raised questions about the rebels’ motives. Some believe it’s a bid to improve their battered image at a time when the UN Commission on Human Rights is readying to debate a resolution tabled by Switzerland in Geneva. “Showing that they are abiding by the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners will go down well, especially as the international community has been critical of the army’s human rights record,” said one Kathmandu-based diplomat.

That the Maoists did not insist on their earlier demand for the release of Mahar Prasad Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar could point to a secret deal with the government who may have asked for a show of goodwill. There is speculation that the two sides may actually be discussing a ceasefire to coincide with the new year. Interestingly, the Maoists contacted the ICRC about their intention to release the hostages. “They called us first and we sent our six-member team to Rolpa for the necessary preparation for the release,” Nicolas Bachmann of the ICRC told us.

No news is good news

Pokhara battens down the hatches

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

There is a full scale counter-insurgency war going on, the headlines are all about bombings, landmines, blockades, bandas, bangs, and abductions. Yet some tourists keep coming into Nepal. The flights are full and the trekking trails are bustling. NTBs (Nepal Tourism Board) figures for March show a whopping 80 percent increase in numbers compared to last year. What is going on? Industry sources cite several reasons: no country in the world is safe anymore and Nepal doesn’t yet have the kind of arbitrary terrorism in place, tourists have never been harnessed in Nepal, there is no active fighting in the high mountain valleys and most visitors to Nepal are adventure tourists so news of fighting doesn’t necessarily deter them.

Still, the Maoist insurgency has cost the industry dearly. Arrival figures of 230,000 last year were half the peak figures for 1998, and income is even lower because hotels and trekking agents have slashed rates to stay afloat. Despite Maoist assurances that they will not harm tourists, the industry is sensitive to information of strikes or violence. Pokhara was badly hit by the two-week Chitwan and Gandaki blockades in March and the battle for Beni. There are also worrying signs that assurances guaranteeing safety of trekkers is not always being followed by grassroots militia. Recent incidents:

3 April: Protesters in Kathmandu stoned peloton of vehicles carrying tourists arriving after an overland drive from Tibet. Many of these vehicles were driven into the safety of the BICC. “Some tourists were sick with fear,” recalls Rabi Poudel, a resident of Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA).

24 March: Maoist rebels forced two French tourists to walk back to Daman on the Tribhuvan Highway because of the Makawanpur and Dhading blockades. Their van was pushed over a cliff.

21 March: The rebels destroyed the tower in Meghai, an airfield used exclusively for tourists travelling to the upmarket Tiger Tops resort in the Royal Chitwan National Park.

15 March: Suspected Maoists have been setting off explosions in government buildings in the vicinity of Thamel including the Election Commission and the Sanchaya Kosh Building. Not one has been hurt, but there are loud bangs.

11 March: Maoists vandalised a bus carrying two British tourists to Tiger Tops from Bharatpur Airport. The two were badly shaken and hired a rickshaw back to Narayanghat.

26 February: A socket bomb hit a van carrying a French family driving overland to Kathmandu from India during a banda in Kanchanpur. The tourists were so spooked they cut short their Nepal visit and returned to India through Dhansag.

Recent news of attacks on Indian vehicles and businesses is worrying the travel industry who fear a slump in Indian arrivals.

Indian tourists were already keeping away because they heard about the blockades, says Sundar Shrestha, former president of Pokhara’s HAN chapter.

“There were 60 percent cancellations in the last one week alone.”

The average length of stay of tourists in Nepal has also dropped from 14 days to 9 days.

The Canadian International Development Agency is seeking an experienced Nepali citizen for the directorship of the Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO). Applicants must explain, in less than two pages, how they intend to provide the required services under the current environment.

Applicants should also state the annual consultant fee (minus the compulsory insurance coverage) that they are willing to accept. Women and ethnic minorities candidates are encouraged to apply. The full statement of services is available upon request at cco@cco.org.np. Applications must be received before 16:30 on Monday April 19th at the address below.

Only short listed candidates will be contacted.

DIRECTOR

CANADIAN COOPERATION OFFICE, NEPAL

Duties

The Director of the Nepal CCO ensures the provision of professional, financial, technical and administrative advice required for management and ongoing monitoring of CIDA programs and projects in Nepal.

Education

Graduation from a recognized university with specialization in commerce, business administration, economics, international relations, development studies, or other relevant field.

Language Requirements

English and Nepali Essential

Experience

- Experience in managing and monitoring international development programs/projects, in the field or at the headquarters of an international development organization
- Experience in advising and supporting senior officials from Canada and/or other donor countries
- Experience in policy/program analysis and financial management
- Experience in managing professional and support staff.

Knowledge

- Knowledge of the mandate, policies, programs, objectives and priorities of CIDA.
- Knowledge of contracting regulations and procurement procedures
- Knowledge of financial management practices as they apply to the management of international development programs and projects
- Knowledge of current international issues that have an impact on developing countries.
- Knowledge of South Asia and Nepal.

Duties

- Ability to analyze, plan and manage all aspects of implementing and monitoring complex projects and programs with several components, and to achieve the desired results.
- Ability to implement results-based management and an accountability frameworks
- Ability to manage budgets and financial systems
- Ability to analyze complex geopolitical issues at the national level, to work as part of a team to develop a strategic vision to development assistance and contribute towards the effectiveness of aid
- Ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing
- Ability to supervise the work of staff and consultants within a multicultural context.
- Ability to create and lead teams to deliver high quality collaborative assignments.
- Ability to manage risk to protect assets, staff and partners working in conflict.

Personal Suitability

- Effective interpersonal relationships and teamwork
- Initiative
- Reliability
- Able to work under pressure
- Ability to make decisions and sound judgement.

* The successful candidate will be required to take out performance Liability insurance

Phone calls and e-mail enquiries will not be entertained.

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Fax: 977-1-441-0422

E-mail: merina@cco.org.np
Manjushree’s headache

If this is what latthis can do, imagine what M-16s are doing

My friend Manjushree Thapa has a headache. A big one. She also has severe back pains. Both of these newly acquired ailments come courtesy of the government.

My friend was participating in a peaceful democracy rally around Ratna Park on Sunday, when all of a sudden she found herself cornered by latthi-wielding riot police. With the rest of the crowd, she attempted to run away but was hit on the head by a policeman.

Falling to the ground, blood pouring from the gash in her head, she was taken to Bir Hospital, into which police then subjected her to further latthi blows to her body.

She was helped by strangers to enter Bir Hospital, into which police were subjected to further latthi blows to her body.

Manjushree is another statistic in the lengthening list of those with head injuries. In hospital, she lay with her head covered by a latthi-wielding riot police. With the rest of the crowd, she attempted to run away but was hit on the head by a policeman.

But things have changed. India is belatedly giving the Maoists a hard time in its territory and Indian concerns will have deepened after the Nepali-style landmine attack in Jharkhand that killed 26 police on Thursday.

For the first time in years the Maoist statements have taken on a strident anti-Indian tone accompanied by attacks on Indian vehicles and businesses in the state.

Former minister and police broker Narayan Singh Pun believes the Maoists in Jharkhand and Beni actually show that they want to return to the table. They are committing the government to take seriously and restart the peace process, but both sides need to treat each other,” he told Times of India.

The government is still talking tough, refusing to accept third-party mediation. “The Beni attack completely wiped out the possibility for peace talks,” Home Minister Kamal Thapa said after the 20 March incident.

But there are no indications that there are any back channel initiatives. If anything, the situation on the ground is getting worse. The midwest has been under siege for two weeks now, with serious food shortages in the hill districts. The blockade has forced some Nepalis coming home from India to walk up to 100km to reach their homes.

In the far west, the Maoists have traditionally been much more active this week rounding up thousands of villagers and taking them on tractor trailers to an unknown destination. Many others have fled across the border to India.

The big question now is how long can, or should, King Gyanendra fight his war on two fronts?

SUKSU SANHAKUMI

In Geneva, the spotlight is on Nepal

Nepalis returning from India trekking for 200 km to their villages in the midwestern hills, near the Mahendra Highway near Nepalganj.

The political leaders insist the semantics is not so important, but it is clear that the palace sees ‘constituent assembly’ as an ‘ex sufਸ reminisce for ‘republic’ and will not agree easily. The parties may be pushed to ask for a constituent assembly, which has been the Maoist demand all along. This was also the point on which the peace talks between the government and the Maoists collapsed last August.

‘If the parties in government will need a constituent assembly to bring both the king and the parliamentary forces within the constitutional framework,’ says Damayanthi Dhungana, former speaker and a peace facilitator. ‘All the factions will unite against the king if he does not agree. It will be the people vs the king.’

But the king could still defuse the situation by forming an all-party government acceptable to everyone, or restoring parliament. After reasserting power, the parties may soften their tough talk, as they gear up towards future elections while trying to arrange a ceasefire.

