Sher Bahadur Deuba must prove that he is not just another bahadur

KUNDA DIXIT

Sher Bahadur Deuba’s appointment this week as prime minister for the third time is a chance to end a two-year political deadlock and make up for lost time in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

It took nearly a month to get a successor to Suraj Bahadur Thapa, and the delay prompted speculation of back channel talks between the Maoists and palace eminities. It was reportedly after those dialogues failed that the five party alliance was asked to come up with a common candidate for premiership. But the alliance fell apart over differences between the NC and the UML on whether or not to send a nominee.

Essentially, there was no procedural difference between Deuba’s appointment and that of Thapa and Lokendra Bahadur Chand before him. But analysts say where Deuba can make a difference is in showing that he can take the parties along. To do this, paradoxically, he has to prove to them that he is not a palace pawn.

Minendra Rijal of the NC (Democratic) told us his party was taking things step by step, adding: “We are determined to get all the parties on board.” But NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh KC was less upbeat: “It shows regression hasn’t ended. Deuba may have been reinstated, but the people’s sovereignty has not.”

Piecemeal, the sequence of events this week, is it clear that everyone except Sher Bahadur Deuba and Speaker Taranath Ranabhat failed the test criteria for the premier’s post. At the last moment, Ranabhat put himself out of the race on Tuesday morning by refusing to resign his speaker’s post as the palace insisted.

Deuba’s appointment was then hastened by the surprise announcement this week that caretaker premier Thapa had, without telling anyone, extended an invitation to Indian foreign minister K Narwar Singh to visit on 4 June. A prime minister had to be found quickly before he came.

King Gyanendra decided to eat his words and reinstate a prime minister he sacked 20 months ago for “incompetence”. The king risked being ridiculed by the parties, but hoped that public opinion would favour the move.

Deuba thinks his reinstatement proves once and for all he was never incompetent. As with his predecessors, the king gave Deuba a three point agenda: get the parties on board, start a peace process with the Maoists and conduct elections within the next 10 months. Given Deuba’s track record during his previous two tenures, analysts are not hopeful that he can deliver.

During his second term, Deuba made the fatal blunder of terminating local bodies, which left a vacuum at the grassroots that the Maoists filled. He declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament and announced elections he knew he couldn’t hold. He was also blamed by the misdeeds of his cabinet.

This time, the fact that Deuba rushed to see Girija Koirala first thing on Wednesday afternoon shows he takes the king’s instructions seriously. He even broached the subject of reunification of the NC, which Koirala did not reject outright because it would help him deal with the UML.

The UML itself has fallen out with Koirala and is waiting for his next move before deciding on a common minimum program and whether to accept Deuba’s invitation for support at a central committee meeting on Friday. But for now, the parties are still adopting a hardline stance because they do not want to alienate radicalised students on the streets who will need time to cool down.
The error of terror

Terrorism is not going to get the Maoists anywhere

The Maoist ‘people’s war’ that began with the objective of political, social and economic upliftment, has now veered off course. The use of terror as a tactic is being applied indiscriminately to undermine the social, political, administrative and economic fabric of the state. There are fundamental questions about whether the current position and posture of the Maoist movement can be considered legitimate. Yet an organisation which has adopted terrorism as an end in itself, continues to be accepted and receive sympathy from responsible and intelligent liberals and democrats.

The answer probably lies in the post-1990 political standoff. The disintegration of the people led to the Maoist insurgency wherein a macro-political group was now seeking power, change, respectability and a share in the power. This path of violence and anarchy, which rests on a foundation of subversion and terrorism, has attained dangerous dimensions in the absence of appropriate political initiatives. The longterm objective of the Maoists and their methods have not been properly analysed and need to be seen in the correct perspective. The campaign of violence and coercion has effectively destroyed the state’s ability to engage in any progress or development. It has also seriously damaged the very social foundation and harmony of Nepal’s satisfied and homogeneous society.

Maoist subversion was developed and designed to lead to the eventual collapse of the state machinery, infrastructure and economic activities. In the absence of political resolve and effective policies to counter these designs, there is an urgent need for a socio-political movement against the inhuman methods adopted by the rebels. Public awareness, initiative at all levels, commitment and concerted action by civil society in particular is an absolute necessity.

There is a certain reluctance on the part of media to term Maoist activity as terrorism. These Kathmandu-based journalists may be respected and responsible, but they are far removed from the daily reality of rural Nepal where the people grapple with terror every day.

One internationally-accepted definition of terrorism is: The premeditated, deliberate systematic murder, mayhem and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience. This accurately describes the Maoist tactic of fear, intimidation, threats and murder that is happening throughout Nepal today.

SADDAVISED
Re: ‘Saddavised’ (Here and There, # 198), Daniel Lak, like all flip-flopers, has pretty good hindsight. If I’m not mistaken, he once wrote in this very column that Sadda was an evil man who had used chemical weapons on his own people and that America was doing the right thing by going to war to get rid of him. Now he claims that the invasion of Iraq was a huge mistake. Even Americans (a majority of whom were in support of the war) are now changing their minds, he says. It’s not on moral grounds, that’s for sure. Would this have change the place if fewer American lives had been lost and Pangs had progressed according to US plans for liberating the ‘Iraqi people’? When the going is good, the tough get going is a popular American saying. I leave it up to your readers to decide on who is more worthy of this saying —the Americans or the Iraqis or the people?

SS Pal, email

SHAME
I am ashamed to be a citizen of Nepal after seeing the crowd of wannabe prime ministers at the palace gate. What a joke on our national destiny and on the pride of the people!

Basanta Gautam, Kasugai, Japan
However, the reporting of this is sanitised and ad hoc. The source and accuracy of the reports in the media are questionable.

Most reports have never been near the scene of an incident and when and if they are, it is hard to gauge if they are reporting uninjured victims of Maoist misinformation or intimidation. The astonishing thing is that the international community has selectively accepted the propaganda of human rights violations by the security forces in total, without the benefit of doubt. All forms of terrorism violate human values and are desensitised towards loss of innocent lives: Maoist killings are carried out without any sense of remorse. Terrorists use the cold-blooded murder of non-combatants as a means to an end, but why is society tacitly accepting and sometimes even justifying it?

It is clear that a once-politically savvy Maoist party is now trapped by its own rigid interpretation of a definite and outdated ideology that is trying to force on an uneducated and desperate populace using unscientific and systematic terror to establish a monolithic single-party state.

The priority now is to pursue diplomatic and political initiatives to develop the appropriate armed response to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table. The Maoist tactic of assassinations and threats against non-combatants to create panic and chaos has not worked and will not get them any nearer their goal. The only rational course open to the rebels is to stop this fiatal violence and terrorism and revert to peace talks.

Samrat Rana is the pen name of a military analyst.

