Ever since it got dragged into the war two-and-half years ago, the Royal Nepali Army has said it needs more soldiers and equipment to fight the Maoists. Today, the army is engaged in the biggest-ever expansion in its history. The country’s military spending has shot up to 12 percent of the total budget from 7.5 percent three years ago, according to official figures. The Royal Nepali Army has nearly doubled its troop strength in the past three years, growing from about 45,000 to 75,000. Under current scenarios, it is expected to reach 150,000 in the next five years. This doesn’t include the 20,000 paramilitary Armed Police Force. Senior army officials defend the expansion, arguing that the forces can’t fight a full-scale insurgency on such difficult terrain, guard infrastructure and defend highways with its current strength. “In any classic guerrilla war you need a 10:1 numerical superiority to be able to make an impact,” says one senior officer.

However, retired army officers say that given the topography and hit-and-run tactics of the Maoists, no force will be strong enough to win the war. “To believe in a military victory is to live in a dreamland,” says one ex-military man. “However large your force, you will still be too thin on the ground.”

Continued
Battle royal

The Maoists move into their ‘Strategic Offensive’ phase

testing the waters to see if public frustration and anger has turned against the state. If it works, they may launch a series of major offensives and hope that the people will join in a mass uprising. So far, however, the Maoists spread misery and inconvenience a lot of people, nothing more.

Even so, the fact that the state military machine has been unable to thwart the Maoist advance can be seen as proof that the Royal Nepali Army is still in defensive mode. Prachanda’s statement last week – that the Maoists’ strategy is to “weaken us and force us to negotiate” – this statement is uncomfortably similar to what the head of the Royal Humane Force, Rukum Kangal, said recently: “Our aim is to disarm the Maoists and bring them back to the mainstream.”

If the remaining defensive after two-and-half years can be interpreted as a kind of defeat for the army. It follows from this that the king is also on the political defensive. Squeezed militarily by the Maoists and politically by the parties, the king is trying to consolidate his power by picking off the parties and ministers one by one. After all, his longest-term threat is from the Maoist revolution, and the students’ anti-monarchy slogans on the streets are built on the republican seeds planted by the Maoist ‘people’s war’.

If the Maoist ‘Strategic Offensive’ is on a militarily decisive phase, their next attacks can be expected to be daring and dramatic.

Translated from the Nepali original in Atma Khabarpatrika.

LEGAL

Guest Column

Puskar Gautam

Letters

FEDERAL

I must congratulate you for finally mentioning the big ‘F’ word, federal, in your editorial (‘Emergency surgery’, #197). But what does this mean in the Nepali context? Words have a habit of meaning different things to different people, more so with a word like ‘federal’, I grew up in a democracy, the Handaath gymkhana democracy, single party democracy as it was called, where all Nepalis were said to be Panchas and there were no problems among the Panchas. The country has just been through another democracy, a multiparty democracy. A democracy of the parties, by the parties and unfortunately only for the parties. I witnessed a rally of a ‘mainstream political party’ that took place in Butwal last month. The word was pathetically small, even a snake charmer could amass more people. It seems most party leaders were ordered to attend other ‘mass rallies’ in Kathmandu, and the local population in Butwal, as in the capital Kathmandu, were just too far from this new fangled multiparty democracy to really participate. So what does this ‘federal Nepal’ mean? Instead of one distant ruler in Kathmandu, do we get a dozen distant rulers in the hitherto民主 political conflicts in the Nepali federal model in #197? For one, am not ready to buy a pig in a poke.

Kabindra Pradhan, Butwal

LIFE AND DEATH

After reading the letters by Debra Storin and Stephen Bezruchka (#197, #196) critical of Saradha Basnyat’s report ‘Trekker bring medical care to the Armupas’ (#183), I would like to tell the learned doctors that their esoteric arguments on medical ethics may be a fine subject to debate in the public health doctoral programs in their respective institutions, but it is of little comfort to a child dying in Beni because of dehydration or a mother suffering from birth complications in Rasuwa. As a volunteer in rural Nepal for the past few years, I have seen enough suffering and unnecessary death due to lack of facilities and medicines to say with confidence that any help to augment the equipment or drugs in health posts and hospitals can spell the difference between life and death. Bezruchka’s argument that America is a nation with poor health care and therefore it has no right to preach to others is specious. First of all, the good Samaritans featured in the article just happen to be Americans. They could be any other nationality. Secondly, who cares about America’s health programs? What is important is how much difference even simple things like a dental floss demonstration or the training value of a resuscitation baby makes here. Your article summed it up rather well: ‘Medicines for Nepal at least provides the storyline that there aren’t any and has a regular channel to keep the supplies going to remote health posts.’ And what a great way to make trekking so directly beneficial to the people!

Judi Goldener, Pokhara

BANDA AID

This is in response to Ashutosh Tiwari’s ‘Banda Aid’ (Strictly Business, #196). He mentions five days of strike in two weeks, but forget the blockades and strikes in other parts of Nepal. This week saw a 12-day strike in the eastern districts, and a month of nationwide protests even carried this news. But I agree with Tiwari that there are ways to end bandas. The government can pass laws, but will the bunch of leaders that we have elected follow these laws? They have never cared about anything other than their self-interest. Be it Maoists or the five party alliance, if they ever cared for the nation, they would not call for frequent bandas. A terrorist is defined as a person who engages in acts of political or ideological destruction. In that sense, our political leaders are not different than terrorists: they destroy national property, economic development, endanger national security and have plunged us back into the dark ages. If any one of the Maoists leaders or five party leaders have some common sense, they would work towards a peaceful resolution.

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Back to the future?
Reforming parliament may have become a moral necessity

Recently, a Nepali student in New Delhi sent an email emblematic of the SNS generation’s ‘...I walk down the road of jana...watching bougainvillea blooming everywhere...I can’t help but silently envy the spring that this country has sustained... unlike the cold winters preserved in my country...’

With that lower-case message, the student expressed the anguish of a lost generation of 20-something Nepalis. What have we done to make our youth so disconsolate? Some are shouting slogans on the streets, others have gone into the jungle with guns. None beside a society that ignores the yearnings of its youth. The collective frustration of Nepali students abroad and the cry of their companions back home have a common feature: they are not comfortable with the institution of democracy anymore. People of our generation may find it a little difficult to accept a Nepal that is not a kingdom, but there is a growing segment of the Nepali population that sees the monarchy as the root of all ills. Unless the grievances of this generation are addressed, their republican slogans will be self-fulfilling. Nobody knows who or what prompted Sher Bahadur Deuba to exercise his doomsday authority two years ago to dissolve parliament and call for elections. But it has been downhill ever since that fateful decision on 22 May 2002. The country continues to wallow deeper in a cesspool of violent insurgency, street protests, ineffective governance and a creeping anarchy.

The king has been firing and firing premiers at will, but to no avail. Governance remains stuck in a Panchayat-type rut. Even under despotic regimes there is a token legislative body to which the executive is at least nominally accountable. But not in our quasi-democracy. Unless that fundamental condition of constitutionalism is met, it is difficult to see how King Gyanendra can run a civilian government with another set of handpicked ministers in Singha Durbar. It is symptomatic of a deeply-flawed polity that this country continues to stumble along without a prime minister for three weeks.

In the absence of parliament, there is no forum to debate the conduct of constitutional bodies, the report of the auditor general is in cold storage, recommendations of different commissions gather dust—all because there is no mechanism to legislate necessary laws. By renaturing the same or similar ordinances every six months, and that too upon the recommendations of his own nominees, the king is not just undermining democracy but also shipping away at the credibility of the institution of monarchy itself.

Depoliticisation leads to bureaucratisation, and as philosopher Hannah Arendt puts it, “the greater the bureaucratisation of public life, the greater the attraction of violence”. Restoration of parliament may not resolve the insurgency, or even bring back political stability right away, but it will at least dissipate a lot of other people from losing faith in peaceful politics.

The king talks about elections in a tone that defies the panic-stricken ground reality in the country. When soldiers shoot at police in broad daylight at the international airport, who will guard the guards in the countryside? Before the political plantations of the season can begin, it is first necessary for the king to set the constitutional house in order. It is a moral necessity to restore the House of Representatives by a royal decree. This may not be constitutional by definition, but shock therapy to kick-start a comatose polity is neither illegal nor immoral. All it needs is sagacity and courage so that the young student in Delhi will one day witness a revival of democracy in his own motherland.

Navin Singh Khadka’s profile of the army’s new spokesperson Rajendra Thapa may have been great journalism for those who do not him personally but for a retired army officer like me, it was hilarious. Thapa’s claim that he is a strong soldier who climbed up the hierarchy with hard work is correct—he spent a tremendous amount of time and effort as a ghost writer and gardening consultant for his superiors.