It is later that a future elected government will face in toughest test in dealing with the Maoist insurgency. In a sense, we will be back to 5 October 2002 but with a much more serious situation.

The Maoists, for their part, have been using the party-place clash to their advantage. They are on an offensive spree with attacks on police posts in Janakpur and Lumbini this week.

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A draft human rights resolution sponsored by Switzerland has raised a storm in a tea cup. The resolution would extend technical cooperation to the government of Nepal under Agenda Item 19 of the ongoing 60th session of the Commission on Human Rights. The European Union, which is using the draft as a stick to prod Kathmandu to resume negotiations with the Maoists, has not yet taken a decision on whether to co-sponsor the resolution which, if tabled, will come to the vote on 21 April.

Situations similar to the one prevailing in Nepal are best suited for a resolution under Agenda Item 9 on country situations. Usually, resolutions under Agenda Item 19 are tabled as a compromise after a country has been censured over a considerable period of time under Agenda Item 9.

As expected, Kathmandu sought New Delhi’s protection. India has been opposed to any third party involvement in South Asia although it did go along when Colombo decided to invite Norway to facilitate the peace process with the LTTE. Foreign Minister Bhishma Bhadur Thapa met his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha on his way back from New Delhi and month and then went on to Brussels to convince the EU.

On 20 March Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa announced a 25-point commitment paper on human rights.

The questions now is who could be credible and effective mediators to the conflict in Nepal. The government has ruled out UN mediation. Domestic interlocutors have no leverage over the parties in conflict except serving as potholes. While Kathmandu might have extracted temporary respite from New Delhi’s pressure, it will have to pay a heavy price.

India’s Foreign Secretary Sharikand reportedly assured his Nepali counterpart Madhav Raman Acharya on 23 February to take up the Bhutanese refugee issue. However, during his meeting with King Gyanendra on 26 March 2004, Shankar has reportedly denied any such assurance being given to Nepal.

Colombia, which has been fighting the communist FARC guerrillas, welcomed United Nations monitoring and sovereignty has not been denied by the UN presence.

Nepal, like Sri Lanka, must make an independent decision whether to invite the UN Secretary General to step in. If Nepal, following New Delhi’s footsteps, considers the Maoist issue as an internal one and the Bhutanese refugee issue as a bilateral one with Bhutan, victory to Gyanendra would indeed be a defeat.

A failed state is in its own negative dynamics and it is in Nepal’s interest to facilitate solutions to both the Maoist and Bhutanese refugee issue. Capturing a few Maoists leaders in India is unlikely to resolve the Maoist crisis. The EU, which provides substantial funding for Nepal and Bhutanese refugees, must take a firm decision to co-sponsor the Swiss resolution of Nepal up to inviting the UN Secretary General before 21 April.

Suk Suhanahkumi is the foreign editor of the Asian Age, New Delhi.

Suk Suhanahkumi is the director of the Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi.
Nothing left to lose

In remote Baitadi, you hear the heartrending stories of Nepal’s internally displaced

KISHORE NEPAL in BAITADI

Bhandari himself is not convinced why this sleepy little village should have the grandiose label of ‘municipality’. But it is true that Golhalpuni’s population has surged after the Maoist attack in the main town of Patan two years ago. It is also now the transit point for many Baitadi villagers fleeing across the border to India in large numbers.

After the Maoists started forcing teachers to attend their meetings in the past two months, most have abandoned their schools and come to Golhalpuni for safety. Dhuwalkot Pan, 49, is a teacher at a school teacher from Khaliag. The Maoists looted their house and the family has nothing left. "We did nothing wrong, my husband is a good man, he has been teaching for 25 years," she says, sobbing. Two boys and two girls, all teenagers, came to their house four months ago and told family members to get out because the ‘command’ had decided to evict them. "Even my 81-year-old mother-in-law was told to get out, and she is now mentally unbalanced," says Dhuwalkot. The number of Nepalis who are internally displaced or forced to migrate to India because of the conflict is, according to one estimate, now about 1.5 million. These heartrending stories must be multiplied many times to gauge the true scale of misery and suffering.

Dil Bahadur Bobhata is from Khorotara village, and has also fled to the relative safety of Golhalpuni. His distraught face tells of his anxiety about his teenage daughter who was recently abducted by the Maoists. He does not remember the date. It was the day before Gauna Pashu. Why does it matter when she was taken away, my daughter is lost," he says and posess his anger at the Maoists as well as the CDO, army and police who are doing nothing to help.

For Baitadi’s CDO Pradhanum Aryal, the sheer scale of the dislocation is hard to manage. It is very difficult to help individuals when there are thousands of them. Aryal was CDO in Dhanu and has seen first hand the brutality of a Maoist attack. He is trying to help with the meagre resources at his disposal. Aryal knows Dil Bahadur personally and, even so, there is nothing he can do. "I know he is going through hell," he says, "but what can I do? I just don’t have any budget even for emergency relief.

Just when you think you have heard the saddest story, there is even a sadder one. Dhan Bahadur Kunwar, a tailor from Kurvalok village, has no words to describe what he went through. He is still speechless with shock and shows us his bruised body. His small tea shop was doing well. The Maoists wanted a donation, but he couldn’t afford the sum and resisted. He was beaten and forced to his village with his family and what was left of his belongings.

A Baitadi journalist, Laxmi Dutta Pant, says things were going from bad to worse, but in the past month Maoist extortion, eviction and threats has increased many fold. It is not just the rich people in the villages who are victims. Increasingly, small shopkeepers and subsistence farmers are being targeted.

"By night the Maoists force them to give food and shelter, and by day the army patrols come trying to find out where they are," explains Pant.

Most people we talked to here are reluctant to speak out about their ordeals. The stories of ruthless extortion and punishment they have heard means people keep quiet. Raj Bahadur Chaudhary, a local human rights activist, says: ‘People from the villages are extremely frightened, they are also not comfortable with outsiders.’ But what is surprising is that despite their suffering and the threat of violence, there is still a lot of fearless people who will speak the truth on the record about the atrocities perpetrated by both the security forces and the Maoists. For Nepalis displaced from their homes and villages, it seems there is nothing left to lose. Speaking out is the only thing they can do.

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The Himalayan Times
Picture perfect

Kathmandu’s top photographers are fussy about quality

SRADDA BASHNYAT

Instead of relying on others, Mari Lama (pictured) started Dark Room Creations, a professional black and white lab in Lazimpat where he works with Tanka Rai, a renowned manual processor. “Professionals who know black and white come to us. I give them very good quality work,” says Lama. The devil is in the detail, especially since developing black and white film is still a manual process, right from getting the film onto the spot in the darkroom—something Lama makes his students practice repetitively—to choosing the right grade of paper for the negative. “You can do a lot with black and white,” says Lama, whose work with the medium has been lauded at several exhibitions. RK Manandhar agrees. “Black and white is my art too,” he says.

Most raw materials for processing film are available in the market allowing professionals like Manandhar to mix their own solutions, removing the risk of an inept technician and getting as close to the photographer’s perception as possible. He says: “Working with the grayscale and lighting gives the photograph a more artistic feel and greater tonal quality.”

Rameshwor Prasad Aryal, president of the Nepal Colour Lab Association, believes Nepali technicians are of international calibre. “Solar, Nepal only produces enough technicians for the local market, but we could export this manpower,” he says. His Rainbow Photo Labs has been in business for 19 years and has 14 branches. The Nepali technicians use mostly Konica technology and film products. “As Konica’s trading partner, Rainbow Photo Labs would give us world class quality and service at very competitive prices,” says Aryal.

Himmeda’s photographer Min Bajracharya has been on the beat since 1983 and visited all the top brands before settling on AGFA. “I find a warm richness in the photographs and there’s good colour dispersion,” he says. Bajracharya suggests matching the film to the lab—in his case, AGFA for an AGFA processing lab—since the film and processing equipment are calibrated.

To be fair, the blame for a bad picture cannot be placed solely on the lab. Cameras need to be cleaned and maintained. Film kept under glass is corrupted by direct sunlight or may be a duplicate. Photographic paper often isn’t stored at the right temperatures.

Professional labs like Manandhar take no chances: his fridge is stuffed with boxes of photo paper and he divides labour. “I trust the bigger labs to do my processing and have the prints done at manual labs,” he told us. If the end result is to be close to flawless, sticklers like Manandhar realise, “It’ll never be perfect unless I do everything myself.”

Digital multiply

With digital technology making things easier, even the most dedicated professionals are making the switch. Going straight from the camera to computer programs like Adobe Photoshop eliminates the entire developing process and has made editing a breeze.