Niki Lauda’s revenge
Flashback to a scandal from which neither Nepali politics nor its flag carrier ever recovered

The national flag carrier has been trying for months to lease an aircraft, but to no avail. Royal Nepal Airlines has become such a pariah in international aviation circles that nobody wants to touch it with a barge pole. The airline had been flying through bumpy weather for years, but what made it lose all credibility was the scandal involving the lease of a Boeing 767 from Lauda Air in 2000.

The word Lauda, along with other international brand names like Pajero, has become a short-hand for corruption in high places. The UML, which was then in the opposition, disrupted the entire winter session of the government in 2001, demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala for his alleged involvement in the Austrian aircraft lease. Everyone was hailing for Koirala’s bhadro.

The CAA served the premier a letter asking him to furnish some ‘clarifications’. Koirala finally quit on 19 July 2001, to be replaced by Sher Bahadur Deuba in his second tenure as prime minister.

Public memory being what it is, there may be very few today who remember the smear campaign that was run in the name of Lauda to bring down the Koirala government. But its political fallout was similar to that of the Bofors gun deal in India that ousted Rajiv Gandhi from power.

Till date, the occupationist Nepali Congress president carries a whiff of Lauda. The case is still pending at the courts and it may be too early to write off all allegations with any certainty but a review of those tumultuous days reveals the wheeling and dealing of power politics in Nepal.

Some at being ousted from Singha Durbar, Krishna Prasad Bharatari was trying to get back at his good friend Koirala. Some of his sidekicks at Royal Nepal Airlines were miffed at the Lauda lease since it deprived the carrier’s 737 crew of lucrative allowances. Competing commission agents offered a vociferous media comparative cost charts to prove that they had better rates.

Ambitious Deuba used it as an opportunity to play factional politics inside the ruling party against his mentor and leaked details to a plant press. The UML saw it as an opportunity to divide the ruling party andexploited it to the hilt. Civil society wanted to test the power of its fangs and provoked upon a victim already wounded by the political attacks. The scandal suited the needs of several power players. In the end, no one won. Everyone lost.

The Lauda affair was proof that political forces go to any length, sacrifice anything, use any weapon against an opponent even if it means hurting the country and its institutions.

Beholden to those who had helped him claw his way into Singha Durbar, Deuba did their bidding by refusing to extend the term of local government unites, declaring a state of emergency, crippling his political party, dissolving parliament and finally recommending the suspension of general elections before being dismissed as an incompetent prime minister by the king.

Madhus Kumar Nepal’s dreams of benefiting from the split in the ruling party did not materialise as the October Fourth royal move swept him into the sidelines. The CAA is yet to regain the credibility it lost in pursuing a lost cause. Koirup has buried the Lauda hatchet for good and prominent responsible for the operation have moved on. Its front-page editorials of that period can still be read in libraries and are examples of partisanship, Bharatari has deservedly become a laughing stock.

Local agents of Lauda Air and their political supporters milked the deal to the last drop, pocketing a cut for every hour that the jet was in the air and then dumped the scandal on a hapless state airline.

This intelligently planned and cleverly implemented campaign in the name of fighting corruption offers proof—if it is still needed—that all is fair in politics. After all, politics is what you do, propaganda is how you do it. For lasting impact, just look at Girija Prasad Koirala today still struggling four years later to convince King Gyanendra that he has a clean image.

SAMRAT RANA
Final farewell in a

How did a popular university graduate from Myagdi end up jumping off a bridge in Belgium?

Town! What was he fleeing: poverty, Maoists or the army? Why was he not granted asylum if his life was at risk?

With about 1,000 refugees, Belgium has the highest number of Nepali asylum seekers. They come to Europe through various routes, overland across eastern Europe or by air, some paying up to Rs 800,000 to middlemen who promise them well-paying jobs. Others know exactly what they are in for. An unknown number of asylum seekers have arrived on costly student visas provided by the former Belgian Consul General in Nepal. Authorities found out about this only last year, after which the consul was dismissed.

Until 2002, asylum seekers received €590 per month from the Belgian government and were allowed to work. The process of applying for asylum could take anywhere from a few months to five years. These days the procedure is much shorter. An asylum seeker can be deported within a month and applicants must live in a detention centre. The number of new arrivals from Nepal is decreasing dramatically, down from 550 in 2001 to 50 in 2003.

After his suicide six months ago, Prem Prasad Subedi’s friends gathered in a house in Brussels. The battery-powered lamp threw shadows on crumbling walls decorated with pictures of glorious swans and palm trees next to posters of Karl Marx and Che Guevara. The house is the base of the Nepalese People’s Progressive Forum (NPPF), which works to promote unity and cooperation among Nepali citizens who are forced to reside in Belgium due to repression and individual files of the members in relation to political activities of and repression against them while in Nepal.

Forum member Kumar Dahal remembers Subedi as a comrade: “He was a good supporter of the cause, politically well-informed. He left Nepal because the security forces were after him. He applied for asylum in Belgium, and a month ago was told he did not qualify. He committed suicide because he feared being killed by the army upon his return.”

Nepali ambassador Shamsher Thapa denies Prem would have been killed. “Governments do not oppress their own people,” he says. “I’d say over 95 percent of them are economic migrants.” It is the embassy’s task to confirm the identity of Nepali asylum seekers, who normally do not carry any identity papers. It’s a cumbersome task: if the Home Ministry cannot confirm the identity, there is little Brussels can do. The embassy also provides travel documents to those who willingly return to Nepal, after their case has been rejected. During peace talks last year, a number of people chose this option.

Bijay Lama, a 29-year-old shopkeeper from Palpa, just arrived at the asylum detention centre in Brussels. “A few weeks ago Maoist rebels came to my house and asked for a donation of Rs 500,000,” says Bijay, trembling in his thin overcoat in a sparsely heated café. “When I

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he world news agenda focuses—necessarily—on war and disaster, politics and big business. There are forces that creep into everyday lives and change them imperceptibly. So is the job of the reporter to enquire into these matters and lay out what facts can be unearthed.

Lately, a ray of light from South Asia shone into a flurry of news that is otherwise dark and foreboding. And this was the general election in India. Now understand that I’m not declaring for Congress here. I take no sides in Indian politics, save to be against extremes of all sorts and to be in favour of democracy. That is what India showed the world, that is the light that emanated from Kashmir to Kanyakumari recently. Remember Chairman Mao Zedong saying, ‘the Chinese people have stood up’ when he spoke to party cadres in Beijing after his successful revolution? Well to my mind, the Indian people not only stood up, they leapt to their feet, punched their fists into the air and made it very clear that they were mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. They did what worked best in democracy—they punished a government with their votes.