Name withheld, email/phone

SOLDIER POET
Re: ‘Soldier poet’ (Nepal Society, #197). There are other things that a soldier and poet have in common besides ‘strong sensitivities’. Each also has a pair of eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth and let’s see what else...oh, yes, two hands and two legs. But that’s where the similarities end. The uncommon aspects between the two are:

One wields a gun, the other a pen.
Soldier is a doer, poet a thinker!
One is bound by rules and regulation in that type of environment the other would not be able to function.
Soldier lives and works in a group/poet is basically a loner. For one it is drill and firing, for the other it is the thrill of rhyming!
Soldier has a crew cut, poet looks like a hippy.
The differences are so many that the two would never become chummy!

Sagar, Kathmandu

Southern Appetite

Hotel Yak & Yeti proudly presents the Grand Desert Paula featuring the magic of Chef Naveen from “way-down South” India, Tamilnadu.

Introducing different types of Deserts with fillings ranging from classic spiced potted kebab lambs, mad over the simple pleasures of life with exquisite South Indian desserts. 

Date: May 5th-8th
Time: 9:00am to 11:00pm
Venue: Café Europa, 2nd floor (Dine in)/Gulmohar Café (Alcohol service)

For details, please call 443-2244/3722/4000 ext. 3456

www.nepaltimes.com

Times 28 May - 3 June 2004 #198

#198
Nepal thrives as regional drug hub

The Robinson case may show why Nepal is still a major transhipment point for international drug trafficking

Gordon William Robinson should not be a free man. Two years ago, he was caught red-handed at Kathmandu airport with 2.3kg of heroin hidden in his shoe and luggage. A special court fined the notorious British drug trafficker Rs 1.7 million and sentenced him to 17 years in prison after he confessed to smuggling the drug from Mumbai to Nepal through the Sunauli border.

But on 23 April 2003, the Supreme Court acquitted Robinson on grounds of insufficient evidence. Robinson left Nepal immediately thereafter.

This controversial release of a known narco-trafficker has once again put Nepal under close scrutiny of international drug enforcement agencies. In the months since Robinson was released, there have been many enquires from Interpol and other agencies at the Narcotic Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit in Banepa. They all want to know why Robinson was released and how he was allowed to slip out of the country. Interpol was convinced the evidence was irrefutable and sufficient.

Robinson was acquitted by Supreme Court justices Krishna Kumar Barma and Baliram Kumar after an appeal was filed. The Nepal Bar Association and several prominent lawyers have protested the verdict and have filed for a retrial at the Supreme Court. Attorney General Shailsh Pant Thursday filed an application at the Supreme Court for a review of the case. It is now up to the Supreme Court to decide whether such a review is necessary.

Supreme Court spokesperson Ram Krishna Timilina told us it should be kept out of the matter. “We should look for alternatives like the jurisdiction of the Chief Justice or the Judicial Council,” he says. Even the royal palace has taken the unusual step of asking the Supreme Court for details of the verdict.

Justices Barma and Kumar are both on leave and not available for comment. When Robinson was acquitted, the justices said that investigators had not followed procedures properly.

At the drug control unit, Senior Superintendent of Police Hemant Malla, admits that at times there are procedural errors in such cases. “But that does not mean the criminals should be set free,” says Malla, an expert on narco crimes.

Other sources who declined to be named say the Robinson acquittal has all the hallmarks of corruption and an active drug mafia. Even if Robinson is caught again, it is unlikely that he will be returned to Nepal to stand trial because of the lack of extradition laws. As for now, the police authorities would be happy if there is just a clear verdict that he is guilty. Robinson’s release not only humiliated the police authorities and the Home Ministry in front of Interpol, but also demoralized the investigative anti-narcotic personnel.

Saddamised

Those who thought getting rid of Saddam was a good thing are now changing their minds

I-r: sniffer dogs at the Tribhuvan International Airport checking luggage. Trafficking convict Gordon William Robinson got off scot free, Supreme Court Justice Baliram Kumar(left) and Krishna Kumar Barma.

It must be plain by now that the invasion of Iraq by the United States, Britain, Australia and a few other countries was a huge mistake. Hardly a day goes by without evidence of that.

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have earned themselves a place in history as either great dupes or liars of gargantuan proportions. As I sit here in London, awaiting a flight to another continent, I read the latest revelations. Iran, it seems, fed false intelligence about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to a prominent Iraqi exile leader, who in turn conveyed the information to a Washington cabal hungry for reasons to topple Saddam Hussein.

The Iranian mufflaks are giggling through their beams. At a stroke, they helped humiliate the Great Satan, America, and its junior partner Britain, while at the same time ridding their neighbourhood of an evil tyrant. Don’t forget that Saddam actually used his chemical weapons against the Iranians in the horrific 80s war between the two countries.

Nor should anyone forget that the United States encouraged the Butcher of Baghdad to launch that war against the Ayatollahs because Washington’s Axis of Evil didn’t include Iraq at that point, just Iran. So intense was the dislike of the Iranian theocracy at the time that American leaders and diplomats turned a blind eye to the use of chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers.

There’s a horrible irony to all of this, if only anyone in Washington could perceive it. West of all, from America’s point of view, there’s not really much that can be done about Iran’s perfidy. False intelligence fed to a hostile state falls under the category of what’s fair in war, so far as I can tell. Not that the US won’t be aggrieved and vengeful against Iran, but the fact is that the ayatollahs and the Wolfowitz-Bush-Rumsfeld faction had a lot in common in their hatred of Saddam. So the words ‘just’ and ‘deserts’ spring rather quickly to mind.

Coming on top of the prison torture revelations, this information should help comprehensively sink the Bush-Blair war in public opinion. The people of Britain have long since given up on this adventure. They opposed it beforehand and only gave it their conditional backing when British troops were deployed and needed public support to keep up morale. Now they want their soldiers brought home.

In America, skewed polling samples and data selection suggest that just under half the public want more war. That’s not true according to all the polls. I’ve spoken to over the past few months. And those who once thought getting rid of Saddam, WMDs or no, was a good thing, are now changing their minds. It’s a turning point. ●
DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Targeting media

Maoists ambushed a Himalayan Times van delivering newspapers from Kathmandu to Pokhara near Damai on Thursday morning, killing the driver and leaving another staff member seriously injured. The explosion completely destroyed the car. Sources say the Maoists couldn’t have been unaware that the vehicle belonged to media and the bombing was a direct attack on the press. The injured staffer was flown to Kathmandu for treatment.

WHO helps?

“You talk, we die,” charged a group of HIV-infected people in front of the United Nations (UN) complex on Thursday. Braving rain, they prevented UN vehicles from entering the building for an hour.

Nava Kiran, the organisation providing treatment to Nepali AIDS patients, planned the protest to highlight what it said was the lack of concern displayed by World Health Organisation (WHO). The group says that despite a Global Fund (GF) to treat 3 million HIV positive people around the world by 2005, Nepali patients have not benefited. “Most of the funds are spent on training, awareness seminars and printing brochures and posters,” says Nava Kiran’s Parbat Rana. Only 3.3 percent of the money in the GF is spent on antiretroviral (ARV) and other drugs, that help slow down HIV development to full-blown AIDS. “If these drugs are supplied and at least one hospice built, it will help a lot of HIV patients live a little longer,” adds Rana. But the WHO and the government don’t seem to consider it a priority. “How can we solve anything? It is up to the politicians,” Klaus Wagner (photographed, far right) from WHO explained to Rajiv Kafle, an AIDS activist outside the UN gates.

Six months ago, the group organised a similar protest that resulted in assurances from the UN that it would act soon to scale up treatment. “They have done absolutely nothing and our friends and relatives are desperate,” says Rana. Nava Kiran is making its own efforts to provide ARV drugs and treatment services to the HIV/AIDS patients.

Records tumble on Everest

It was a lucky season for most Sagarmatha expeditioners. By presstime Thursday, 161 climbers from 13 different teams had made it to the top of the world and one person even flew over the top in an ultralight (see p16).