GOPAL CHITRAKAR, photo correspondent with Reuters, began taking pictures 25 years ago. At the time it was vital for any good photographer to know the darkroom process, which involved an enormous amount of time and effort. Now, with digital technology, he is the master of his own lab and marvels at how fast, economical and easy the process has become. “It’s just my photograph and me,” says Chitarkar as he operates a computer file and shows us his recent pictures of a Himalayan panorama (see pic top). “This picture was possible only with a software that allowed me to integrate seven separate images.”

Digital print facilities are useful for those of us who prefer to have hardcopies. Unfortunately, most run-of-the-mill labs offer a consumer quality ink jet printer that results in a grainy, raw output, so it definitely helps to know who does it right.

Though they had a good digital mini lab, Photo Concern brought in a Digital Image Processing System (DIPS) to ride the digital wave. The Kodak technology cost Rs 2 million, but the print quality is unparalleled. Though it relies on the same chemical process as a manual lab, it’s an entirely digital set up from scanner to LED printer for uniform colour tone. And if they’re doing the shoot for you, they’ll use their own camera, a Fuji S2 Pro with 12.1 megapixels. DIPS prints from any digital media, including mobile phones. It’s possible to retouch, enlarge photos or restore old colour or black and white pictures too. Maximum print size is 20”x30” and a postcard size costs Rs 30 per print.

It is a bit pricier for less work than regular prints, but technology doesn’t always come cheap. Studio 7 uses the Konica QD 21 mini lab system for graphic designers, ad agencies and anyone who requires quality digital work, printing a maximum 12”x18” size at 300dpi. But, as technician Miraj Dhungel cautions, if the resolution of the image is low, there are limits to how much it can be improved. Unlike the liquid chemicals many other systems use, QD21 uses tablet chemicals ensuring the limits to how much it can be improved. Unlike regular printing a maximum 12”x18” size at 300dpi.

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AGFA is expecting the arrival of its AGFA DILab 2 in a few months. The processing is a regular chemical job, but prints are exposed by laser. It’s got a built-in scanner to limit human error and prints 40dpi. You can ask for prints on digital photo paper at a maximum 12”x18” print, but it will most likely come to double the price of regular film prints, estimates Sarasu Amalya, director at Colour Link Lab in Thamel.

Chitrakar, who teaches communications at Tribhuvan University, sees only one drawback with digital: “It’s so easy to manipulate an image. If you are unethical you could destroy someone’s life with it.”
The NGO business

How can business work for development?

**ECONOMIC SENSE**
**Arttha Beed**

Nepali NGOs are generally made up of people who do not want to work for the private sector under free-market rules. However, they are now finding it important to understand the private sector, especially in developing countries where business has to look at the huge social service market. These NGOs are understanding that the real answer is finding a way to make private business work for development.

The region is witnessing an unprecedented wave of free trade agreements and creation of economic blocs. Like Nepal, many countries have exceeded these agreements without really understanding the possible socio-economic impact. Socialists for have always been against global integration of business and economy, to improve their image as well as boost productivity. Companies with philanthropic track records that take corporate social responsibility seriously are better placed than their competitors and surely NGOs and community-based organisations form the best vehicle for the implementation of their social goals. It is not only the larger multinationals or large NGOs that can get into partnerships but perhaps organisations of all sizes and scales can join hands.

Cabbages and Condoms resorts chain in Thailand started by Mecchh Vairavadya is an example of businesses run by NGOs. Khan Mecchh’s profits from the company go to fund The Asian Centre for Population Development, Community Development. In Nepal, there are lots of examples of the fusion of community service and business. Bhuddhah Hospital, women’s co-operatives and handicraft manufacturers. It is time to look for replication and further partnerships. That is precisely why the Asia-Pacific experience has a lot of relevance for us in Nepal.

Photo Concern is a family business, how did it get started?

Srijana Thapa: My grandfather DB Thapa was a royal photographer and established the business in 1960. It was in Calcutta that he became interested in photography, but there were no photography services or equipment here then. People used to take colour rolls to Hong Kong to develop. So, he started a small studio downstairs. He started developing colour photographs manually and in the 1970s he got a mini lab. Having the machine in itself was itself a big challenge. It cost Rs 8-9 lakh and no one wanted to help with co-investing. Everyone thought there was no market.

Isn’t quality control a real problem?

Quality depends on many factors: the camera, the photographer, people behind the printing machine. The machine itself. Most of our lab technicians have been trained in India and have 12-15 years experience so they are well acquainted with the whole process. We don’t compromise on quality. As far as the paper and chemicals are concerned, we use only Kodak. Some labs cut corners and dilute their chemicals.

They call it the ‘photo lab syndrome’: the Nepali propensity to copy someone else’s success. The photo lab business really picked up 10-12 years ago. Now, it’s pretty saturated and stable. We have now 117 Kodak Express Labs in Nepal out of the total 240 labs. The business is growing daily. Our main outlet processes 50,000 rolls a month and from each roll we give Rs 2 to the Nepal Cancer Relief Society. That comes to Rs 100,000 a month.

Going digital hasn’t affected business?

Four years ago we brought in the first professional LED digital lab. It gives a uniform colour tone. We have three of the top digital cameras including Fujis S2 Pro with 12.1 megapixels. Four megapixels is a major leap. The two others are 6.2 megapixels. The cost of processing is less. But professionals will always prefer manual photography.

Who are some of the big name photographers that come to Photo Concern?

Thomas Kelly was here for his exhibition on sadhus. We have also worked with Jill Gocher, a travel photographer and Kanak Mani Doti’s black and white prints were here digitally. Roishan Chitraker is studying in the US, he came here on an internship and printed his photographs here.

Disposal is a concern isn’t it?

The machines put out minute waste, especially with introduction of digital photography. Test prints create waste paper. We put it through a paper cutter and give it to the municipality. We sell the waste chemicals to people who extract silver from it. We used to do it ourselves but it became a health hazard for the staff. Now, we sell it to the municipality and have the technology to deal with it safely.
Some can even make me cry

Siddhanta Ghimire and Niruta Singh in Dui Kinara.

KAPIL TAMOT

Here are Bollywood-type melodramatic tearjerkers, and there are movies like Tulsí Ghimire’s Dui Kinara, which are just so pure in their sentiments that they bring tears to your eyes. It is a love story in which a young fisherman falls in love with a Nepali woman raised in America while she’s on a visit home. He thinks this is such an impossible relationship that he doesn’t let his feelings show. But he is attached to her son, and... I shouldn’t give away too much of the plot.

There isn’t anything extraordinary about the plot, indeed it is the simplicity of the story and the Nepali touch that is the most moving. Bhupen Chand, Niruta Singh and even child actor Siddhanta Ghimire provide stellar performances. After a recent premier of the three-hour movie, I went up to Bhupen Chand and congratulated him. Chand didn’t want to follow his father into politics and trained to be a pilot. But it is in film that he seems to have found his true calling. Chand must have seen my moist eyes and asked: ‘Did you cry?’ I told him I did, not once but twice.

Tulsí Ghimire said in a BBC interview three years ago, “The Nepali audience wants drama with a good social message.” It looks like Ghimire has delivered exactly that with Dui Kinara. In the interview the veteran director also said: “We shouldn’t give up, and we must compete with Indian films differently not with bigger budgets but with relevance and Nepaliess.”

That was a time Ghimire’s Dapan Chhayana was drawing unexpected crowds and raked in more than Rs 30 million at the box office. More than half the theatres across the country, including those in the rural belt, were showing Nepali films. Fifty Nepali movies were being produced every year and they were doing well despite the world’s largest film industry being right next door. The logic that Nepali audiences would not respond to Nepali movies proved a fallacy.

But things started going wrong. At the security situation deteriorated and the state of emergency was declared in 2001, the cinema industry took a direct hit. Anywhere else, the film industry would have done well in times of crisis. After all, celluloid is a form of escapism. Here, the public was reluctant to go to the movies because of security concerns. But that still doesn’t explain full houses in a South Asian documentary film festival last year, and Karthmandu’s youth don’t seem to be scared to attend concerts, and the disco and dance clubs in Thamel are full till late at night.

Actor Hari Bansha Acharya doesn’t believe security concerns are the main reason for the downturn in the cinema industry. He argues that the people who used to go to the movies prior to the state of emergency simply aren’t in Nepali anymore, having left for the Gulf or for Malaysia. In order to attract an audience, Acharya thinks Nepali directors and producers need to pay serious attention to quality.

During a talk program last month at the Reporters’ Club, actress Jal Shah publicly admitted she felt ashamed being a cinema actress. Is this why educated parents tend to discourage children from joining the film industry? What is the main reason Nepalis don’t watch Nepali movies anymore? Who is to blame: the directors, producers, actors, the government, the Film Development Board?

“All of the above,” says Tulsí Ghimire. “Times are difficult, the industry is going through a serious crisis. There is nothing negative about it, there are ups and downs in every industry. People do want to watch good movies,” he says.