Not that Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s coalition government was particularly bad or inept. It wasn’t. Vajpayee himself is a towering figure in Indian public life. Some of his cabinet colleagues were able and well meaning. A few interesting policies were in the works, not least privatising some of India’s vast public sector so that money used to run government steel mills could be spent in the old one. There are regional parties from the south where personalities count more than policy. There are disgruntled independents, those who want to carve new states from old, one-issue parties, regional satraps and political gendarmes. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a dignified and honest man, has quite a task holding them all together. As the heart of this democratic turmoil is an organisation that is a political party in name only—the Indian National Congress. Aside from using the word

sector’, it’s hard to find a term to sum up Congress from a political point of view. It’s more of a political system unto itself, led by a dynasty, its ranks stuffed with opportunists and sincere reformers alike. The Congress is a uniquely south Asian organisation, and its renewal at the polls last month is good news for Indian democracy, even if the leader inherited her job.

The democratic system works best with a vigorous responsible opposition to keep the government in check, along with a lively, committed media. India has both. It was always said of the BJP that they were more comfortable opposing than proposing. They proved that maxim wrong in power, but they didn’t cover all of the bases necessary for re-election so they paid the ultimate price. For now.

Indian democracy is alive and well. It’s a journalists’ delight and something the Indian people are rightly proud of. Despite corruption, confusion andcronyism galore, India uses the ballot to change governments—not royal fiat or military coup. Nepal’s putative power brokers take note and repeat after me: Democracy Now. It’s the only system that works.

LUCIA DE VRIES in BRUSSELS

Prem Prasad Subedi (top) during happier times in Belgium, and lying in a mortuary in the town of Gent. Prem Prasad’s son, Sagar, at his school in Beni.

HERE AND THERE

Daniel Lak

Congress here. I take no sides in Indian politics, save to be against extremes of all sorts and to be in favour of democracy. That is what India showed the world, that is the light that emanated from Kashmir to Kanyakumari recently. Remember Chairman Mao Zedong saying, ‘the Chinese people have stood up’ when he spoke to party cadres in Beijing after his successful revolution? Well to my mind, the Indian people not only stood up, they leapt to their feet, punched their fists into the air and made it very clear that they were mad as
Mao in exile

In 1999, Krishna Dhq Sharma, President of the Nepalese People’s Progressive Forum (NPPF) was on his way to Canada. During a stopover in Brussels, his wife became dangerously sick. She was admitted to the hospital, and the Sharmas decided to seek asylum in Belgium. Ever since he attended a Maoist mass rally during which looted land document papers were distributed among the poor, Krishna felt he was no longer safe in Nepal. A member of the United People’s Front, he believed in Prachanda’s revolution and in restructuring Nepal’s “semi-feudal, semi-colonial state.” His house was raided by security forces, who believed it was a Maoist hideout. Krishna Dhq and his wife, Laxmi, are appreciative of the Belgian government for allowing them to stay and be full-time political activists. “If we had stayed in Nepal, we would no longer be alive,” says Krishna Dhq.

Sandhu Magar is also with the NPPF. He used to be a Maoist supporter, but left Nepal in 1999 because he was scared. “I didn’t have enough courage to go underground and did not want to surrender to the security forces.” His departure was not taken lightly by the party. “I feel guilty for having let down my comrades. I work half-time for the forum just to show that I regret my decision.” Sandhu misses his wife, and would do anything to be able to return to Nepal. However, he feels he may be targeted by both the party and the army. “Being tortured is one thing, but I worry that I will be killed without anyone knowing about it,” he says. Sandhu doesn’t like staying in Brussels, but for the moment he has no choice but stay put and hope for things to change.

Some names have been changed.

Grand slam

- Alan Hinkes aims to be the first Briton to climb all the world’s fourteen 8,000m peaks. This spring, he climbed Dhaulagiri and has only one left: Kanchenjunga.

- “I am on the final bend of the final lap,” says the climber, who started his odyssey in 1987 after climbing Xixapangma, the 8,046m peak which lies just inside Tibet and is visible from Kathmandu Valley. Since then, he has climbed all the 8,000m peaks in the Pakistani Karakoram, and all the 8,000-ers in Nepal except Kanchenjunga.

- “Kanchenjunga is not easy, it is more difficult than Mt Everest,” Hinkes said in Kathmandu this week, after coming down off Dhaulagiri. He expects to make his Kanchenjunga bid next spring. So far, only 12 people have completed the grand slam of climbing all the world’s 8,000m peaks, of which eight are located in Nepal.

Surfing in Nepal, not Scotland

A member of the Scottish parliament is furious after he has discovered that five villages in Nepal have faster Internet connections than some of his constituents. Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands, Rob Gibson, said this week that five villages in remote Nepal have a wireless Internet connection and “villagers can surf the net till the yaks come home.” OK, so they might have a shortage of phone lines up there, but they have broadband while their apparently more high tech cousins in far flung parts of Scotland have barely a dial-up line to work with.

“If yak farmers in Nepal can be afforded high-speed access to the web why can’t someone in Dunbeath?” Gibson sighed. He said if the Scottish executive was so keen on repopulating the Highlands, with more than the current population of a few tough Scots, a few cattle and some sheep, then it needed broadband. Apparently cuttles and a few romantic evenings in does not do enough to produce more baby highlanders. Gibson was referring to a BBC Go Digital Program this week about a village in Myagdi where local educationist Mahabir Pun is using wireless Internet to keep in touch with remote villages.

Money for the poor

Nepal’s poverty alleviation drive just received an immense boost with the World Bank approving $40 million in assistance this week. Out of the total, $25.3 million is earmarked for improving water supply and sanitation. In addition, the credit is expected to support rural communities in forming local water supply and sanitation user groups, which will be involved in planning, implementation and operating their infrastructure. The support is expected to benefit about 80,000 rural Nepalis.

The rest of the $15 million grant will be used in the Poverty Alleviation Fund to create income generation opportunities and facilitate access to basic services and infrastructure to poor rural communities. A World Bank statement acknowledged that the government recognised some NGOs, community based organisations and donors implemented successful programs to reach marginalised groups through community-managed infrastructure.
The gori details

Nothing like a modelling contest to remind you that beauty is only skin deep

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o I was, working hard on a presentation all through Saturday afternoon, wondering what to do at night to let off some steam. Should I call up friends and go see Nair’s or “Yuva” at Jai Nepal Cinema with dinner at Thamel afterwards? Or chill out with them at an airport sekuwa ghar with beer? Or I could make some thick soup and curl up with Ha Jin’s The Bridgegroom. Then again, listening to some humid jive in one of Kathmandu’s smoke-filled bars sounded good too.

Then the phone rang. My buddy SMS was inviting me to the finale of 2004 Saboon Beauty Star Contest. For free, yaar,” SMS went on. “I’ve got you a pass. There’s dinner afterward. Be at the Hyatt at seven, I’ll meet you at the lobby. And, uh, wear something nice.”

The Hyatt was packed to the rafters with Kathmandu’s who’s who. Not the literary, poetic types. Nor the rabble-rousing political brigade. There were corporate types with wires in various stages of undress. The multilingual crowd was there in force and the media typhoons.