Records tumbled: on 21 May, Pemba Dorje Sherpa made the fastest ever ascent of Sagarmatha from Base Camp in eight hours and 10 minutes. During the Everest’s Golden Jubilee last year, Pemba took 12 hours 45 minutes, a record that stood for only three days till Laiga Golu Sherpa reached the top in 10 hours and 56 minutes. Apa Sherpa came out of retirement to break his own record by getting to the top for an astounding 14th time on 17 May. A day earlier, Nawang Sherpa became the first differently-abled Nepali (he has an artificial leg) to reach the top. Then Laiga Sherpa became the first Nepali woman to climb Sagarmatha for the fourth time. More than 1,300 people have climbed Sagarmatha since Tensing Norgay and Edmund Hillary got to the top 50 years ago. Nearly 200 have died on the slopes, most of them on their way down. As the official spring season comes to a close on 31 May, expeditions on other mountains are battling bad weather to reach the summit. There were 55 expeditions in the Nepal Himalaya this year.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Himalayan Times

28 MAY - 3 JUNE 2004
None of the above
Nepalis must demand a resolution

From halfway across the world, Nepal’s situation looks grim—whatever becomes the next prime minister. The intentions of all the three key political players, the opposition politicians, the Maoists and the king, are driven by power. None of them seems to be bothered that the state is crumbling before their eyes.

If the leaders of the five ruling parties cannot have a united voice even during such trying times, what can we expect from them in future? It is unlikely that they will rule in harmony even if one of them were to become the prime minister. Handing them power will just intensify their squabbling. Their working unity, even when needed the most, has already turned out to be a farce. If they can’t agree to choose a consensus candidate for prime ministership, can they work effectively in an all-party government and bring the Maoists back to the negotiating table?

From the Maoists’ perspective, there is no reason to engage in anything that will help the current regime since what they want is its collapse. They can just sit back and watch it self-destruct.

They exercise authority over the countryside, and what they want now is to paralyse the government machinery in the district headquarters and Kathmandu Valley. They are achieving this not through rational power and persuasion, but through brutal coercion. If a mayor like Keshab Shilpi, known for his bravado, has to resign because of Maoist threats, it is unlikely anyone else can resist them.

The king’s hugeness, on the other hand, has added fuel to the fire. He wants things under his control, but may be losing his grip. Whatever will be his future course of action, he must have realised by now that Nepal cannot be ruled by authoritarian means. The leaders have compelled him to give a collective audience, the youth on the streets are chanting ever more violent republican slogans, the referendum in colleges are overwhelming for ending the monarchy—these are writings on the wall. The only question is, will King Gyanendra now acknowledge that his way is not working and restore power to people’s representatives, or will he go down fighting?

Political activists on the streets and a small number of civil society members have played a vital role in stopping Nepal from sliding back into authoritarianism. Had they not consistently struggled for democracy on the streets, Nepal would have probably been under a totalitarian yoke of the left or right by now. But how long can the activists keep up the struggle?

Every conscious Nepali must now exert pressure on the political forces that are struggling in their name to compel them to find a resolution, or else our woes will multiply. People’s power is the greatest power. But, sadly, Nepal’s silent masses are not speaking up when they need to be heard the most.

Despite reports of chronic friction between the military and political forces, the army has remained loyal to the new regime. This has resulted in the government being able to push through its agenda.

However, the army’s reputation is at stake as it is being viewed as a tool of the Rashtreeya Prajatantra Party, which is unpopular among the general public. The army needs to take steps to improve its image and regain public trust.

The army’s new acquisitions will include (clockwise from above): the Indian Advanced Light Helicopter and Mine-protected vehicle, the British-built surveillance aircraft, the British Norman Islander, and the Indian-made INSAS assault rifle.

The army’s acquisition of new equipment, such as the M-16s, is a significant development. The introduction of modernised military equipment will enhance the army’s capabilities and enable it to carry out its duties more effectively.

Shopping list

The army’s new acquisitions will include (clockwise from above): the Indian Advanced Light Helicopter and Mine-protected vehicle, the British-built surveillance aircraft, the British Norman Islander, and the Indian-made INSAS assault rifle.
Nepali climbers set new records this season on Sagarmatha and other Himalayan peaks. Forty-three of the 75 people who climbed Sagarmatha this year from the Nepal side till pre-storm Wednesday were Nepalis. An increasing number of Sherpas do not regard climbing as just a job any more, but as an adventure and a challenge.

Although they appear to be genetically able to adapt to high altitude, most Nepali climbers lack technical training. This is also the reason for the casualty rate among high altitude porters who need to learn more about rope and ice techniques and other danger.

Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) set up a climbing school in Marung 15 years ago to conduct regular training. A group of veteran Nepali climbers have also formed the Nepal Mountaineering Instructors Association (NMA) to encourage Nepal’s youth to discover the wilderness, learn basic climbing techniques and undergo survival training.

Austrian group Eco-Himal has been working with both organisations to standardise and mountaineering training in Nepal and promote sustainable and viable eco-tourism models. It just completed a one-month training in first aid, rock climbing, ice techniques and mountain rescue in Thame.

“I have been guiding climbing groups, but was self-taught. It is better to be trained,” says Krishna Gurung, who took the course last year.

The course in Thame was designed by NMA along internationally recognised norms so that Nepal-trained guides and climbers can now join international expeditions as more than just porters. “This training will give our trainees the same grade as the internationally recognised UIAGM,” says NMA’s Nima Sherpa who has been training Nepali climbers in Thame for the past seven years, referring to the Union Internationale des Associations de
Send it by train

The new railway agreement will allow Nepali goods to move cheaper and faster through India

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The biggest dilemma for planners in landlocked Nepal has always been dealing with the burden of geography: how to get goods to a sea port cheaply and reliably.

Transit through India in trucks has made trade expensive, and the goods are exposed to pilferage, damage and delays. Hopefully, last week’s bilateral railway agreement between Nepal and India will address many of these problems.

The agreement allows an Indian company to operate a railway service between the container port in Birganj and Indian cities. India’s public sector Container Corporation of India has already been selected as the operator and it will have 60 percent of the shares, while the rest will be owned by a conglomerate of Nepali companies.

In two months, when trains start shuttling between India and Nepal, our exports will reach ports in Calcutta within 24 hours—a journey that presently takes container trucks up to two weeks. Officials say trains will also bring transport costs down by 40 percent.

“The idea is to save time and money,” says Surendra Govinda Joshi, senior transport specalist at the World Bank that financed 80 percent of the $16 million cost of the Birganj container port. “If all goes well, there will be two trains daily carrying Nepali products to Indian ports.”

Container Corporation of India was the only bidder in a re-tender this year. It was one of two bidders in an earlier tender, but a private Calcutta-based company was disqualified. Officials at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry say that the Birganj dry port will be far more efficient than those in Bhairawa and Biratnagar. “That is because those two ports have road connections while the one in Birganj has railway facility. Naturally trains will reach the cargo for shipment faster,” said an official.

The dry ports in Biratnagar and Bhairawa were also supported by the World Bank, and cost Rs 500 million each. Private operators who have leased these two dry ports have been paying the government Rs 10 million annually.

The Nepal-India joint venture operator will pay Rs 95 million per year to the government to lease the Birganj container port, which was completed three years ago but couldn’t be commissioned because Nepal and India couldn’t reach a railway agreement. Nepal was losing about $7 million a year while the port remained closed.

While officials are quite positive about the impact the railway service could bring to Nepal’s export business, the private sector is keeping its fingers crossed. Businesses say they will have to wait and see how the Birganj port functions and whether they will have the same trouble they faced in the past with the transit of Nepali goods through India.

“Let’s wait and see,” says Federation of Nepali Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) first vice president, Chandu Dhakal. “We are eager to see if this facility can overcome the unnecessary delays we have faced while transporting our goods through transit before.”

The FNCCI says despite bilateral trade agreements between Kathmandu and New Delhi, different rules in various Indian states add complications. “For instance, the Indians levy luxury tax on goods that should have free transit access,” they say. “Whether the same story repeat even after the railway service comes into operation remains to be seen.”

Another concern traders have is about the reliability and timing of the railway service. “If the railway service operator refuses to wait even for a short duration to accommodate delays at this end, it could cause troubles,” says Dhakal.
**A star is born**

After a nearly month-long search for Nepal’s most striking model in open selections in Chiran, Pokhara and Kathmandu, we have a winner. Priyanka Basnet, 18, of Kathmandu has crowned Lux Beauty Star 2004 and Suchitra Acharya, 23, of Bratnagar was the first runner up in the finals held at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu on 22 May. Basnet won Rs 50,000, Acharya Rs 25,000. Both girls also won an all-expense paid trip to Lakme Fashion Week 2005 in India.

**Woman who can**

Binita Pradhan is the recipient of the Luxmi Woman Entrepreneur Award 2004, created by Luxmi Bank in recognition of her contributions to the women’s empowerment cause. Pradhan is the Executive Director of ANCO International, which is the sole distributor of Hyundai Motor Company South Korea and Hyundai Motor India and also represents a host of other multinationals. The award was a part of Celebrating Womenhood 2004.