And that is exactly what he seems to have done with Dui Kinara. Mending a powerful story with good acting and professional production. The success of Namaste and the documentary Bheddo Om Jastaman mean that times are changing, and so is public taste.

Muna and Madan

When word came that the movie based on Laumi Prasad Debokota’s Muna Madan was being screened in New York, many had very low expectations. Some thought the great literary work of the Maha Kabi should not be turned into a motion picture with a low budget, while others felt it shouldn’t be turned into movie at all.

Surprisingly, Debokota’s epic tragedy of love, separation and death has been turned into one of the best movies ever made in Nepal. The film has not yet been screened in Nepal itself, but is being shown to selected audiences in the United States. One of the most interesting reactions to the film was from the Sherpa community in New York after it was screened here recently.

When comedian Santosh Parij came up with socially insensitive and insulting ‘Sherpa Ramayan’ in the 1990s, he had ridiculed the community. He made fun of the way they dress (gun boots), the way they speak Nepali (heavy accents) and made fun of their occupations and habits. Among mainstream Nepalis in New York, it was a big hit, of course. But the Sherpas had felt slighted by the negative stereotyping.

When Girja Prasad Koirala had come to New York as prime minister in 2000 and addressed Nepalis at Columbia University, many in the audience quizzed him about dual citizenship. But the Sherpas bombarded him with questions on discrimination within the civil service and recounted vividly the harassment meted out to those not from the mainstream community at the airport in Kathmandu when they returned home. With so much intolerance how can a Sherpa, Tamang or Gurung feel a sense of belonging to Nepal?

But Muna Madan was a departure from the standard portrayals. When a dying Madan, left behind by his friends while returning from Tibet, a Sherpa named Chyangba (although Chyangba is from Tibet, a Sherpa) finds Madan. At first, Madan is scared of this stranger in the jungle and frantically hides his valuables. But when Chyangba offers Madan shelter in his house, the famous song in background (‘Mani Thulo dila le huncha, juta le hudaina’), the theatre broke into applause. Some Nepali New Yorkers had tears streaming down their eyes.

When Madan gets ready to leave after getting better, he offers Chyangba the sack of gold he hid in the jungle. Chyangba answers with those famous lines from Debokota in Nepal that go: ‘Gold cannot be eaten or grown, instead send blessings for my children from your mother’. Muna Madan should go some way to heal the insensitive portrayals of Nepalis minorities in the past.

For those used to Bollywood, the film is restrained, not melodramatic and there aren’t any of the usual embarrassing moments when you feel like cringing. The film is set in a typical Nepali village and there are few flaws (no fake sneakers in the background) and the actors all deserve an A+. Some Nepali women felt that the way Muna and her mother were portrayed as vulnerable and weak was an insult to womanhood. But even they couldn’t stop tears welling up when the movie neared its sad climax.

[Kiran Thapa in New York]
When Dhubra Basnet ventured into the Nepali hinterland armed with a digital camera in February 2001, little did he know that the footage he captured over a month of travelling through the Maoist heartland of Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot would result in a documentary that would bring the Nepali public face to face with the reality of the Maoist People's War. For the first time, the Nepalis saw images of guerrillas on the move, Maoist gatherings, interviews with widows and orphans, the sad tales of villagers caught between the security forces and the Maoists, hapless government officials at district headquarters. These were viewers who, all too often, had only been able to read vague accounts in the newspapers and the government's body count.

Suddenly, they were real people. Nepalis who could be our brothers and sisters fighting and killing each other. “Government officials, lawmakers, politicians, policy makers, diplomats, the general Nepali public, everyone wanted to watch the film,” recalls Basnet, who was overwhelmed by the response. “I had an idea that I could make a film about the people’s war but didn’t realise the interest it would generate.”

Premiered at Film South Asia 2001, a biannual festival of South Asian documentaries in Kathmandu, Basnet’s 46-minute The Killing Terraces won wide acclaim. The film has since travelled for screenings across the subcontinent, Europe and in the United States. It has been shown in festivals in Japan and broadcast on Australian and Finnish television. Since 2001, the country’s security situation has deteriorated and the Maoist conflict has spread. “Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot and large portions of the west are largely controlled by the Maoists, and it is difficult to travel like I did then,” says Basnet, who recently returned from Bhojpur and Khotang in the east.

“The security situation in the east is like it was in the mid-west three years ago,” Basnet says. With filmmaker Mohan Mainali, Basnet visited the destroyed district headquarters of Bhojpur and filmed ordinary people caught between the Maoists and the army.

Mainali’s own film, Jigmatara ka Jyotandarara and Seeking Peace in Karnali document the added hardships faced by ordinary people in Nepal’s remote regions because of the conflict. Jigmatara talks about the families of 18 young men from a village in Dhading who were working at the afffield in Kailoke and were killed in an army raid two years ago when they were mistaken for Maoists.

Mainali and Basnet are now working on another documentary on the impact the conflict is having on Nepal’s education system and longterm development. Both filmmakers have found that documentaries are much more powerful in getting the message across than scores of articles in the print media. “The audio-visual medium is extremely effective, but it has to be done with sensitivity, without propaganda and by letting the people speak on camera,” says Basnet.

Nabin Subba, who made the award-winning film Namaste about a Limbu woman and the women in her life, says the country’s present situation has brought out many stories that need to be told. “There are a lot of places to explore for the filmmaker, we need more courage to create a third opinion that is different from the Maoists and the security forces,” he says, “and film is the medium to do this with, but we need to take risks.”

Subba is working on a feature film on the current conflict due to be released by November. “It is a simple story about a village that is suffering from the repercussions of the eight years of Maoist conflict, the village emptied of its youth, the story told through the eyes of an older generation caught between the Maoists and the security forces.”

He realises the risks. Mainali’s Jigmatara ka Jyotandarara was almost banned by the authorities during an official screening at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2002.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

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RAMYATA LIMBU

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Times 9 - 15 April 2004 #191

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Dhubra Basnet filming the recent street demonstrations in Kathmandu

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Real on reel

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Girls and grenades

Rajasthan, 2 April

Ten-year-old Rajalakshmi Rawat’s hands are small, tender. And they are accustomed to lobbing lethal grenades at security forces in and around Ratlam village in Jumla district. “I have two with me right now,” she says, showing us the bag that she carries round the clock. “I was told to attack the enemy with the grenades whenever and wherever I see them.” Isn’t she the least bit afraid that the explosives may detonate in her hand? “I am not afraid of death,” she says confidently.

Rajalakshmi looks no different from any other child: you could easily imagine her frolicking with her friends and being indulged with candies. But this young girl left home for good and went underground with other Maoist rebels who gave her the nom de guerre Comrade Samimaha.

Her friend Sirina Budha is 11, and she has two grenades too. “Right now our roles are confined to throwing grenades at security forces,” she says, matter-of-factly. “Once we grow up, we will attack the barracks of the Royal Nepali Army.”

Comrade Samimaha, she left school at grade three to join the rebels. There are at least six other girls like Rajalakshmi and Sirina in Ratlam who also act as spies. They scout the village and keep a sharp lookout for security patrols. They also keep tabs of newcomers in the area. The girls carry arms and ammunition for the rebels, sometimes travelling to areas where full-scale battles are raging between the security forces and the rebels.

“When my friends are ready to die, I cannot stay back. My parents encouraged me to fight against injustice and exploitation,” says Samimaha. The girls have a ready explanation about their involvement. They all say they joined the rebels out of their own free will and were not forced. They say they are fighting global imperialism, but don’t seem to know what that means. The Maoist leadership has maintained the movement never uses children. Costs a flat fee of $4,500. That covers not only the permit for the expedition but also includes the expense for Chinese liaison officers and the Himalayan heart of burdens, yaks. Little wonder then, that while Tibet has nearly two dozen expedition teams for Everest this season, Nepal has only nine.

Out of control

Rajasthan, 4 April

Gayatri Adhikari and her friend Gyanu Humagai never imagined they would end up in a hospital after they set out to meet their parents on the afternoon of 3 April, the third day of the anti-regression street demonstration organised by the five parties. The two were caught in a police lathi charge. The blows fell following protests that they were government employees not involved in the rally. All 45 Gayari, 48, remembers is walking from Maiti Devi to Purnai Sadak. She woke up with a wounded eye at Bir Hospital, surrounded by doctors and her husband. Gyanu was also taken to a hospital by passers by, Bistam Tamang, another pedestrian, had her nose broken by the police.

Some demonstrators were drinking alcohol while chanting anti-regression slogans, provoking the police by shouting at them and breaking through noisy street barriers. These instances led the police to attack those in the rallies. Congress leader Jagdish Singh K.C. himself showed a remarkable lack of restraint by lobbing bricks at the police. But ordinary people in the city, those who have places to go, were caught in the fracas. Nyum Maharjan was obviously in mourning with his white clothes. He was on his way to his mother’s funeral on his bike when the demonstrators grabbed his key and...