The show begins. Eighteen girls make an appearance, wearing skimpy outrageous costumes that no woman would wear on the streets of Kathmandu. They were scrawny—some looked positively malmourned. “Don’t they feed these girls?” I ask SMS. “Only lettuce,” he answers.

The ethnography of the contestants is fascinating, and some of the visibly non-bahun lasses have bahun surnames. What is going on here? “When we bahuns sleep around, we contribute to the melting pot of this great nation,” whispers SMS. The guy in front gives us a dirty look, we are ruining his concentration.

Looks like the fair ones have an advantage here. And sure enough, the dusky ethnic types don’t stand a chance, the winner is as gori as they come. The Kathmandu elite in attendance is composed of old-line aristocrats, largely irrelevant and in need of money, and the yuppies (young, upwardly-mobile mummies) who have amassed new money but are in the process of acquiring class so they are taken seriously. And what could be better than for both types to cross-pollinate each other, to see and be seen together at events such as these?

And over in the far corner are the 60-something men, who can’t seem to get enough of the 18-year-olds sashaying down the ramp. Next to us is a nattily dressed Alfa Male who displays an enthusiasm for chatting up other people’s wives while neglecting his own. The corporate anawannabes are clicking away with their Olympus digital just so they can ogle at the pictures with co-workers on Monday morning.

Given the state of the country, I guess it’s a form of escapism to spend a Saturday evening watching people watching beautiful young women. And I could still get back to Ha Jin.

(Bhupendra Sharma fancies himself as a Boston Brahmin)

“Leave our schools alone”

Nepathya’s unique concert tour carried the message of peace and education through music

Halfway through the final concert of the Nepathya Sangerf Yatra at the BICC last Saturday, the audience decided it wasn’t going to sit through the performance.

Nearly a thousand people were on their feet to dance, wave, clap and sing along with Resham, Bhaldeko Oru and the band’s other hits. When Ankit Gurung lead his band into its rendition of Rato ra Chandra Saya, the audience, made up mostly of school and college students, decided to move into the aisles to join at the top of their lungs the song that many regard as Nepal’s alternative national anthem.

Nepathya’s four-week, 15-concert tour across the length and breadth of Nepal had the theme “Education for Peace”. And everywhere they performed, it was to jam-packed auditoriums of young Nepal eager to have fun and contribute to the cause of peace.

“The audience is even more enthusiastic outside Kathmandu. In Chitwan, they brought flags and waved candles in the audience. In Pokhara, the audience knew every song by heart and sang so loud I had a hard time keeping in tune,” a visibly exhausted Ankit Gurung told us. In Damak, the temperature inside the hall rose to nearly 40 degrees and the exhausted band had to shorten the performance because there was serious danger of dehydration.

The Kathmandu concert began with a brief video of the concert tour with shots of the band’s bus negotiating destroyed bridges and the charred halls of buses burnt by the Maoists. In the background was the band’s haunting peace ballad, Rangeen Chura. There were very few dry eyes in the audience.

Between songs, Anmit Gurung made an impassioned plea to the warring sides to leave the schools alone. “I call on everyone to keep politics and weapons out of schools. This is where we nurture our nation’s future, school belongs to children,” Gurung would say, only to be drowned out by sustained cheer of approval.

Money raised from ticket sales was donated to schools in the cities where performances took place. Proceeds from the Kathmandu concert went to Madan Memorial School and Bijay Smarak. Uniformed children from both schools were at the BICC on Friday and Saturday, and were the most enthusiastic fans, often spilling out into the aisles to dance.

This is Nepathya’s second concert for peace in the past two years. This year, it braved five days of Nepal bandas and eight days of blockades in various districts, but the tour did not stop. The only concert that had to be cancelled was in Nepalgunj because of a banda called by the Maoist.

“In most places, the audience was seeing an international class concert for the first time, with fabulous sound, special effects, and a background live video of the audience to make them more interactive, and they loved it,” recalls Arpan Sharma event nepa-laya, the management group that organised the shows.

In most cities, local FM stations broadcast the entire concert live, so the audience was much larger than the fans who thronged to see Nepathya perform.

Nepali Pan

Bhupendra Sharma

ALL PICS: ANUP PRAKASH

From top down: Nepathya’s “Education for Peace” tour bus passes a bombed out bridge on the Prithi Highway, flag waving fans in Chitwan, and the final concert at the BICC last Saturday

(867x1280)
19 daughters, still hoping for a son

A lot more needs to be done to bring Nepal’s fertility rate down

F orty-eight-year-old Subhedra Darji has given birth to 19 daughters since her marriage about 32 years ago. She is pregnant again, and is hoping it will finally be a son. Two of Subhedra’s daughters died very young, and seven of the remaining 17 are married. Last year, Subhedra gave birth to twins: both daughters.

“It was god’s wish that all 19 were daughters, I have to accept that till I get a son,” she says. Subhedra’s husband, Sher Bahadur, is delighted that his wife is pregnant again. “We hope it will be a son, because we need him to look after us in our old age,” he says.

A local astrologer told Gita Pakhrint that her 12th child would be a son, but like all her previous offsprings it was a daughter. Two of Gita’s daughters died, three are married. “How unfortunate we are,” says the 56-year-old Gita. “It seems we are just not fated to have a son.”

Family planning programs have made no inroads in these backwaters of Nepal’s eastern Panchthar district. Bachu Kumari Kadarai, a 61-year-old woman from Raninak VDC, chased away health workers advocating family planning from her village. Bachu Kumari is no ordinary woman, she has given birth to an astounding 30 children, an accomplishment that has given her stature and respect in the district. Bachu Kumari had two miscarriages and five of her children died.

“We thought that the rest of the children might also die and continued producing children as per god’s wish,” Bachu Kumari told us. “We were not rich, but we managed to raise our children.” After her last child was born 12 years ago, Bachu Kumari has been busy raising her brood. Still carrying loads and working in the fields, her health seems none the worse for it.

“I delivered so many children without anybody’s help, I don’t see why people need doctors,” she says.

Elsewhere in Nepal, it is the lack of health care that contributes to the country’s high maternal and infant mortality rates. Sabriti Regmi of Kerahari in Gorkha district gave birth to 10 daughters and four sons. No one ever told her about family planning. Five of her daughters and two sons died young.

But where there is awareness about family planning, Nepal’s patriarchal society does not permit women to have a say in reproductive matters. Gita Devi Baralakha in Sindhuli knew about contraception, but was compelled to give birth to 26 children. “My husband could not go against his father and he did not use any means of family planning,” Gita Devi says.

Gita was married to Bharat Rai in 1948 and gave birth continuously about once every two years until 1992. Fifteen of her 26 children died young.

It is a tradition in some communities in Nepal for couples to remarry sitting on the roof of their house if they have 20 children. In Baurev of Sindhuli district, Rikman Nepal’s wife is pregnant with their 20th child and they are preparing for a remarriage ceremony. “We are looking forward to it,” says Rikman, speaking on behalf of his wife whose health has deteriorated.