**Inspired change**

Since 1991, the Surya trademark, the flagship brand of Surya Nepal, has carved out a strong position in the kingdom’s cigarette market. The trademark’s sun has been used consistently in all Surya communication and is an integral part of the crest that appears on all packs and cigarette sticks. Now the company has unveiled a new sun mnemonic to “encompass values of charismatic women’s empowerment cause. Pradhan is the Executive Director of AVCO Binita Pradhan is the recipient of the Laxmi Woman Entrepreneur Award.

**NEW PRODUCTS**

HOMEMADE GRAVY: At a loss as to what to cook? Home-made Tomato Pura from Dabur Nepal is packaged in Tetra Pak and contains no skin or seeds. The 200g packs are priced at Rs 22 and make gravy thick, smoother and more appetising.

**On the job**

Employers exploit the fact that labour supply usually exceeds demand

Some of my friends in private sector firms always complain about their salaries. “We are the real kamaiyas. We work hard, even sacrificing our evenings and weekends. We make money for our firms. But all of us go to our bosses, while our salaries barely rise to keep up with increases in prices. What’s more, we often don’t get paid for months.” Do they have a valid complaint? The answer depends on who you ask and on one factor: incentives or disincentives that Nepal’s labour laws allow employers to view their employees as investments, not as costs. Take the case of publicly listed private sector companies such as joint-venture banks and multinationals. By law, they have to share 10 percent of their annual net profits with their employees. As such, the way these firms recruit entry-level MBAs is by offering a base monthly salary that, in these times, ranges anywhere from Rs 13,000-18,000. They spice up the pay by dangling the prospect of year-end bonuses that add up to multiples of the salary. The bonuses are paid out as a measure not of individual performance, but of how well the firm does in a given year. In our seniority-obsessed workplace, senior managers, claiming privileges, have every incentive to tilt the scale in their favour by paying themselves disproportionately bigger bonuses, regardless of how much money they individually make for the firm.

Still, those managers remain under pressure from shareholders to post a higher profit every year. And to do that, they pay just enough to keep their junior officers motivated. Meanwhile, those junior officers have to put in anywhere from 7 to 15 years of work to slowly rise up through the ranks before their compensation packages start exceeding those of their local counterparts in NGOs. (Is any wonder, then, that any Nepali MBA looking to maximise his income in the short run, starting her career by working for an aid-supported INGO is profitable to working for a publicly listed company?) True, owing to increasing industry-wide competition in sectors such as print media and banking, staff promotion rates and salaries have gone up. But in most cases, the story of juniors dogging for years at low base salaries remains the same.

One such case is the small-and-medium-business sector. Here, employers are at the mercy of employees who exploit the fact that for most positions, labour supply exceeds demand. Unless competent ‘knowledge workers’ are what they require (say, dental clinics needing certified dental technicians), they have no incentive to try to keep their replaceable employees. Indeed, it’s often the employees, such as my company friends, who hold on to their jobs because, short of leaving for jobs abroad, other alternatives are not attractive.

The challenge for employers is to acquire specialised skills to make themselves continually marketable. But ultimately, it is the government that can push for further economic reforms to reduce the costs of starting and running businesses. After all, it is only a rise in the number of rivals that forces existing concerns to start getting serious about making the best use of the available resources. And one happy consequence will be that employers will start treating their employees better.

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**Annual 30% growth in the colour tv market**

Nepal Times: Do you think this is the right time for Samsung to launch the DigitalAll Celebrations 2004 campaign in Nepal? KS Kim: This is the first time we made our IT product dealers assemble to display our new technology products that would be sold in the markets in the region. Our headquarters recently made a decision to sell up Samsung South West Regional headquarters based in Delhi to our branch in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives. That is in addition to our existing six regional headquarters and it recognises the growing potential of this region to expand.

Sounds great, but is the Nepal market big enough? Even though there is no official data, we have recorded an average 30 percent annual growth in the market, particularly in the coconut tv segment. But the political and economic crisis has caused a slump in the economy. Overall, we believe the slowdown is temporary. But I believe the market will recover soon after the formation of a new government.

What new digital treats can we expect? We have plasma and liquid crystal iss, fully automatic washing machines, refrigerators, digital camcorders, DVDs, laser printers and optical disk drives among others. All of these will be available in Nepal.

Local distributors of electronic goods say their business is dependent on parallel imports. That may be happening in case of other brands. With Samsung, our distributor is His electronics. I don’t see any problem with parallel import of our products.

So why are dealers complaining? This may be happening on a very small scale. We conduct our business through regular channels. You already have a tv factory in Nepal. Do you have further expansion plans? If business grows, there will be further expansion of such facilities. It depends on the market scenario. We may expand such facilities for other products as well.

Have you faced any problem from imitation Samsung? This has not been a major problem for us.

Where are the Samsung products imported in Nepal made? We have many factories around the world. For Nepal, the goods are sent mainly from Korea and some factories in Southeast Asia. High-end products are sent from Japan.

Who is your consumer-segment target? Through the stable to live in percent economic growth in Nepal, the middle and high-income consumer groups have begun to increase and that is the right market for Samsung. We position ourselves as a prestige brand, unlike low category brands. It depends on the market scenario. We may expand such facilities for other products as well.

As the global village gets wired, Nepal is not far behind. To launch Samsung’s DigitalAll Celebrations 2004 campaign, KS Kim, CEO of Samsung’s South West Asia Region, was in Kathmandu this week (pictured above with the executive director of the Golchha Organisation, Shekhar Golchha). He spoke to us about Nepal’s importance as a market, branding power and going green.
The massacre

None of the books that appeared in the three years after the royal massacre bring any deeper insight into that terrible tragedy.

But this disbelief in official explanations of the massacre fails to excite foreign writers about the event, save at a quiet feeling among superstitious locals. Whether it's Neelish Mishra’s ‘End of the Line’, Jonathan Grigson’s ‘Blood Against the Snows’, or ‘Love and Death in Kathmandu’, Amy Willesse and John Whitaker, the conclusions drawn are the same, the sources, insights and anecdotes all similar. Dipendra loved Devanagari. He was a weird guy, evidently dangerous to know. He had many guns. He made enemies at Eton and parted desperately hard. He grabbed up and killed his family. That’s it. No attempt to examine other explanations, no credible off-the-record information, nothing beyond the norm.

Mishra’s book, to do it justice, was prepared within two months of the killings, and can be excused for hasty conclusions and little real penetration into the Nepali psyche. Mishra is a fine journalist who uses his reporter’s skills to seek the most likely explanations. His writing is lively and he offers no less information than any of the other massacre books.

By far the most awkwardly titled and disappointing is ‘Blood Against the Snows’. Much heralded as the Big Book on the royal killings, Jonathan Grigson got a $100,000 advance for his troubles, which adds to the shame of the final product. I’ve seldom read a more derivative account of the massacre. Grigson’s sources are largely documents that tell their stories better than he does and it all begs the question, why, oh why, would you buy this book? Instead, buy or acquire the source material—a pamphlet by Ludwig Stoller called Nepal: Growth of a Nation, the official government inquiry report, and the BBC Panorama documentary, Murder Most Royal.

‘Love and Death in Kathmandu’ is by the Australian husband and wife team, Amy Willesse and Mark Whitaker. In this case, it’s hard to judge a book by its cover. A lurid gold frame, a crass purple background, the title rendered in fake Devanagari script and a picture of Kali, it could easily win Bad Cover of the Year. Had these two writers produced something worthy, we might have forgiven the lurid packaging. But the writing lives up to the cover. It is adolescent and boastful, breathless and ultimately gives a shallow, derivative account.

The authors insist on being jointly present. ‘We are always going to see some individual with the goods on Dipendra, or ‘we are worried about security when ‘we’ drive to Gorkha. Of course, ‘we’ are married and have co-authored another book together but I respectfully suggest that ‘we’ the readers don’t give a damn about ‘we’ the writers unless we’re being enlightened and entertained. And we’re not.

But what annoys me most of all about both this and Grigson’s book is the unabashed Orientalism. Both paint a medieval-style Nepal with a...
callous yet colourful elite. Whether it is royalty of the former ruling Rana family, much is made of drinking, partying, hunting endangered species and so on. Now this is, in part, the reality. But neither Gregory nor Willsee see the massacre as anything other than local colour, rather than desperation or decadence. Nor do they seem concerned about what ordinary Nepalis think about anything.

For a truly unique take on the massacre, the reader must be brave, and must speak French. French novelist Gerard De Villiers finds that Nepal’s court intrigue fits quite nicely into a paranoid worldview that has made him one of the wealthiest pulp fictionists in France.