Excerpts from Baburam Bhattarai’s op-ed piece in Kantipur, 7 April

There is no mystery about why Mohan Baidya was captured. It followed the triumph of our people’s ‘Army’ in Bhupal and Beni. These incidents shattered the state’s dream of overcoming our revolution with military power. It has now failed both politically and militarily. So they have taken the last resort of targeting high-level Maoist leaders. Siliguri was an easy and obvious place to begin. Comrade Kiran was their first prey. They have shown that their political parties began their anti-king movement is further prove that there is a unholy alliance between the reactionary rulers of Nepal and India. The pro-monarchy, parliamentary and revolutionary forces were engaged in a tryst. But this conflict has turned bilateral; between the pro-monarchists and the republicans. While it is true that the revolutionary forces and parliamentary parties have their own ways of attacking the monarchy, they now have a common target and a common understanding. The people have reason to be encouraged. This situation has completely demoralised the pro-philant faction.

Comrade Kiran was arrested with the active role of Indian rulers. It has barred the nexus between the neo-monarchy of the post-royal palace massacre and the reactionary rulers of India who believe in an indivisible India. In some political and media circles, Comrade Kiran’s arrest was interpreted as an unravelling of relations between the Maoists and the Indian ruling class.

Such opinions are baseless, irresponsible and deplorable. Recent developments are indications even for simpitons that it is not we but the monarchy of Nepal that has anti-national links with India. That is why we have no question of reaching an agreement with an anti-democratic and foreign-powerbrokered monarchy. We would rather bear the responsibility of leading a cruel and decisive fight against it.

We see no reason to be ashamed of Comrade Kiran’s arrest. For international proletarians like us, there are friends and foes in every nation. We take it as our right to use the territory of our enemies for to our needs. In line with the demands of our revolution, we can always use the cooperation and protection of our friends elsewhere.

In a foreign land, we run a reasonable risk from the enemy. The outrage and anger that his arrest has aroused in some political and media circles, Comrade Kiran’s arrest was interpreted as an explanation that the Maoist leadership has maintained the movement never uses children.
A marcher of history

I felt that the present stalemate has to be brought to an end, and this idea deserves support in principle. Moreover, being a literate I went to see things for myself. I walked in the rainy but I did not chant slogans. It was a peaceful demonstration. Participating in peaceful rallies isn’t a crime. I don’t believe in the parties completely but the fact remains that they are leading this movement. Among the three forces in the country at present, the parliamentary faction is better than the king and the Maoists that have guns. In these times, we need to support peaceful movement.

I don’t know if my experience with the movement will help my future work. When I was hit on my head, I realised that this part of my body needs to be strengthened. The police beat me on my back several times. I noticed that the police aimed for the heads of demonstrators. Someone came to help me but even he was nearly beaten. I explained that we did not belong to any political party and we were allowed to go to a hospital.

The movement is necessary. To make it effective, it needs wider participation. NGOs and civil society still distance themselves from it. While it is true that trust in the parties’ leadership has eroded, civil society has benefited from democracy. Yet they shy away from active, pro-democratic involvement. The people can replace leaders with tarnished images.

The royal felicitation look orchestrated, they don’t look spontaneous. Perhaps that reality eludes democracy. Yet they shy away from active, pro-democratic involvement. The people can replace leaders with tarnished images.

CDO Parajuli

Annapurna Post, 8 April

After the Maoists attack on Beni was over, they called on us to surrender. It was around 9:30 in the morning. I gave myself up after hiding under a bed in the LDO guesthouse. We had to walk the whole day and night carrying heavy loads of grenades from morning to late afternoon along dangerous trails. I was afraid that the grenades would explode if I accidentally bumped into something. I kept up the pace because I had to carry grenades as well. I was in a bad condition, dehydrated and with a bullet wound in my abdomen. It was a hard trek up and down the steep mountains, through forests and snow-bound passes over 13,500ft. After 13 days, we reached Rolpa’s Thawang and it was there we heard the news on the rebels’ radio about Kofi Annan’s call for peace talks. We were introduced to Pasang, who was exceedingly polite and treated us with respect. The Maoists told us that they would release us through ICRG and treat us as per international human rights norms and the Geneva Convention. We were relieved when the ICRG delegates arrived and told us that we were being released without any conditions and harm from the Maoists. My health has deteriorated and I suffered psychological trauma. But as soon as I am better, I will go back to my post in Myagdi.

Kantipur, 6 April

Excerpts from an interview with writer, Manishree Thapa:

By the time the demonstration reached Ratra Park after marching through Bagh Bazari, Putalipada and Sahid. I left on 4 April, the police had us surrounded. People began to run as soon as the tear gas was fired. The lathicharge began and I was hit on my head. Although I fell down, the police beat me on my back several times. I noticed that the police aimed for the heads of demonstrators. Someone came to help me but even he was nearly beaten. I explained that we did not belong to any political party and we were allowed to go to a hospital.

Mothers and widows

Kamalchhatra, 4 April

JAPA – Families bereaved by the insurgency are urging both the state and the Maoists not to feed off revenge and work towards peace. “It’s time to come to the table and start the peace talks,” was the message that most widows and mothers want spread across the country. “The Maoists should stop their violent politics and the government must avoid thinking that they can control the rebels by force,” says one of the victims’ parents. “If you come to the table and talk to each other, how will we ever have peace?” asks Yamuna Acharya, the widow of prolific writer Deb Kumar Acharya, who was arrested and brutally killed at the Charali army barrack. Her husband was not a Maoist and all he did was to raise his voice against the killings of unarmed civilians. “I don’t want others to suffer the way my husband did,” adds Yamuna, a student at Kakainbath Campus, who saw her husband killed before her eyes. “I obviously want revenge but I try to control it because it won’t benefit anyone.”

“People should stop the game of one Nepali killing another Nepali,” says Hem Kuman Blurtani from Budhabarau whose two sons were killed by the Maoists. “My sons are no more and our family has been uprooted. I wish I were dead too.”

The Maoist dragged her son Bhadur, a staff of National Research Department, out of the Oslo Mediation Camp and shot him.

Vicious cycle

Nikhbar Acharya in
Kanpur, 6 April

What a vicious cycle this is: there can’t be elections without normalcy, there can be no normalcy without the king handing over power and the king won’t handover power until elections. It is to break this vicious cycle that the parties are agitating. After the king’s Pelharada address, I have come to the following conclusions.

1. Elections can’t be held under the present circumstances.
2. It can take up to one year to restore things to normal.
3. Voting can’t be done in that one year, but preparations for elections can begin.
4. So, the first order of business is to restore things to normal, not to conduct elections.
5. This government isn’t capable of returning the situation to normal.
6. To allow the situation to return to normal, all forces must unite.

CCD Parajuli

Annapurna Post, 8 April

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Interested former students/associates/admirers of Fr. Watrin are requested to reserve and collect your invitation at SAV of GAA (442-0597), by April 21, 2004 LIMITED SEATS
The campaign for India's general elections, set to begin later this month, has turned steamiy enough for the Supreme Court to warn contesting parties to stay within the limits of decency or risk disqualification. “We want fair play and not slanderous remarks by one party against the other or the leader of party against that of another. This is not democracy,” a three-member bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice V.N. Khare said this week. Hitting sternly at possible disqualification, the court said: “If there is political mudslinging, we will make it an electoral offence.”

Monday’s was the latest in a series of hearings by the Supreme Court on the issue of ‘surrogate advertisements’ in which Prime Minister Vajpayee while virtually inundated with content coming in from the BJP . “Communal harmony should not be made to suffer and be made dependent upon the will of an individual or a group of individuals, whatever be their religion, be it of the majority or the minority,” the court observed in a ruling on 30 March.

The Election Commission is further daunted by the task of having to monitor the content of India’s 83 private television channels, which are beamed into homes through some 33,000 cable operators. Audiences are being virtually inundated with content coming from six national parties and 45 regional ones. Cable operators are already bound by rules making them liable for showing advertisements which ‘offend morality, decency and religious susceptibility of viewers’, but exactly where the line must be drawn has yet to be defined.
With demand slowly outstripping supply, Asia's energy insecurity is a dilemma for the US

**Analysis by Mikkal Herberg, Joseph Ferguson**

Energy is Asia’s lifeblood. And there is no greater demonstration of this than the fact: exactly 10 years ago, China became a net oil importer. Now, driven by booming economic growth, China surpassed Japan last year to become the second-largest oil consumer in the world after the US and the fifth largest oil importer. China and India (at number six) have now joined Japan and South Korea (at number two and four, respectively) on the list of the globe’s biggest oil importers. The result is a profound and deepening sense of energy insecurity in Asia that will inevitably have significant implications for US interests worldwide.