The couple now have grandchildren, but the burden of raising so many children has meant that the family is not well off. Rikman can’t even grow enough food to feed his family for a month, and now regrets not taking his fellow villager’s advice to go to the district hospital for family planning.

Radio Nepal has been exhorting families that “two children are god’s blessing” for decades. It doesn’t seem to have made an impression on Sarkari Kumari of Kamala Khoch also in Sindhuli. She has given birth to 17 children, and has no regrets. “It is difficult to raise them, but once they grow up and start earning, they take care of the family.” Even if she had known about family planning during her teenage years, it is unlikely Sarkari and her husband would have adopted it.

(Krishna Adhikari/Sancharika Samuha)
Crying over split milk

Unable to sell their produce due to frequent bandas, farmers are pouring milk into rivers and dumping vegetables on the highways.

Padam Chapagain of Rupendehi pours out milk he couldn't sell because of the bandas and (right) four tons of vegetables were dumped on the Mahendra Highway in Chitwan by farmers protesting bandas.

HASTA GURUNG

In the past nine months, vehicles have been off Nepal’s highways for one full month. National bandas, regional blockades and district bandas have affected more than 7.5 million farmers in central Nepal, destroying livelihoods and endangering Nepal’s heard-owned self-sufficiency in the poultry and dairy industries.

Investments worth more than Rs 7 billion by small- and medium-scale farmers across the region are seriously threatened. In the past fortnight, Rs 250 million worth of vegetables was left to rot, Rs 60 million worth of milk was poured into the rivers.

Padam Chapagain lives in Shankarnagar in Rupendehi. In the last week of bandas, he poured more than 1,000 litres of milk into a nearby stream. Padam is on the verge of tears. His family can’t watch this daily tragedy and go inside the house.

Rukum Pandey, chairman of the Rupendehi Dairy Farmers Cooperative in Manigray, says 5,000 of its members produce 80,000 litres of milk a day. They consume 10,000 litres and the rest is usually sold in the market. “The milk just piles up during bandas, we can’t sell it, we can’t take it to market, and in the hot season it spoils easily. We can’t do anything else with it,” he says.

Since the products are perishable and there are limited storage and chilling facilities, frequent bandas and blockades have devastated farmers. There are no facilities to turn the milk into ghee or yogurt, so if it can’t be taken to market, there is a milk glut. Milk that used to sell for Rs 15 per litre doesn’t even go for Rs 9 anymore.

Last week, Chitwan farmers dumped 100,000 litres of milk into drains and rivers. Some farmers found an ingenious way to recycle milk and pumped it into their biogas plants, effectively turning lactose into methane. “It’s better to pour it inside the digester than to dump it into the river, at least some of it will become gas that I can use,” says Pandey, who pours 25 litres of milk into his biogas plant every day that there is a banda.

In Rupendehi, dairy farmers who took bank loans to buy jersey cows for Rs 25,000 each tried to sell them for Rs 10,000, but there were few takers. Five thousand dairy units in Rupendehi alone are on the verge of closing down. Farmers can’t afford to feed their cows as it costs Rs 150 per cow per day. Many are letting them out, and there are now hundreds of abandoned cows grazing along the Mahendra Highway. This is creating problems for the Rural Municipality and the District Traffic Police, which is simply taking the cows across the border and leaving them in India. Like their cows, bankrupt farmers themselves are migrating to India to find work.

Farmers in Dhaiating, Kubhre, Madiwanpur, Chitwan, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Gorhia, Lalitpur, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Rupendehi and Nawalparasi invested decades of hard work and all their savings to supply the Valley market with produce. Every day, they exported Rs 10 million worth of vegetables and Rs 3.5 million worth of milk to the capital. Much of this used to come from India up until a decade ago.

Out of the 2,000 poultry farms in Chitwan three months ago, only half are still in business. The current spate of bandas and transportation strikes is sure to send the rest into bankruptcy. Indra Bahadur Bohara used to raise 4,000 chickens in his farm, today he has none. It cost money to feed the birds for which there was no market. “I am ruined,” he says, “I am going to sell my property, pay off my loan and think about what I will do next.”

It costs Chitwan farmers up to Rs 5 per kg to grow the cauliflower that they are being forced to sell for Rs 1 per kg. They fed the vegetables to their livestock, but there were still mountains of vegetables left. They dumped four tons of it on the East West Highway in protests, blocking 300 metres of the road with vegetables. Elderly farmers by the roadside wept openly when they saw the scene.

Krishna Sapkota has a vegetable farm in Chainpur in eastern Chitwan. He couldn’t afford to hire porters to take his produce to market during a banda, so he and a hundred other farmers just let the vegetables rot in the fields and ploughed them over.

Farmers across Nepal are now downsizing in their own sweat. They took the risk of investing in agriculture and made this country self-sufficient in poultry, eggs, vegetables and fruits. They turned Nepal into a milk surplus country, reduced the dependence on vegetables imported from India. They are being punished by the political forces who can’t agree on sharing power in Kathmandu and the Maoist rebels who would rather destroy livelihoods than build on past successes.

(With reporting by Janak Ayoy in Chitwan and Mukti Pahel in Bhairawa)

Development deadlock

In past month, Maoist warnings have forced many aid agencies to pull out

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The Maoist insistence that aid agencies stop working with the local government and sign agreements with them instead has forced some to suspend basic health and education programs in rural areas.

Last month, the Dutch aid agency, SNV, Britain’s DfID, and Germany’s GTZ suspended their programs in Kailali Zone and Kalikot district. More than 55,000 people are directly affected.

Now, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) is considering terminating work in areas where rebels are insisting that the agency formally recognise the Maoist local administration. SDC works in 54 of Nepal’s 75 districts with basic health, forestry and education and many of its projects are regarded as models for cost-effectiveness, sustainability and local participation.

“Wherever we go in these places, someone shows up and asks us to recognise their administration,” says Jorg Frieden, SDC’s Kathmandu-based director who has just returned from a fieldtrip himself. “How can we have double standards by recognising both the government and the rebel administration?”

This is the first time local Maoist cadres demanded that aid agencies work through them. Earlier, it used to be threats against Nepal staff and extortion. On 10 May, a consortium of donors including SNV, GTZ and DfID put out a statement through the media saying that their projects in Nepalgunj and Dhanagadi had been threatened, their offices bombed and staff intimidated. They said they were closing activities in Karnali’s Mugu, Humla, Jumla and Dolpa districts where they had supported the Rural Community Infrastructure program. GTZ and DfID also suspended their support for the Freed Kamika Yoga Security program.

The situation has worsened in the past month, according to one European aid worker. Now it is not just the NGOs who are being threatened—even the representatives of the donor agencies are under increasing pressure. Asks if they are not playing into the Maoists’ hands by stopping their activities, another donor official in Kathmandu admitted it would be Nepal’s most in need who were going to suffer, but staff security could not be jeopardised. “Also, recognition of the local Maoist administration is just not acceptable until the rebels give up violence,” said the official.