Sas La Roi Fou du Népéal, Nepal’s Crazy King, was written after De Villiers came to Nepal in July of 2001 and duped an unfortunate French ambassador into thinking he was a journalist. He saw top diplomats from the United States and Britain, and promptly turned them into the spits behind the royal killings. In De Villiers’s 150th book that blames the evils of the world on Anglo-Saxon spies, leading members of the Nepali elite have frequent sex with these diplomats and the massacre turns out to be a plot by the CIA and Britain’s SAS commandos. Disrespectful to the victims, yes, but quintessentially French and to be viewed, if not read, in that light.

Nepal and the Naryanahi massacre remain mysteries to the enquiring mind, ill served by foreign writers. Some comfort looms on the horizon though. Some decent Nepali writers are entering the fray with books due out this year on the country’s travails but until then, I’m replaying that Panorama program one more time, and perusing Ludwig Staller for my insight into Nepal. Oh yes, and talking to the ordinary folks of this troubled land who never hesitate to tell you what they really think about those killings at the palace. And everything else.

Blood Against the Snows: The Tragic Story of Nepal’s Royal Dynasty

Jonathan Grespon


Rs 520

Love and Death in Kathmandu: A Strange Tale of Royal Murder

Amy Willesee and Mark Whittaker

Pan Macmillian, Australia, 2003, 330 pp

Rs 632

End of the Line

Neelesh Mishra


Rs 220

The Dreadful Night: Carnage at Nepalese Royal Palace

Asiya Man Shrestha

Eka Books, Nepal, 2001, 183 pp

Rs 500

“Kay Gardiko”: The Royal Massacre in Nepal

Prakash A Raj

Rupa and Co, New Delhi, 2001, 111 pp

Rs 200

Sas La Roi Fou du Népéal

Gerard De Villiers

Malino Productions, Paris, 2002, 250 pp

Euro 8.95

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Swastikko Lagni Hanikaaruk Chh
statements in the meeting made it clear that parties can offer suggestions but not act on them, and that he wouldn’t hand over state power.

To appease the king, the leader of the Nepali Congress, Girja Prasad Koirala, stated it was not the culture of the Congress to chant anti-king slogans and asked his party workers to follow that tradition. Immediately after the Nagpur meeting, however, Madhav Kumar Nepal issued a statement that party stalwarts were responsible for their own street slogans. Clearly, both were trying to convince the king that they had nothing to do with the republican slogans on the streets. But the palace obviously had not softened its stance.

The leaders of the major parties may not have understood the king’s true intentions. But the king himself appears quite clear about his agenda: 19 months ago, the palace recovered the power it had lost 14 years previously. King Gyanendra does not want to lose it again. He will be flexible only with a democracy that he can guide. In other words, he wants to appoint a prime minister and ministers, make laws and rules, implement his plans and programs and be in charge of the country.

The sole reason he talks about democracy is because he cannot fund state-management and the security agencies without the people. Hehangs on about elections because without it, the donor mantra of democracy, good governance and decentralisation cannot be established. He met with civil society and the parties because if he failed to do so, he ran the risk of being labelled a dictator.

Are the parties unaware of what the king is really up to? Perhaps they just do not know. It is hard to believe that these politicians who have witnessed so many ups and downs in their political careers fail to see through the king’s stratagem. The real issue is the crisis of confidence between the main parties, especially within the leadership in the Congress and the UML.

The UML worries that the Congress, the king, and the international community will unite to undermine it. Meanwhile, the Congress suspects that over one late night meeting, the UML will forge an alliance with the king, Deuba Congress, RPP and other smaller parties to leave it out in the cold. These suspicions took root after the UML publicly stated that it would accept the reinstatement of the Sher Bahadur Deuba government. This powerplay among the parties is the greatest obstacle in getting the people on their side. Meanwhile, the fate of the 18-point agenda remains undecided and the parties’ enthusiasm is dwindling.

**Investment zones**

**Spots: 24 May**

The government is preparing an announcement of special economic areas across the country with an ordinance which has been delayed because of Satya Bahadur Thapa’s resignation. The idea is to declare any potential area as an economic zone where construction, operation and management will be the responsibility of a special economic area authority. The authority is supposed to build the right infrastructure for economic activities, monitor the industries established in the area and provide a one-window service to investors. The authority will also be responsible for creating an investment-friendly environment in such areas and attract both domestic and foreign investors.

The idea has also come in line with recommendations made at the non-resident Nepalis’ conference last year where they asked the government to create an environment conducive to foreign investment. The special economic area authority will allow investors to establish industries for 30-year extendable periods. No property in these areas will be nationalised.
Stolen gods
Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 May

The government does not have any proper records of idols stolen from the country. All it has is a record of idols recovered. The Archaeology Department says the police recovered 1,300 stolen idols so far and says thefts are still rampant. “It is still going on,” said the department’s director general Kesh Prasad Acharya. “The only difference now is that people are aware about these things.”

According to the department, an exclusive program for the conservation of idols and monumets in the country is very necessary. “We working on a plan,” Acharya said. The greatest obstacle is a lack of funds. Budgetary constraints resulted in the demolition of a century-old building at Lalitpur for the new offices of the CIAA. “We don’t have the money to conserve the historic building, and it was in a dilapidated state, so we allowed the commission to demolish it.”

Expense account
Biratnagar, 25 May

King Gyamendra issued an ordinance to increase the expenditures of the royal palace for the fourth time on Tuesday. The Royal Palace Expenditure Management Act 2014 was amended and the right was granted to increase expenditure as desired. The palace purse has already been plumped up by millions of rupees.

After the ordinance was first issued in November 2013, the palace funds were increased from Rs 110 million to Rs 620 million. Sources at the Council of Ministers told us that a total of Rs 930 million was sent to the palace in a year-and-a-half, but no data is available.

Senior advocate Krishna Prasad Bhandari said this move was an exploration in the tangle of the five-party anti-regression movement. “Issuing an ordinance time and again is simply too much,” he added.

Bhandari, former president of Nepal Bar Association said that the issuing of four consecutive self-benefiting ordinances by the king was “disgraceful.”

According to provisions in Section 72 of the 1991 Constitution, any ordinance not approved by the House of Representatives within six months is automatically void. (Napex.com)

Cops and soldiers
Editorial in Rajdhani, 26 May

The Nepali people were shocked by the recent shooting of a Nepal police vehicle at the airport by a Jhapa police (BNA) soldier that severely injured three policemen. The incident has sounded a note of discord between the two key forces of national security.

Citizens are worried about what will lead to this and wonder who is telling the truth. At a time when the security forces were gradually winning the trust and confidence of the people, this incident has jeopardised their credibility and integrity.

Of course, the truth should come out as to what really happened but more importantly, the current rift between the two should not be prolonged. At a time when the country is in a security crisis, their unity is needed more than ever. They should coordinate and communicate constructively to combat terror and violence.

The incident is a lesson to both the army and police that they need to work closely together despite their different roles in serving the nation and people.

The shooting can be considered a human error, but it highlights the communication gap between the police and the army. The incident cannot be taken lightly and it must not be repeated.

Who reigns?
Ghit aroma Bichar, 26 May

The CPN-Maoist party took the collective resignations of government-appointed officials as a great political success. On 24 May, according to Maoist directions, Kathmandu Metropolitan City office bearers decided to quit office.

After Mao Keshab Shapri, along with the deputy mayor and 34 ward chairmen handed in their resignations because of growing Maoist threats, the rebel organisation declared it a victory, a move that boosted its morale.

High on this success, inside-sources say they are now working towards weakening the state system by coercing more resignations from key people in the government.

At a time when ruling the country is entirely in the hands of the king, the rebels’ bold move shows the extent of their reach and influence. According to reports, the Maoists are now aiming at the assistant secretary to the king, high-ranking officials of security agencies and officials at the palace. It is unclear when they plan on starting this campaign.

The Maoists, who claim to have complete control over Nepal’s rural areas, asked the people to stop paying any taxes to the government. When this failed to be effective, they decided to force the resignation of high-ranking government officials. This play has served its aim—the people now question who reigns over the country, the Maoist or the king. (Napex.com)

Rebelling against rebels
Nepal, 30 May

BIRATNAGAR—The huge madhesi assembly here was armed with traditional weapons like bows and arrows, axes, swords and spades. Despite the Maoist blockade, thousands of men and women from villages in south Morang travelled on bicycles, tractors and ox-carts to gather in an open field in a display of solidarity and unity against the Maoists. They are tired of the rebels’ injustice and domination, and decided to publicly protest and condemn Maoist atrocities against innocent civilians who are struggling to survive and overcome neglect by the government. “All we want is to live worthily,” one participant said.