The US faces immense competition for influence in key energy-consuming areas. China, Japan, South Korea and increasingly India, are frantically boosting economic and diplomatic ties and aggressively buying up stakes in oil and gas fields across the Persian Gulf and Central Asian regions. The Persian Gulf already accounts for two-thirds of Asia’s oil imports, over the next decade this dependence is likely to balloon to more than 80 percent. All these changes will undoubtedly fuel a complex web of diplomatic ties and alliances that are likely to complicate and occasionally frustrate the US’ own energy diplomacy. Oil demands in Asia is expected to rise to 38 million barrels per day (mbd) from 21 mbd between 2001 and 2005, while regional oil production is likely to stagnate at around 8 mbd, according to the US Department of Energy. To put this into perspective, Asia expected increase in oil imports of 17 mbd by 2005 will exceed today’s oil exports from the entire OPEC Persian Gulf region.

More than half of this new import demand will come from China and India alone. Most of these new imports must inevitably come from politically turbulent and unstable regions, and be transported along potentially risky sea-lanes and complex pipeline routes. At the same time, oil demand in the US and Western Europe is expected to grow by more than 30 percent. And because of declining production, oil imports will rise by 18 mbd in North America and Europe. Although the US will rely far less on the Persian Gulf as a share of its oil imports than Asia or Europe, its oil import dependence will continue to rise, giving the US an even larger stake in the security of world oil flows. The resulting quest for energy security is already awakening tensions among Asia’s major players. A struggle between China and Japan over the route of a Russian oil pipeline is a case in point. After China had spent several years on an agreement with Russia to build a 600,000 barrel per day oil pipeline running 2,400 km from the Angara region in Eastern Siberia to North-eastern China, Japan stepped in the 11th hour to offer $7.5 billion in financial backing to expand and route the pipeline to the Pacific coast, where Japan would have greater access.

A key Pentagon concern is the risk of a growing arms-for-oil trade developing between Asia and the Persian Gulf, particularly in missile exports. Another area of potential long-run concern for the Pentagon is that as a larger share of Asia’s oil and gas requirements move by tanker from the Persian Gulf, the major Asian powers are likely to focus on gaining greater control over the Sea Lanes of Communication, or SLOC, in the Indian Ocean and the South and East China Seas.

Mikal Herberg is director of the Asia-Pacific Energy of the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at USC. Joseph Ferguson is director of Northwest Asia studies at The National Bureau of Asian Research in Seattle.

**Knock on wood**

The European Union and its member states are not doing enough to combat illegal logging, says the report ‘Government Barometer’ of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). It reveals that the majority of EU member states are failing to take action against illegal logging. WWF says illegal logging will become a “very serious internal market issue” when 10 accession countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia) join the bloc in May, bringing 24 million hectares of forests. It points out that half of the EU’s wood products come from these countries. Europe’s imports of illegally sourced timber are believed to be worth $1.4 billion a year.

The European Commission, the EU executive, launched the Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) in May last year. The Commission said the plan would help combat illegal logging by “helping to improve law enforcement and governance in wood-producing countries and by working to stop the trade in illegally harvested wood.” But the WWF report shows that the 12 EU countries that were part of the study—Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK—have so far failed to meet the criteria needed to tackle this problem. The WWF is calling on the European Commission to develop concrete proposals to combat illegal logging. It says it will continue to monitor government commitments, attitudes, and actions on illegal logging over the coming months. It will update its report in September, taking into account the record of the new accession countries.

**Earth unfriendly**

The hole in the ozone layer risks looming larger after the world community agreed last week to permit the United States and 10 other northern countries to continue using a pesticide that was supposed to be off-limits from 2005. The meeting was called after nations failed to agree last year on what exemptions should be granted to the northern nations for using the pesticide methyl bromide. Delegates decided to grant the northern states a one-year exemption, but not to commit to amounts for the following years. They will now be allowed to use an amount equal to more than 50 percent of all the methyl bromide consumed by 34 developed nations in 2001 and nearly three-quarters of that used by developing nations the same year. The push for exemption was led by the United States, whose request accounted for two-thirds of the total.

Methyl bromide is classed as an ozone-depleting substance because it damages the stratospheric layer that protects people, plants and animals from solar radiation, which can produce skin cancer and eye cataracts. Farmers use it to kill pests on strawberries, tomatoes, cut flowers and many other crops. It is also used in meat and vegetable processing. The ozone debate took place during the first extraordinary meeting of countries that signed on to the 1987 Montreal Protocol. The Protocol added teeth to the 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone layer that covers some 100 chemicals, including chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). According to the Protocol, developing nations had to freeze their use of methyl bromide in 2002, and then reduce it by 50 percent by 2005 and 100 percent by 2015. Developed countries previously agreed to cut methyl bromide by 25 percent by 1999 (compared to 1991 levels), 50 percent by 2001, 70 percent by 2003 and 100 percent by 2005.

**Photo Concern**

Print from all media

New Road, Kathmandu, Tel: 977 1 4223275, Fax: 977 1 4227027
“I did not feel the pain, and kept firing…”

This week we begin the recollections of Lachhuman Gurung, another Gurkha soldier who was awarded a Victoria Cross for his bravery in the Burma front. In this first installment Lachhuman recalls how he was hit by a bomb and rescued. These oral testimonies of retired Gurkhas are extracted from Laburey ka Katha by Dev Bahadur Thapa, published by Himal Books and translated from Nepali exclusively for Nepali Times in this space every week.

F

The RWSPP aimed at “full coverage of Lambini Zone” at the end of Phase III by mid-2003, providing water to 500,000 people through 68 gravity schemes and 27 shallow tubewells and sanitation to about 18,000 at the end of Phase Two. It is, however, a familiar story: expatriate domination through special institutions like the Project Support Unit (PSU), the donor choosing the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) as partner for Phase II in place of the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage on grounds of “corruption”, donor ability to extract endorsement from the chronically aid-dependent government despite DWSS and MLD reservations over the bloated “technical assistance” cost (47 percent of total Finnish aid for Phase II), etc.

The researchers studied only one gravity scheme and one tubewell to assess project impact and, based on “user involvement”, declaring it to be “a major success on grounds of “corruption”, donor aid to forestry altogether. A Finnida consultant later concluded that the plan did not allow for meaningful participation, transparency and accountability, have been assured in stakeholders, the basic elements of good governance namely, by the Nepalis”. But the statement, besides being misleading, also “encounter between two grand cultures, the transparent and rationalistic construction institutional arrangements for sustainability, including its study site, it should have examined the project performance for such basic issues as equity, universal coverage and impact in an area of 2.5 million people and post-construction institutional arrangements for sustainability, including its large-scale sanitation. The monitoring mission observed a more fragile job in such projects, but failed to go why Finndia did not opt for them.

In contrast, due to exclusive devolution of authority to the stakeholders, the basic elements of good governance namely, participation, transparency and accountability, have been assured in Nepal’s community forestry. The approach adopted a robust comeback of Nepal’s forest wealth in less than a decade and a half. It is rationalism at work through and through. Contrary to the claim in the book of it being Finnish origin, user management of forests itself was legally provided. Finnish aid to forestry altogether. A Finnida consultant later concluded that the plan did not allow for meaningful participation, transparency and accountability, have been assured in stakeholders, the basic elements of good governance namely, by the Nepalis”. But the statement, besides being misleading, also “encounter between two grand cultures, the transparent and rationalistic construction institutional arrangements for sustainability, including its study site, it should have examined the project performance for such basic issues as equity, universal coverage and impact in an area of 2.5 million people and post-construction institutional arrangements for sustainability, including its large-scale sanitation. The monitoring mission observed a more fragile job in such projects, but failed to go why Finndia did not opt for them.

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**BOOK**

**Stressful aid**

Punishing the country with destructive feature

 FOREIGN aid to Nepal has grown by leaps and bounds in the last 50 years. Today, it also includes military hardware and software to combat the Maoist insurgency. But despite donor input in money and advice, and the restoration of multiparty democracy, foreign aid has been unable to alter the course of events, and now finds itself in the spotlight.

The research work, *Aid Under Stress* authored by independent Nepali and Finnish scholars of Inter-Disciplinary Analysis group in Kathmandu and the Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, looks at two examples of Finnish aid in two phases of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (RWSPP) and the abortive Bara Forestry Management Plan to find out what went wrong.

The 1996 Bara forestry plan was conceived as “a pilot project to examine the viability of a commercial management” of tarai forests in a joint venture between a Finnish multinational and Nepali business houses, and was inspired by the donor’s conviction that “only such a Finnish model could create the necessary discipline in forest exploitation”.