The Maoists, for their part, are hoping that by forcing out what little development is still going on in the rural areas, they will further discredit the government that is already non-existent in large parts of the country. But it is clear that the biggest losers will, as always, be Nepal’s increasingly desperate villagers.
Go north

Now that Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has launched its pilgrimage package south of the border, it is looking north. In association with Air China and five authorised tour operators, NTB is organising a tourist roadshow from Chengdu to Beijing. 8-15 June. During the sales mission, prominent Chinese media and tour operators will be provided updated information on Nepal.

High five

Laxmi Bank opened its fifth full-fledged branch in Pokhara on 30 May offering services like internet banking, ATMs and debit cards, loans, business and trade finance, fund transfers and remittances from abroad. Special schemes for Gurkha servicemen have been introduced. Local businesses will also benefit from cheap, real time transfer of funds between branches.

Celebrating Nepal

The third Nepal Himalayan Festival, organised by the Nepal Association in the UK and hosted by Manchester City Council at the town hall, will feature talks, food, arts and artifacts. The festival has attracted an impressive line-up of civic and celebrity support, including entertainer and hill-walking enthusiast Mike Harding. The event will be inaugurated by the ambassador of Nepal Sir Nicholas Parry. The festival continues until 5 June.

Up, up and away

Qatar Airways announced an increase in passenger revenue during the 2003/2004 financial year, buoyed by a 35 percent increase in the number of passengers the five-star airline served in the last year. The airline carried more than 3.3 million passengers, up from 2.6 million passengers the year before. Qatar exceeded all commercial expectations during the last financial year, recording a 47 percent increase in passengers the year before. Qatar exceeded all commercial expectations during the last financial year, recording a 47 percent increase in passenger revenue and a whopping 73 percent increase in cargo revenue.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

The band decided their commitment to the people was a priority. So, by the simple act of driving to their concert, they made a political statement—one that spoke up for music, education and peace. At every concert, lead vocalist Amrit Gurung called for schools to be kept violence-free. While Kathmandu may be blase about music concerts, the rest of Nepal is hungry for quality entertainment (see p6). The huge crowds that turned up at the 1½ Nepathya gigs proved the demand exists and people are willing to pay. The Beed happened to witness the long queues that snaked outside the Damak venue hours before the concert was scheduled. Later, the audio-visual presentations and the technical excellence of the event amazed those who were lucky enough to get in. An ecstatic fan said afterwards he rarely got the opportunity to witness events of that caliber.

Kiran Krishna Shrestha of event organiser-laws, the management company that handled the ‘Education for Peace’ tour, showed courage in his willingness to take risks. His logic was simple: the marketing and publicity rupas fetch more outside Kathmandu. Other businesses too would do well to remember that 80 percent of Nepalis live beyond Tharkeo. Shrestha won by securing future markets outside the Valley although he gambled with bandas.

The Nepathya model

Taking the message to the people

The use of celebrities as brand and goodwill ambassadors is a well-established practice around the world. More and more people are noticing Nepal beginning this trend in Nepal. With peace and education suffering, our youth need credible role models to follow. The socio-economic fabric also demands stars who can afford to spend time and make an effort in addressing larger social issues. We will possibly have to wait twice before compensating on quality.

It is important that while businesses may boom, the impact of the message is not diluted. The next step, how the concert sound bite is converted into concrete action, will require a separate model. The Beed will gladly give it a name when someone comes up with it.

Too much drag

It is too late to rescue Royal Nepal Airlines and turn it into the reliable and profitable carrier it once was

VIJAY LAMA

Rather fly their own flag than someone else’s as long as the service is reliable. And there is no reason we can’t be if we are allowed to hold our heads high, regain our confidence and stop being cynical about our abilities.

The blame for the present state of affairs must be shared by past governments, political parties who treated the airline like an employment agency, the travel trade mafia that bled it dry, and a few employees of the airline, replicated in other businesses. Event nepa-laya has raised the bar for future players, and others will have to think twice before compromising on quality.

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DOGWANDU

Dogs are best friends with benefits. They work with us, keep us company, give us unwavering loyalty, protect and cheer us up and never ask for more than a little love and respect in return. Little wonder then, that from cave dwellers right up to fashionistas with designer poodles, our furry friends are our most trusted allies. In fact, in Nepal dogs are even gods certain days in the year. Here are some tips about dog care.

**BASES**

The first and most important considerations before you decide on getting a dog is whether you are willing to make a long-term commitment. Dogs are ‘till death do us part’.

Sharad Singh Yadav of Nepal Veterinary Clinic and Research Centre in Baneshwor has a checklist:

- Do you have enough space for the breed of your choice?
- Do you have good bedding that’s warm in winter and out of the direct sun in summer?
- Are you prepared to spend time with your puppy that needs constant care?

If the answers to all the above is ‘yes’, then congratulations, you’re ready to get yourself a dog. There is a good reason they call infarctions puppy love—at that age, all dogs are irresistible. Make sure your pick is at least 45 days old and weaned from the mother’s choice. Choose the liveliest, most happy one. Look for clear bright eyes, a shiny coat and a moist nose. Observe them at feeding time: the one with a big appetite will usually be assertive and energetic too. Boy or girl? Yadav usually favors females. “It is standard to want a male but I find females are very loyal and are not as aggressive.”

**HEALTH**

Timely deworming and vaccinations are crucial. Sudesh Prasad Gautam and Naryan Prasad Chhetri run Kathmandu Veterinary Clinic, one of the oldest vet practices in Nepal. They say worms must be treated before any vaccine is administered. Deworming should start as early as four weeks and continue approximately every month for half a year. After that, biannually is good enough. Between six to eight weeks, pups are ready for DHPP, to protect them from canine distemper, hepatitis, parovirus, parainfluenza and leptospirosis. It requires a booster shot after 28 days. The importance of the rabies vaccine can’t be over stressed. Always make sure a licensed vet administers the vaccine.

Be wary of door-to-door services. Make sure a fresh disposable syringe is used. Keep the used vial so there’s no chance of mixup.

**RABIES**

There are an estimated 200 cases of human rabies infection reported each year in Nepal. According to Durga Dutt Joshi, chairman at the Nepal Vet Council, many go unreported because once hydrophobia sets in, death is inevitable.

The simplest and most effective way to deal with a dog bite is to immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for 15 minutes. Then seek medical attention. This procedure reduces the risk of rabies by up to 50 percent.

**NUTRITION**

Like us, dogs also benefit from a varied diet. “Keep meat to a minimum,” advises Yadav, who also doubles as the vet at Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Nepal (SPCAN). “They need a lot of protein which they can get from eggs, milk and lentils. Include fibre through vegetables like carrots and beans. Give them a multi-grain mix, seasonal fruits are very good for dogs, especially bananas for the digestive system.”