The Santhali community in Sisabani is constantly harassed by Maoists for food and shelter. “We have so little ourselves and yet they demand we feed them meat and rice,” says Bisma Mumi, a local villager who was forced to feed the rebels on two consecutive nights. When he refused, his mother and sister were threatened. “How much longer can we endure this?” asks a furious young man, a bow and arrows ready on his back.

Former vice chairman of Budhanagar village, Tarachand Shash, refused to pay ransom for his son who was kidnapped by the Maoists and they killed him. Since then, people from the villages neighbouring Budhanagar have united against the Maoists. Madhesi security units were formed a while ago for the villages of Pokharia, Jhorhat, Tetariya, Sisabani, Majhare, Nocha, Budhanagar, Bhajijacha and Kadimalh. They patrol day and night to keep the Maoists away. “There is a limit to our silence and fear,” says Gangaram Rajbhar, who gave up his job in India to join the anti-Maoist campaign in his village.

Since the brutal killing of 54-year-old Sampath Das Tharu on 7 May, hatred towards the rebels has intensified and now the people are taking the law into their own hands. Four days after the murder, villagers of Tetariya stoned two Maoist activists, Tek Bahadur Rajbangi and Lilam Adhi, to death. Ten days later, they killed another young Maoist who constantly badgered them for donations.

From the Nepali Press

28 May - 3 June 2004 #139
A few of the new members entering India’s parliament have unique experiences under their belts. One can claim to have streaked across the barren hinterland on horseback with a gun and holster, followed by some 20 muscular men, dressed like a Robin Hood-style bandit. Another of these lawmakers once climbed a huge water tank in a drunken state and remained dangerously perched there, refusing to come down until a lady in the village agreed to let him marry her daughter. Yet another is known for India’s longest lie.

All of this, of course, was on screen. These heroic acts can be explained by Sunil Dutt, Dharmendra, Vinod Khanna, Govinda and Jaya Prada, all hugely popular movie actors who—after last week’s stunning election upset that swept Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s government out of power—are now members of the Indian parliament. The journey to Indian politics from the glitzy world of Bollywood, the world’s most watched movie industry, is not a new phenomenon. In fact, this Indian tradition predates famous actor-turned-politicians like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Ronald Reagan. For years, various movie actors have tried their hand at politics, with mixed luck. But the latest elections have witnessed a record number of actors running for office: more than 15 across India. The success rate has also been enormously high: only three of them lost.

Movies are one of the two great passions, along with cricket, of this billion strong nation. Film songs have shaped social mores. Popular actors are idolised and their marriages, hairstyles, clothes, gait, famous dialogues and romantic songs can become the inspiration for several generations. In south India, temples have even been built for them.

It was only natural, then, that ambitious actors would eventually try to apply their mesmerising hold to politics. Actors run governments for several terms in at least two southern Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Even Tamil Nadu’s current chief minister, Jayaram Jayalalitha, who is also an ex-convict, was once a hugely popular actor who danced and sang in films and frequently played the role of Hindu goddesses.

In 1986, India’s brightest star tried his hand at politics. Aamir Khan, India’s iconic entertainment legend, who was later voted the world’s most popular actor of the 20th century in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) poll, agreed to run for parliament. He did so to oblige his friend Rajiv Gandhi, who was soon to succeed his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had been assassinated that year. Bachchan defeated his rival Hema Malini Banubhazan, then one of the top politicians in north India, getting over 50 percent of the vote. That thumping defeat ended Banubhazan’s political career, but Bachchan’s also ended three years later when he said he realised politics was his cup of tea.

Clearly, India’s new generation of actors does not agree. Some 30 actors joined different parties in the run up to the recent elections and campaigned for their friends and other politicians, traveling to remote parts and clogged streets on jeep-top. They would appear at press conferences, eagerly responding to almost identical questions on why they liked the party they had chosen.

As politicians and actors use many of the same skills, the political newcomers slipped easily into their new role. Politics is an intoxication, just like films. Once you have tasted it, you don’t want to let it go,” said Dharmendra, the aforementioned hero who climbed the water tank to obtain his sweethearts. Dharmendra (who only uses a single name) travelled to remove villages in his Bikaner constituency in the desert state of Rajasthan as a member of Vajpayee’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He often enacted his famous water tank scene from “Sholay” in which he played the role of a convict hired by a retired police officer to fight a bandit leader.

The other election hero was Govinda (see pic below), who also uses a single name and has won over the masses with dances involving pelvic thrusts and funny, though lewd, dialogue delivery. He contested from Mumbai, where the Bollywood film industry is based. Govinda strummed guitars during the campaign when he humbly lined up to buy tickets and traveled in local trains and buses. A nominee of Sonia Gandhi’s Congress Party, he defeated political giant Ram Naik of the BJP, who was undefeated in several elections.

The actors also tried to reach out to voters by touching on the very real issues that this election was fought on—road construction, electricity and poverty—rather than the divide issues of caste and religion that often dominated India’s politics.

These Bollywood stars may have partied with the megastars of their day and enjoyed the glamorous image—especially the poor, who turned out in large numbers this election. But the next few months will show if these actors can be heroes in real life as they were on screen.
Is war obsolete?

Losers lose the most, but winners also are worse off than if peace had been maintained.

DAHR JAMAIL in HADITHA, IRAQ

Two pictures put up in an internet café in Baghdad make for a vivid statement on how Iraqis have come to see US occupiers. One shows a woman in the United States hugging her dog. The second shows a hooded Iraqi prisoner sitting on the ground, hands tied behind his back. A soldier holds a gun to his head.

The picture seems to get worse in Iraq every day, and it gets worse for the United States in Iraq as well. Iraqis are already incensed over widespread damage caused by US military operations to their mosques both in Fallujah and southern Iraq, and by the photographs documenting torture in Abu Ghraib prison. The killing of 40 wedding guests, mostly women and children, in a military helicopter attack have enraged people further.

“The Americans must have no religion,” Hashimya Ali Abdulla, a housewife in Baghdad said of the slaughter at the wedding. “Anyone with religion cannot tolerate people, destroy mosques and homes, or kill people at a wedding ceremony. They worship force, not God.”

In Haditha, a small city northeast of Baghdad on the banks of the Euphrates river, shopkeeper Ali Zainuhi speaks of the consequences for the United States. “US companies will never be able to work in Iraq after what their military has done here. The mujahdeen will never allow it.”

US actions seem to have improved Saddam’s image. “Even Saddam wasn’t as cruel as the Americans,” said Tassim Awaied in Haditha. “Even he didn’t torture like the Americans. Everyone in Haditha believes Saddam was a criminal, but would prefer him over the Americans.” Iraqis are less than optimistic about the “transfer of sovereignty” on 30 June. “The Americans have fulfilled none of their promises,” said Saladoun Aziz, an unemployed construction worker. “Where is the rebuilding?”

Many people want Saddam back because the present situation is terrible, he said. “After 30 June the oil, finance and trade ministries will remain in the hands of the Americans, and we will have no army of our own.” Aziz pointed across the Euphrates to a damaged electricity tower. “This is freedom.”

At his home in Haditha, Hammed Abdulla believes the attack on the wedding party was intentional. “The Americans are provoking people on purpose to get a reaction,” he said. “Iraq is sitting on top of a volcano.” He added angrily, “I would like to see Bush and tell him that Saddam is better than he is.” Schoolteacher Mohammed al-Hakim says, “The Americans are speaking of freedom and democracy while they are the cruellest, most brutal army ever.”

Sitting nearby, an unemployed school manager agrees that 30 June will bring no change. “They will not pull out,” he said. “But the Americans cannot control Iraq. America promises so many things, but has fulfilled none of them.” Several men and women around him nodded in agreement as he spoke. They promised prosperity, yet they have destroyed everything. They shut up the wedding party because they are the terrorists.

One man added, “They said they would bring real freedom but we see our people tortured in prison, looted and their homes raided.” Daily attacks on US forces in Iraq remain high, and many Iraqis believe this number will only increase as 30 June approaches. The highway through the desert to Haditha bears several scars from improvised explosive devices that have detonated under US military vehicles patrolling the area. They are only one sign of Iraqi anger with US forces.

“Saddam was better”

The Iraqi people speak

J Bradford DeLong is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley and was Assistant US Treasury Secretary during the Clinton Presidency.