But the proposal met with overwhelming opposition from all quarters: the forest-related national and international NGO’s, local entities and forest officials. A Finnida consultant later concluded that the plan did not “adequately address the concern of the local community as stakeholders for forest forest. It absorbed the four-year effort that led to the withdrawal of Finnish aid to forestry altogether.

The RWSPP aimed at “full coverage of Lambini Zone” at the end of Phase III by mid-2003, providing water to 500,000 people through 68 gravity schemes and 27 shallow tubewells and sanitation to about 18,000 at the end of Phase Two. It is, however, a familiar story: expatriate domination through special institutions like the Project Support Unit (PSU), the donor choosing the Ministry of Local Development (MLD) as partner for Phase II in place of the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage on grounds of “corruption”, donor ability to extract endorsement from the chronically aid-dependent government despite DWSS and MLD reservations over the bloated “technical assistance” cost (47 percent of total Finnish aid for Phase II), etc.

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Bihar Krishna Shrestha is an anthropologist who once served in the National Planning Commission.
Give way to the ladies

Golf is no longer just for gentlemen in Nepal

A gentleman’s game’ is what golf has long been known as, with the word ‘gentleman’ referring to its elegance and the following of written and unwritten rules of etiquettes during play. Though traditionally, as in most sports, it was a man’s game, today it is very much a ladies sport too. Millions of women play the sport worldwide, recreationally, as a competitive amusement and on professional golf courses where the prize money is quite substantial.

A young phenomenon who just turned 21 is Michelle Wie, who can drive the ball as far as the men do, over 300 yards, and who shot a 64 at the age of 10! She showed her courage and prowess recently by competing with the big boys at the Sony Open, a men’s USPGA tour event. She is expected to give women’s golf that similar new dimension that Tiger Woods brought to men’s golf.

In Nepal, until just a few years ago, we hardly saw any Nepali women playing golf. Most women golfers were wives of expatriates and diplomats. Recently however this has begun to change, with many more females out on the course enjoying the game both on weekdays and weekends, especially amongst the wives of our British Gurkha officers.

To encourage more ladies to take up the game, Royal Nepal Golf Club offers 50 percent discounts for ladies to join the club as temporary members, and Gokarna Forest Golf Club offers a family membership, where if one person is a golfing member of the club, the spouse automatically becomes a member as well.

Shanti Shrestha, handicap 20, is one of Nepal’s top lady golfers, and she is the lady captain of RNGC. Now retired after serving for the 24 years at the Gorkhapatra Sansthan, Shrestha says, “When I started the game three years ago, I was very shy as there were very few ladies golfers. Frankly, I just wanted my husband to start playing this game because he used to spend so much time playing cards. The time came that I was up to my neck with this, I would push him and go along to the golf course where I loved the environment. I found an incredible social life, which attracted me to this wonderful sport that I enjoy so much today, and will continue enjoying it as long as I can still swing a golf club.”

When asked how to increase the number of Nepali women playing the game, Shrestha said it needs to start from the men. They should encourage their wives to take up the game, and they, obviously, when mothers play it becomes a family sport and youngsters then take up the game. She said it would not be a bad idea to promote golf by offering free golf lessons and providing easier access to make it more accessible so that its popularity would automatically increase.

Eu Hazar Thapa, the wife of KNSS Thapa, a retired general and ardant golfer, says, “My husband has been playing golf for the last 30 years. He tried to motivate me all along but I was only convinced when he was just about to retire in 1996. She regrouped having started earlier, and recalls those boating days when her husband was out enjoying lovely rounds of golf around the globe during his service with the UN. Her early wins in the ladies categories of tournaments in Nepal instilled her to play more. She enjoys the sport and says, “Golf has been both medication and meditation for me.” Thapa always had an interest in sports and now enjoys golf, loves the environment and the social life at the club. She feels it is possible to produce top women golfers in Nepal with integrated support from all sides.

I am with her, so why don’t you ladies take a tee break?

Deepek Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. prodeepek@hotmail.com

Zinedine Zidane, the world’s best player tells Andrew Hussey of his pride in his Algerian heritage, his rage to be the best and reveals why his talent can still be engaged by flashes of violence

L a Castellane, a council estate in the northern suburbs of Nice, is officially known in French as a quartier difficile, a sensitive zone. Most of the population is first- and second-generation immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Almost everybody who lives here refrains point-blank to identify themselves as French.

This is the hometown of Zinedine Zidane, the Real Madrid playmaker who, as he approaches his professional peak at the age of 32, is probably the most complete and gifted footballer of his generation.

Aime Jacquet, the French coach whose victory in the 1998 World Cup was hammered home with two goals from Zidane in the final, claims to have recognised immediately that Zidane was a phenomenon. “His control is precise and decisive. He can make the ball do whatever he wants. But it is his drive that takes him forward. He is 100 per cent football,” he told me.

Fellow players, too, admire his consistency and strength. Luis Figo, a notorious slobber for efficiency and organisation in a team, describes Zidane’s control and pace as “extraordinary”. David Beckham unabashedly called his colleague “the greatest player in the world”. Even Thierry Henry, who recently lost out to Zidane for the title of Fifa World Player of the Year, admires his integrity, describing his team-mate in the France squad as “the guy we can always count on, the one who really takes control”.

In the past 10 years, Zidane has claimed every top honour that the game has to offer. Most importantly, for the inhabitants of La Castellane, he has never forgotten his roots. His parents still live near the area in a large house in the only slightly posher suburb of Le Pontet-Mirebeau. One of his brothers, Farid, coaches the local team, Notoavlle Vignes, which Zidane as his life president. The kids here are grateful to him, even if they are indifferent to his status as a French national icon.

In the rest of France, Zidane, nicknamed ‘Zizou’ by the public, is admired for his decency as well as his footballing skills. His public priorities are football, family and friends. His family are Algerian immigrants, so-called ‘Ameur’ (French slang for Arab), and he describes himself as “a non-practising Muslim”. “To be recognised by a whole country is incredible,” Zidane says. “Before it was hard to talk about certain things, especially, like me, you came from a difficult area or from an immigrant background. But now it tells you how France has changed and is changing. It’s a message to everybody—politicians, the kids I grew up with, ordinary French people—about what can be done.”

When I asked him where he felt most at home, he was guarded: “I am first of all from La Castellane and Marseille,” he began hesitantly, “I love Madrid. But I am proud of where I come from and never forget the people I grew up with. Wherever I go, La Castellane is where I want to go back.”

Zidane talks about his father with respect and admiration. “I am very inspired by him,” he tells me. “It was my father who taught us that an immigrant must work twice as hard as anybody else, that he must never give up.” He talks about his own young family with pride. He married Veronique, who is of French-Spanish extraction, in 1992. They now have three boys, each with an Italian name. “They are all good footballers,” he says. “I would be happy for them to go into the game. But they must work hard first. That is what I have learnt.

As we chat about Algeria, Marseille, music and family, the atmosphere becomes more relaxed. “I was lucky to come from a difficult area,” he says. “It teaches you not just about football but also life. There were lots of kids from different races and poor families. People had to struggle to get through the day. Music was important. Football was the easy part.”

One of the theories about Zidane as a player is that he is driven by an inner rage. His football is elegant and masterful, charged with technique and vision. He still exerts a shocking violence that is as sudden as it is inexplicable. The most famous examples of this include head butting Johan Kriek of Hamburg during a Champions League match when he was at Juventus in 2000 and his stomping on the hapless Faouzi Amri of Saudi Arabia during the 1998 World Cup finals.

He is excited about Euro 2004, although he is deferential about the game against England on 13 June. He singles out Beckham for praise (“he has adapted well to the life here and the game; he is very good indeed”) but is less interested in other aspects of the English game. “I have a need to play intensely every day, to fight every match hard,” he told me. “And this desire never to stop fighting is something else I learnt in the place where I grew up. And, for me, the most important thing is that I still know who I am.”

(© The Observer)

Andrew Hussey is the author of The Game of War: The Life and death of Gary Deakin.

EU HAZAR THAPA (right) winning a prize at the New Year’s Open.
**FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS**
- Mixed Media Exhibition by Pilipoon June Pethwé Lisborg 11 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048
- Göng-Ha Mats (Traditional Newari Thali) for woodfired pizzas. Opp St Mary’s School, Sunny Side Up Monday - Friday at T oran
- Splash Spring BBQ Flautist Manose along with DJ Tangree in aid of School Week of Art, Music and Drama New Year Cultural Program Photographs by Wayne Amrith 15 April 13 May, poetry reading 5:30 PM on 15 April at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revised. 4218048.