Vegetarian diets that exclude fat, oil, spice and sweetenets the dogs at SPCAN, he says, and they are living longer, healthier lives.

**GROOMING**

Dogs, unlike humans, don’t need frequent baths, says Swyam Prakash Shrestha of Pet Clinicic: “Vet Consultancy. It’s a common mistake people make. Twice a month is more than enough so their protective oily coating doesn’t dry out. Never use human soaps or shampoos. The pH of their skin is alkaline and ours is acidic,” he cautions. Regular brushing is good for your dog’s circulation.

**TRAINING**

Big or naturally exuberant breeds need discipline since they could unintentionally hurt children or adults. Ram Babu Pokhrel at Mount Everest Kennel Club relies on techniques of positive reinforcement to train dogs. Punishment, he found, doesn’t work quite as well. He teaches clear hand and voice commands, which the owner must also learn. Both you and your dog need to learn together.

**LOVE**

Taking all your dog’s needs into consideration is useless if you can’t actually devote time to doing it yourself. It’s not good enough to have other pets in the work if all you do is occasionally pat the dog. The most necessary factor in your canine relationship is love, because to your dog, you are the centre of the universe.

“Love your dog equally from puppy to adulthood,” advises Shrestha. “Otherwise you could end up with an insecure animal with psychological problems.”

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**Adopt a dog**

The many stray dogs on the streets of Kathmandu hunger for a little love. And given half a chance, they make the perfect companions, says Mera Thompson, manager at Arya Tara School for nuns, knows. She took in Sangye through SPCAN’s adoption program and considers it one of the best decisions she’s ever made. Although she grew up with a pedigree dog, Mera says she wouldn’t get one again. Sangye is missing a leg and part of her tail (left). She’d been hit by a car and spent two years in neglect. Now Sangye uses a wheelchair to get around and the two have worked out a very happy schedule. “It’s a huge responsibility and requires true compassion. But if you have the extra resources and are willing to dedicate yourself, I strongly recommend adopting a dog.”

Dogs are brought to the SPCAN shelter. Once they are strong, Sharad Singh Yadav and his team castrate or spay the animal, vaccinate it and put it up for adoption. Last year, they had 32 adoptions. Adoption days are on the last Sunday of each month. Contact: 4467953

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**Contacts**

- **Vet Clinic**: Kathmandu Gutt, Prativa 552428
- **Kathmandu Veterinary Clinic**: Mahakapi 470528
- **Veterinary Services**: Chabahil 446238
- **Pet Clinic**: Jhulairkot 591106
- **Pet Clinic**: Bari, Kirtipur 594566
- **National Vet Polytechnic**: Mahakapi 437296
- **Orchid Veterinary Centre**: Basantapur 441129
- **Shrestha Vet Clinic**: Chapali 427109
- **Vet Services**: Bari, Kirtipur 446782
- **Mobile Vet Clinic**: Jwalakhel 526807
- **Nepal Vet Clinic**: Kirtipur 427844
- **Deshi Veterinary Clinic**: Golabari 495252
- **Kumar Vet Clinic**: Katari 527156
- **Apt Diagnostic**: Makalbari 585409
- **Nepal Veterinary Clinic**: New Baneshwor 9871040662
- **Bhakta Chandra**: Ncell practice 446900
- **Love Pet Clinic**: Ncell 426398
- **Ghantepur Vet**: Bhandari 659207
- **Pushpa Raji Vet Clinic**: Bhaskarpur 5841365
- **One Vet Clinic**: Khokana 5841227
Charlotte Uhlenbroek (pic, below), the British wildlife commentator who some speculate replaced David Attenborough, is now setting up a dog shelter in Kathmandu named KAT?

Charlotte was born in London, grew up in the jungles of east Africa, studied chimpanzees in west Africa for her doctorate, spent time in the Amazon and has travelled the globe filming the natural world for the BBC. But wait, that still doesn’t answer our question.

This animal lover, it turns out, has a soft spot for city mutts. When she was living in Nepal between the ages of five and 14, she had four dogs plus rabbits, guinea pigs, parrots and cats. She constantly brought home more animals.

Charlotte came on a visit to Nepal last year. “The essence of Nepal was the same,” she recalls. But she found a lot of things had changed.

She was appalled by the condition of the street dogs. Poisoning by the municipality has never been a humane or effective way to deal with them. The dogs continue to breed. Plus it’s not safe for people and other animals. She also wanted to tackle the problem of rabid dogs on the streets. Charlotte decided to start up a project with Jan Salter, a long-time Kathmandu resident, artist and dog do-gooder in her own right.

The Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT) Centre, where Charlotte is patron, offers a very pragmatic solution to the street dog problem: sterilisation or birth control to reduce the population and rabies vaccinations. The team at KAT, which includes manager Khageshwar Sharma, will work systematically area by area while also collecting data on canine population dynamics to monitor the impact of their efforts.

Already 44 dogs have passed through their kennels located on route to Budhanikarka, most of them females that were spayed and the rest were males. All dogs received treatment for any diseases and also got vaccinated. KAT’s target is 60 dogs a month for this year but hopes to work up to 200 a month by next year.

The next phase involves public education. KAT doesn’t expect attitudes to change overnight, but it wants people to take responsibility for community dogs by vaccinating them and spaying females. The local municipalities, the World Health Organisation and the Humane Society International are all pledging support. Charlotte shot a short film that she will use for fundraising efforts in England. “There is a lot of work to be done,” she says. “But we are very optimistic that we can get the job done.”

Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre: www.katcentre.org.np

Deliveries to your home or office? Call 5543333
Famine’s door

Rajdhani, 28 May

ROLPA — For the past five months, the Maoists have blocked Libang. Villagers cannot get in or out of the district headquarters. Waving banners scare off travellers and traders. The district is on the verge of starvation and neither the state nor the Maoists are concerned.

“There is no business here at all, but what is worse is that the villagers can’t get food,” says local shopkeeper Krishna Lal Shrestha. As no vehicles are let through to Libang, the only source of food is the state food depot, which is also running out. The depot has announced tenders for food supply thrice but suppliers haven’t shown any interest — no one wants to take the risk.

While the villagers are facing starvation, Tatting, the Maoist chief of the district says the blockade is designed to starve the security forces and food can still be transported for the general public. But low-level cadre are preventing that from happening.

Local are not allowed to sell their produce at Libang because the Maoists suspect that the food would eventually reach the security forces. The rebels, on the other hand, blame the state for first using food as a weapon. “This is just to counter that move against us,” says Agni, a Maoist activist. He says the state should first lift the food embargo on the districts before they open the roads into Libang.

Over 18 VDCs cannot sell or buy food. Famine is imminent. Although the main targets were the security forces, they are largely unaffected. The lives of thousands of children and adults are at risk. The Maoists, meanwhile, are making a tidy packet by releasing seized buses and macks after the owners pay a sum of money.