Comment

J Bradford DeLong

Angell’s argument was simple: in all prolonged modern industrial wars, everybody loses. Losers lose the most, but winners also are worse off than if peace had been maintained. Many fathers, sons and husbands are dead, and so are many mothers, wives and daughters. Much wealth has been blown up. Much architecture has been turned into rubble. Conflagration damages the rule of law on which modern industrial prosperity rests. The most that even the winners can say is that they are little losers rather than big losers. Modern industrial war is, as the computer in the 1982 movie War Games put it, a very peculiar game: “The only way to win is not to play.”

Angell argued that Angell wrote, some people argued that war was an important means to promote national prosperity, that commercial prosperity was the fruit of military power. Angell puzzled over how pre-WWI pan-German politicians could believe that German prosperity required a big battle fleet when the absence of one made no difference to the prosperity of Norway, Denmark or Holland.

He was, of course, right in his judgment that the only way to prevent any modern industrial war from becoming a destructive tragedy for all was to actually conclude a ceasefire. Governments that view aggressive war as a means to prosperity have been rare since the end of World War I: the Imperial Japanese government that launched World War II in the Pacific and Saddam Hussein’s two grubs for oil fields are examples that spring immediately to mind.

But what makes The Great Illusion the saddest book on my office bookshelf is that we have found other reasons to fight wars: to preserve colonial domination and ways to end it, civil wars, ideological wars, wars of extermination. We have seen ethnic wars and wars fought to make governments stop killing their citizens. Indeed, we have seen more religious wars than at any time since the end of the Thirty Years War in 1658. Yet there is no hope.

Additional foreign policy “realists” (who somehow unlike me is not a very realistic bunch) attributed the end of Franco-German antagonism to the fact that they had something bigger to be scared of: Russia, which was terrifying under Stalin, frightening under Khushchev and wormsome under Breznev. Let the Cold War end, they said, and then we will see France and Germany begin to ratle their sabers again, for that is the tragedy of international power politics. Yet the Cold War has been over for 15 years, and military conflict between France and Germany today seems as unlikely as military conflict between America and Canada.

I hope that it is the fact of European interdependence—an interdependence carefully constructed by Jean Monnet, Robert Schumans, Konrad Adenauer and those who followed in their footsteps—not the memory of the horror of World War II that has caused the armies that used to cross the Rhine in arms to vanish. If so, there is a chance that the globalized economic age to which we look forward will be a more peaceful age than the 20th century was. If not, then Angell may well continue to be as irrelevant as he was right.

(0 Pay Spring)
Victoria Cross winner Ram Bahadur Limbu talks about fighting in Malaysia, Queen Elizabeth and the options of retired Gurkha soldiers in this condensed account. His story is included with those of other Gurkha soldiers in Lahurey ka Katha, translated by Dev Bahadur Thapa for Nepali Times.

My father had been in the army and fought in World War I, but after that he came home on leave and never went back. I remember him showing us a bullet scar on his throat. Since I was very young, I don’t remember anything else he told us. I enlisted in the British Army at Puddikhat in 1956 and, after a week in Kolkata, went to Penang in Malaysia by ship. I underwent 10 months’ training and then was posted to second battalion, and stayed for two years in the Malaysian city of Johore. In 1958, we went to Hong Kong and in 1963, I was posted to Singapore. There was a conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia and we fought on the Malaysian side in Sarawak, where the Indonesians had a strong defence. The C-Company and some reinforcements from the artillery reached the site, approximately 150 people. When we attacked, I was in the middle with a small group. Bullets filled my companions on the left and right. The enemy had taken position in the bunker. I aimed at that and fired. When the enemy firing stopped, I assumed everyone inside the bunker must have died. One of my companions, Brijal Prasad Limbu, had been hit in the head and died instantly. Khark Bahadur Limbu had been wounded in the stomach, and I dragged him to a safer place, but he died a day later. The battle continued, with heavy artillery bombardments. When the fighting was over, eyewitnesses claimed 24 on the enemy side had died compared to the three dead and three wounded on ours. I could operate all kinds of weapons — machine guns, automatic rifles, grenades, rocket launcher and a gun that could destroy bunkers and trenches. We fought for two months in Malaysia. Although the full-scale war between Malaysia and Indonesia ended in 1965 or 1966, skirmishes continued inside thick forests until 1968, when the armistice was signed. Mosquitoes and wild animals caused us a lot of trouble in the Malaysian jungles. One serviceman was dragged by an elephant and had his ribs damaged, but he survived. Rumour had it that there were two brothers in another unit, and the younger one was being devoured by a python when the elder one cut the python into pieces and took his brother out alive.

I was given the Victoria Cross for valour in battle. However, I didn’t even know about this till two years later. That morning, high-ranking officers congratulated me and said I got a very high-class award, but I still didn’t know which award it was. Later, the commanding general made an announcement about the award during a ceremonial parade. Although I’d never met any of them, I’d read about several Gurkha soldiers who had received the Victoria Cross during the first and second world wars. One was Gunja Lama, and when people passed by his house in Siddem, they used to point it out and talk about his award. There were quite a few others who fought with courage and deserved an award, so it would be unfair to say that only I had been heroic. Yet I did my little bit, and I was proud and happy. I was 29 years old at the time, and since then, no other Gurkha soldier has been awarded the Victoria Cross.

I travelled to London, where Queen Elizabeth presented the medal to me at Buckingham Palace. A citation is made prior to the pinning on of the medal, stating that so and so did such and such a deed. The queen congratulated me and said well done, and then shook hands with me. I thought about how I’d seen a large number of dead Indonesian soldiers as I carried my two wounded comrades away. It is impossible to say how many I killed, and how many my comrades killed, but in all, 24 enemy soldiers were dead and it was certain our group was responsible. We brought back our wounded and dead comrades, and all of our weapons, so I suppose that’s why I was awarded the medal. At the time, I was a lance corporal, and had risen to the rank of captain when I retired after 28 years of service. Sometimes we old timers would meet each other and recall the days gone by.

While fighting we were aware that we were not fighting for our own country. In a sense, we fought for our living. For over 200 years, our forefathers had been involved as soldiers and warriors, so in a way, it was like carrying on a family profession. Today, two of my sons are in the army. One has earned a pension, but the other is still serving. In some families, four or five generations have been serving in the army. Recently, I had an audience with His Majesty the King. We often talk about the lack of opportunities for ex-servicemen in Nepal. We have a number of important skills, and a few have even had training in engineering or communications. It is a shame those talents go to waste, when they could be used to help Nepal.

O n 25 May, Richard Meredith-Hardy made history: the former world microlight champion became the first person to successfully fly over Everest in a microlight aircraft.

Taking off from Syangboche airfield, Hardy approached the summit from the south side and passed the Khumbu Icefall as well as Lhotse and Nuptse on his way to the top. The most difficult part of the climb was near the summit, where he encountered severe turbulence and down drafts. Over the summit he saw a group of Italian climbers nearing the stop, and they waved at each other.

Just like in mountaineering attempts, going down was actually harder then going up. On return, his engine froze and visibility was low in Syangboche, but Meredith-Hardy managed a safe landing.

Monday’s flight was actually not meant to be a serious attempt, as morning weather conditions were not in Meredith-Hardy’s favour. However, the weather cleared up as he was testing the microlight, so he decided to risk it.

Flying over Everest has been Meredith-Hardy’s dream for the past 10 years but he began planning and preparing only in 2002. This not only involved many trips to Nepal but also testing equipment. A normal microlight cannot handle extreme conditions, so a lot of modifications were called for. Specialised equipment was built and tested extensively, particularly for the cold, high altitude takeoffs.

Along with the microlight, a special suit allowed engine heat to circulate inside and Meredith-Hardy also had artificial oxygen. “This is not so much an item of clothing as an engineering marvel,” claimed Meredith-Hardy in his online journal.

Accompanying Meredith-Hardy on his journey was Italian hanglider Angelo D’Arigo. The Italian was trying to fly over Everest in a hang glider, also custom built for the attempt. However, the trolley connecting his hang glider to Meredith-Hardy’s microlight snapped near the summit, but he managed to land safely nearby.

D’Arigo points out that the hang gliding effort is not just for fun. It is part of Project Metamorphosis, a worldwide study on migratory patterns of birds of prey. In the Himalaya, he was following the migration of steppe eagles.●
Perfect putting
Sharpening your putting stroke

Ever played snooker or pool? Had an easy shot on the black and missed it? That usually happens because of bad technique. Listen to a group of golfers discussing their game after a round. They rarely talk about the bad drives or iron shots they've had that day. However, they will always mention the missed three-footer for birdie, or how all those three putts cost them the game. I'm no different, and there's a reason for that. Once you start to reach a reasonable level of competence, your scores are ruined more often by poor putting than any other reason.