**EVENTS**
- New Year Cultural Program at Chandrodaya Shelter (Kalanki), 13-30 PM on 15 April, 4256411, 981069113
- Week of Art, Music and Drama on Gallery Nine’s first anniversary, 9-14 April, in cooperation with Sutra. Details: Sujan Chitrakar, Sutra - 981063905, Kharchan Gurung, Gallery Nine - 4426894
- The Power of Nisha along with DJ Tangree in aid of School Adoption Project. Couples: Rs 4,500, 12 April at Hyati Regency Kathmandu.
- Music Flaustian Manose accompanied Navaraj Gurung on Tabla live at the Patan Museum at 6PM on 9 April. Tickets: Rs 350. Contact Mangal: 1214211
- Not Just the Jazz Bar presents Chris Masand and The Modern Jazz Live Band. Friday and Saturday night. Shangri-la Hotel, Lazimpat, 4413999
- Abhayaa and The Steam Injums at Dwarika’s every Friday from 7PM onwards. 4479488

**FOOD**
- Splash Spring BBQ every Wednesday and Friday. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, Lazimpat.
- Executive Lunch Monday - Friday at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika’s, 4479488
- Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ lunch for Rs 650 per person at the Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, 4273999
- Dinner at Café U every Friday and Saturday. Opp British School, Patan. 5523263
- Roadhouse Cafe for woodfired pizzas, Opp St Mary’s School, Pulchowk. 5521755
- Traditional Newari Thali at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4413632

**GETAWAYS**
- Pure relaxation at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- Luxury package for Shivapuri Cottage, Dadagaon. Highland Travel & Tours, 4261352
- Golf in the Valley’s last pristine forest at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212

**NEPALI WEATHER**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Night</th>
<th>Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28-14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-14</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-14</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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by MAUSAM BEED

This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows a rain commonly front that originates in the East China Sea with one of its tendrils swiring into eastern Nepal. Through the middle atmosphere wedge, air mass operations on the mountains, are continuing to push to persistent weather patterns. The nascently will probably be cossed out the persistent weather front to allow some improvement in the near-term storms in places.

**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pollutant</th>
<th>GC (ug/m³)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealth</td>
<td>612 to 1050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous</td>
<td>351 to 425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazardous</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Kathmandu is an air quality database from the Nepal pollution conspiracy and other organizations were yet successful in silencing other Kathmandu. Today last week. An air quality and the most recent air pollution at Kathmandu were found to be the road. PM2.5 standard that are estimated to enter the human body on cancer and premature death by 15-20 percent. Now, it is only the important value. It is from the burning trees, which release large amount of toxic smoke. The elevated levels of PM2.5 at Swayambhunath, which is known to be the highest from burning tires, which release large amount of toxic smoke. They could be thankful for closing up air as well. The day the rain breaks in Kathmandu.

For insertions ring NT Marketing at 5543333-36.
Strange customs declaration form

Family Name: ____________________________ Given Name: ____________________________
Not given Name: ____________________________ Nom de Garre: ____________________________
Date of Birth (if applicable): ____________________________
Nationality at Birth: ____________________________
Nationality in Previous Incarnation: ____________________________
Permanent Address: ____________________________
Semi-permanent address: ____________________________
Underground Address: ____________________________
Royal Address: ____________________________
Occupation (tick one box only): ____________________________
- Doctor
- Engineer
- Anti-Torture Expert
- Part-Time NRN
- Currently unemployed
- Tourist
- Doctor
- Inhuman
- Marathon
- Terrorist
- Charles Sobhraj

Sex (tick one only): ____________________________
- No, thank you
- Yes, please
Race: ____________________________

Passport No.: ____________________________
Fake Passport No.: ____________________________
Place of Birth: ____________________________
Place of Expiry: ____________________________

Object of Journey (encircle one): ____________________________
- Official/Semi-official/Trekking/Expedition/Business/Please/Meditation/
- Mediation/Convention/Rafting/Deported Asylum Seeker/Extradited
- Comrade
- Terrorist Charles Sobhraj
- Mombasa
- Rangoon
- Batavia

Next port of call: ____________________________

Passengers can use the Green Channel if they are carrying the following items in the specified quantity:
- More than two sacks of mobile phones, more than 15 tricycles, more than a reasonable number of parambuls, telescopes in excess of one for everyday use, dirty linen, skeletons in the closet, rotten fruits.
- Remember: Green Channel is not a Green Light. Walking through the Green Channel with Dubitable Items may lead to confiscation of goods, fine, penalty, prosecution, a medal and an ambassadorship. However, running through the Green Channel is allowed, just don’t get caught.

Foreign Currency: Detection of undeclared foreign currency is legally punishable and will result in the confiscation of the said amount, and you will not in jail unless you pay us a bakshish equivalent to the confiscated amount. Although, how you are going to do that if you are rotting in jail is beyond us, but we’ll figure it out some way.

Welcome to Nepal, and enjoy your perambulations.

WET & WILD SUMMER SPLASH

Every Saturday and Sunday

A fun time awaits you this summer at Godavari Village Resort. Beat the heat and splash into the cool blue pool. Then, enjoy a free game of tennis, table tennis and the fascinating natural setting of the resort while savouring a sumptuous Buffet Lunch. Good clean fun for the entire family - courtesy the Godavari Village Resort.

Adults: . Rs. 400+Tax (includes a bottle of beer)
Children: Rs. 290+Tax (includes a bottle of soft drink)

P.O. Box: 12449 Awastishri Tower, Godavari, Tel: 550917 Fax: 5509177,
Email: godavari@godavari.com.np Website: www.godavari.com.np

HAPPENINGS

FREE. ICRC delegates with 37 prisoners including CDO Sagar Mani Parajuli and DSP Rana Bahadur Gautam(right) at Kathmandu after arrival from Rolpa by helicopter on Tuesday.

NO TAXI: Angered that the public was disregarding the three-day banda, two Maoists got off this taxi and blew it up at Banemadha on Wednesday afternoon.

Photo Dehauve: The National Forum of Photjoournalists launches bright new vests for photojournalists so that they can be easily identified during street protests.

WITH THE TIMES: Girija Koirala and Madhab Nepal share a copy of Nepal Times during a sit-in at Ramta Park on Friday.

Strange Customs

LET’S FACE IT. Flying has lost its aura of romance and adventure. Gone are the days when, as children, we climbed up the slanted cabin of a Royal Nepal Airlines EC-3 at Sunauthe and the smell of leafy barf bag assailed our nostrils prompting us to throw up even before we took off. The

UNDER MY HAT

Kunda Dixit

excitement! The grandeur of air travel in the old days. We can look back with nostalgia and nausea to that lost era of aviation when flying meant stuffing cotton wool into your ear canal and putting your digestive canal into reverse gear.

These days, flights into Kathmandu are so boring that the cabin crew tries to keep passengers from stagnating in-flight mutiny by keeping them busy with paperwork. Forms are distributed as soon as the aircraft takes off for Kathmandu so passengers have ample time to fill out His Majesty’s Government Strange Customs Declaration Form, the Department of Immigration’s Disembarkation Card, and Appendix-1 Related to Rule 4 (5), 5 (2) & 5 (9) Visa Form For Entry.

To assist passengers unfamiliar with these entry formalities, we offer below a sample preview of past question papers so prospective visitors to Nepal have a headstart in their in-flight entry examination. Be warned, only those who pass this test will be allowed to enter Nepal.

Next port of call: ____________________________
After interviewing Bhushan Tuladhar, a visitor can’t help being infected by this environmentalist’s can-do optimism. “It is a management problem, and if we can get the politics out of it, both are issues that can be solved easily,” says Bhushan, who is now working on building grassroots pressure from the Valley’s communities for cleaner air and litter-free streets.

After completing his masters in environmental engineering in the US, Bhushan had his pick of international jobs. But he came home to his native Kathmandu, where Mayor Keshab Sthapit made him an offer he couldn’t refuse: help setting up and heading Kathmandu municipality’s environment department. He now has an advisory role as a member of the City Planning Commission, and heads the lobby group, Clean Energy Nepal.

Bhushan’s experience in urban environment management and recycling means he is often invited to train experts from other developing countries, like at a recent seminar in Sweden. “We have this notion nothing happens in Nepal, but there are a lot of success stories we can share with other developing countries,” he says.

Bhushan is convinced Kathmandu’s problems have very simple and economic solutions that take very little time and can be done right at home. Kathmandu’s garbage is still predominantly biodegradable organic waste that can be turned into valuable fertiliser. Traditionally, Kathmandu Valley’s farmers have always practiced recycling organic waste. “We used to have three basic concepts of recycling already in place: waste has value, it must be recycled and it’s up to individuals to do it. We must revive this tradition,” says Bhushan showing us the dry, odourless fertiliser that comes out of the compost pile in his home.

It helps that Bhushan is someone who practices what he preaches. He pedals to work in his Taiwanese mountain bike, at his office he has a conference table propped up by used truck tires rescued from the municipal dump and at home he makes his own fertiliser compost on his terrace roof from kitchen scrap. He says: “If I don’t do it myself, I have no right telling other people that they should care about the environment.”

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