To be honest, putting may look easy, but in practice it isn't. This covers all levels of player, from the club golfer, to even top professionals, who can often be heard saying, "If only my putter had worked better today!" Phil Mickelson, the current Masters Champion, 4 putted from 8 feet in a PGA tour event last year. So we can imagine how difficult putting can become, especially under pressure.

Thousand of words have been written over many years on this subject. Looking at the number of successful individual styles of putting underlines the fact that putting is a game within the game. Irrespective of what style you employ, there are basically two repeatability end up trying various styles and often reach nowhere. Some drills to improve your putting action.

a. Square to Square – where the putter head is taken straight back, kept square to the line of the putt, and the same square plane is followed on the through stroke. This is recommended for shorter putts, let’s say inside 10 feet.

b. In to Square to In - This method is used for longer putts, the reason being that as the length of the putting stroke gets longer, the putter head starts to move naturally on a slight inward path on the backswings, then comes back square at contact, and then goes slightly inwards.

Most amateur golfers are inconsistent putters, and we return to the number one reason why: they just don’t practice enough. Even those who practice to achieve a flawless stroke end up trying various styles and often reach nowhere.

Pump it up
International football’s second biggest sporting event is finally here! Portugal plays host to Euro 2004, and here in football-mad Nepal, we’ll be watching some of the best players work a little of their magic in the beautiful game, broadcast live on ESPN. The official fixture sheet below will make keeping track of matches a breeze. Keep your eyes on the ball.

Date Time-NST Group Team A Team B Result
12 June 22.45 A A1 A2 Portugal Greece
12 June 1.30 B B1 B2 Sweden Russia
13 June 22.45 B B3 B4 Switzerland Croatia
13 June 1.30 C C1 C2 England Sweden
14 June 22.45 C C3 C4 Denmark Italy
14 June 1.30 D D1 D2 Czech Republic Latvia
15 June 1.30 D D3 D4 Germany Netherlands
16 June 22.45 A A2 A3 Greece Spain
16 June 1.30 A A4 A5 Russia Portugal
17 June 22.45 B B2 B3 England Switzerland
17 June 1.30 B B4 B5 Croatia France
18 June 22.45 C C2 C3 Bulgaria Denmark
18 June 1.30 C C4 C5 Italy Sweden
19 June 22.45 D D2 D3 Latvia Germany
19 June 1.30 D D4 D5 Netherlands Czech Republic
20 June 1.30 A A4 A5 Russia Greece
20 June 1.30 A A6 A7 Spain Portugal
21 June 1.30 B B4 B5 Croatia England
21 June 1.30 B B6 B7 Switzerland France
22 June 1.30 C C4 C5 Italy Bulgaria
22 June 1.30 C C6 C7 Denmark Sweden
23 June 1.30 D D4 D5 Netherlands Latvia
23 June 1.30 D D3 D4 Germany Czech Republic

Group A
Portugal 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Spain 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Russia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group B
France 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
England 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Switzerland 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Croatia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group C
Sweden 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Bulgaria 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Denmark 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Italy 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group A
Portugal 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Spain 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Russia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group B
France 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
England 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Switzerland 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Croatia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group C
Sweden 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Bulgaria 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Denmark 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group D
Portugal 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Spain 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Russia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group E
France 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
England 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Switzerland 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Croatia 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Group F
Sweden 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Bulgaria 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
Denmark 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Italy 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Be there with Hyundai

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The Underdevelopment of Development: Essays in Honor of Andre Gunder Frank
Sing-C. Chew, Robert A. Denemark (eds)
Vantage, 2004
Rs 472

Today, when we are experiencing a powerful comeback of the 'modernisation-agenda' in the name of 'globalisation' and a real ideological consensus on the policies of liberalisation, this book engages the reader in a debate that sharpens understanding. This collection has been organised with care, attempting to present a synthetic view of Gunder Frank's own thoughts over the decades.

Courtesy: Manda Bok Point, Kantiapah, 4227711, manda@cscl.com.np
Democratic granny

She participated in anti-Rana protests in 1950. She campaigned on the side of multiparty democracy in the 1980 referendum, she was at the barricades in the People's Movement of 1990. This year, 87-year-old Chhaya Debi Parajuli left her home and dozen grandchildren in Sunsari and travelled to Kathmandu at her own expense to join the demos against the October Fourth royal move. “This is the third war that I’ve participated in,” she says proudly. Draped from shoulder to feet in Nepali Congress flags, she is now a celebrity figure in the crowds. Without hesitation, she climbs on the shoulders of a young man willing to act as her mobile podium. Her strong clear voice rises above the babble of slogans, louder than that of other protesters. “Come on, your voices are not loud enough,” she shouts, rallying a group of demonstrators at Putal Sadak. When riot police charge with their sticks, Chhaya Debi rides into battle. Tear gas canisters exploded around her, bricks and sticks rain down nearby, fellow protesters retreat but Chhaya Debi leads the charge. She is hit by a police baton and is injured in the head. While she bleeds, she curses the police. A quick first aid, antiseptics and bandage on her head, and Chhaya Debi is on her feet again. But she is quickly carried away by policemen into a police van—her seventh arrest so far. These days, Chhaya Debi is so well known among riot police that she is taken into custody before she even gets to the barricades.

Chhaya Debi has no interest in a political career, all she cares about is inspiring the politically indifferent young in Kathmandu to join the movement. “If I can come all the way from my village, why can’t people here just take that little step?” she questions. We ask her how long she is going to go on. “Till the king backs down,” she answers.

FINNS: Finnish charge d'affaires Pauli Mastonen speaking at the inauguration of an exhibition by a trio of Finnish artists in Mekoh Art Gallery last Friday.

PILGRIMS PROGRESS: A traditional Budhha festival at the Hiranyavartha Mahavihar in Patan on Monday was turned into a ‘peace puja’.

WATER FOR ALL: An exhibition of models and photographs of traditional stone spouts at Kastamandap on Tuesday organised by Kathmandu 20/20.

GALAXY OF STARS: Contestants of the Lux Beauty Star 2004 competition line up for the grand finale at the Hyatt Regency on Saturday.

NEW FOR OLD: A car exchange mela organised by Hyundai at the BICC last week for owners to trade in their old cars for newer models.
More important tips for visitors

Due to overwhelming popular demand to excommunicate this scripture from the All Nepal Non-working Journalists Union for causing several readers to throw up while reading last week’s episode, today’s column comes with a statutory government health warning that it should not be read while partaking of food in the presence of unattended minions. That said, we can proceed now where we left off with our next and final installment of important tips for visitors to Nepal so they can cope with cultural shock when they arrive on our shores.

One of the best ways to get the most out of your brief sojourn in Shangrila is to carefully observe the gestures and mannerisms of the inhabitants and imitate them so you can blend in. And one of the first things many outsiders notice on arrival at Tribhuvan International Airport these days is that commandos guarding the perimeter have been issued shoot-on-sight orders at all departing passengers.

WHAT IF I AM ITCHY?
Despite such heavy security, one notices that airport staff risk life and limb to scratch themselves in public. In fact, if we didn’t already have a national past-time (protesting regression), attending to a bodily itch could well be it. I know from personal experience that in some primitive cultures scratching and sniffing private parts in public is frowned upon. Not so here. Nepal is a safe haven for itchy persons and visions can scratch away to their heart’s content and no one will bat an eyelid. In fact, one can poke around in one’s toolbox without let or hindrance in most public sector places in Nepal, beginning with the arrival parking area.

WHAT IS NEPALI TIME?
Nepal Standard Time is plus-minus two hours of whatever is indicated on your wristwatch. Nepali Time is elastic and it is one of the few places in the solar system where Einstein’s Theory of Space Time Continuum can actually be scientifically demonstrated since time can actually be observed to bend. This is why Nepalis will never do today what should have been done three weeks ago. They will wait till next Friday, according to shaman Adhok Bajracharya. In fact, we are a nation state in such an advanced stage of repose that we will not do in this life what can be accomplished in our next.

WHAT ARE THE RULES ON TIPPING?
Yes, I’m afraid you do ask that. Tipping is mandatory in Nepal and, unlike most other places, is given Aferica job is done. For instance, if one is a convicted international narco-terrorist, one tips the judges to let one off. Nepalis aren’t so crude as to call it a bribe, we call it a Facilitation Fee. Never, never offer a bribe with the left hand since it is considered an impure part of the body. When offered a bribe it is considered rude if the recipient doesn’t eat it immediately. In fact, a common form of greeting in the corridors of power in Nepal is: “Ghus khanu bhak?” Luckily, you don’t have to answer, it’s just like saying “Good morning.”

CAN I DRINK THE WATER?
Hai Hai Hai! What water?