Instead of offering constructive solutions to the ongoing crisis, the rebels trouble the people with blockades and bandas. They attacked the van because it floated a strike declared in Gandaki. They knew fully well that only ambulances and press vehicles would be on the roads. Not even the security forces dared to go out.

The Maoists revealed their true face by scaling up violence at a time when all the political parties are working together. Obsessed with extreme leftist ideals, in just nine years the Maoist organisation successfully controls a large part of the country with their armed revolution. It is difficult to predict how much the Maoists will impact Nepal’s politics once they lay down their arms. Their political ideals will be acceptable if they are democratic and respect the rights of the people. By attacking the press, we trust the Maoists’ democratic credentials even less.

Press ambush

Editorial in Kantipur, 28 May

Cowards fear the press. The Maoists showed their true colours by attacking a press van, killing the innocent driver and severely injuring a passenger. The attack on a vehicle belonging to The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Posin Tarinal last Thursday clearly marks the Maoists’ agenda.

Powerful women

Husia Yami in Kantipur, 30 May

In a semi-feudal country like Nepal, the question of women’s emancipation must focus on the struggle against the monarchy that aims at keeping both men and women in the shackles of slavery. It should not be limited only to gender. In this context, what women must understand is the role of private property in the development of human society. Women became the first slaves. That means the liberty of women is possible only after the freedom of all other communities and classes. The first step is an unconditional right to personal property and equal participation in state power. Women have already shown great courage in the urban street protests and in the rural battles with the royal army. Now patriotic and democratic women must join hands with men and stand up against the fascist regime.

Terror tactics

Editorial in Kantipur, 31 May

The outrage of blowing up a Baglung-bound Saiba bus in the Valley, killing one person and injuring nearly two dozen passengers shows that the Maoists deliberately wanted to make an example of a cooperative that dared to fly during bandas. Along with the mobley bus, Saiba restarted its service at the request of...
Recently, I was accused of stirring trouble for the UML through my articles. The issues that I chose, which raised hackles, are absolutely legitimate. However, having heard the reservations of my party leaders, I must stop writing if my work caused problems. No country in the world grants total freedom to creative writers. Paul Robinson was imprisoned after he sang a socialist song, musician Bob Dylan was slandered because he opposed the Vietnam War; the state will not honour those who challenge its power. This could be why freedom-seekers don't fit into politics. I am not talking about my conscience here—perhaps state power is for those unable to commit to their convictions. Leaders don’t have the luxury of disagreeing with the party line. A leader can't expect concessions just because he is a writer. Everyone must abide by the rules. If it stirs up trouble, they must stop writing. That is their duty.

I cannot leave the party at the moment, hence I have to give up writing. The present complexities mean enemies could use my comments as a weapon. People have insulted my literary work, some tried to assassinate my character by misinterpreting my comments, yet the party leadership never censored my content. Those who wish to see the end of the communist party demanded the party take action against me but the UML itself did not accuse me of writing against its policies.

Party leaders questioned me: ‘Have you written anything about the Congress, anything on a republic or about the king? We don’t want written anything about the Congress, anything about a republic or about the king! We don’t want it!’

This has forced me to rethink my role as a writer. I thank the party for allowing me to write for so long. But now, I rest my pen.

**Indian benefits**

**Annapurna Post, 2 June**

There are expectations that the upcoming two-day visit of Indian Foreign Minister K. Narasimha Sudresha Singh will promote Nepali interests.

Nepal Congress (Democratic) leader Pradeep Gyawali added that the visit is expected to further enhance the country's image in the international community.

Gyawali, who is also the leader of the main opposition party in the country, said that the visit would help in strengthening the bilateral ties.

**Red journos**

**Baburam Bhutari** in Ramana, 28 May-5 June

Without the active support of revolutionary journalists, any social revolution is doomed to failure.

Most of the world’s greatest revolutions sought the support for their ideals through journalism: Karl Marx started his career as the chief editor of Rheinische Zeitung in Cologne and later worked as a correspondent for New York Tribune. Lenin was the editor of the communist newspaper Iskra. Mao was constantly involved in editing publications run by his party and wrote columns, opinion pieces and editorials during and after the Cultural Revolution.

The progress in our defence and offensive strategies has already made a huge impact at national and international levels. This is why the time has come for revolutionary journalists to be more prominent in their responsibilities towards society and the nation. They need to be more objective and disseminate real facts and provide constructive analyses. They should also adopt an undermining the imperialistic propaganda spread by a capitalist global media that is penetrating Nepal. The only way to diminish the threat is joining patriotic and nationalistic elements. As the revolution becomes more urban-centric, revolutionary journalists play a key role in clearing prejudices, exposing the crimes of reactionaries and boosting the morale of the ‘people’s army’ and party members. The ideological struggle has been consistent throughout our movement. At present, the duty of revolutionary journalists is to play their part in taking the revolution to its logical conclusion.

**Pen to rest**

**Annapurna Post, 2 June**

NARA YANGHAT—Top Bahadur Khadga devoted all his life to spreading education so his students got the opportunity to do well in life. He was friendly, generous and a doting father of three young daughters and a son. On Saturday night at nine, while the family was watching television at home, eight men with pistols and khukri burst into the house. They asked Top Bahadur for Rs 50,000. When he said he didn’t have that kind of money, they threatened to take away his 18-year-old daughter Dipi.

‘Then daddy said let me find the money, give me some time,’ recalls a tearful Dipi, ‘but they shot him and he fell to the floor.’ Dipi’s younger sisters Prativa, Pragya and 10-year-old little brother, Abirami, can’t stop crying. Their mother, Gangi, is still in shock. The assailants claimed they were Maoists, but Top Bahadur’s neighbours can’t understand why such a good and innocent man was killed. The police are investigating the matter but say the Maoists are probably responsible. The rebels haven’t claimed responsibility.

**Indian benefits**

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There are expectations that the upcoming two-day visit of Indian Foreign Minister K. Narasimha Singh will promote Nepali interests.

Nepal Congress (Democratic) leader Pradeep Gyawali dubbed the new Indian government as ‘comparatively progressive’ and said the visit so soon after the appointment of the Deuba government could prove crucial.

In his view, the former BIP government was by nature profit-seeking and would haggle over minor trade deals. The Congress government will be better for bolstering bilateral ties, Giri added.

According to Sachchid Shumsher Rana, former army chief and the incumbent member of Raj Parishad Standing Committee, Narasimha Singh’s visit will help Nepal in its effort to resolve the Maoist problem. Former speaker Daman Nath Dhungana thinks the promises on the part of our southern neighbour to help us was commendable. Saying that the Indian foreign minister’s visit would not make any major difference in the existing relationship between the two countries, former Nepal ambassador to India, Lok Raj Birla, maintained that the priority the new Indian government seems to have given to Nepal is praiseworthy.

**Live imaging...**

**EPSON**

**Photo STYLISTS**

**MERCANTILE OFFICE SYSTEMS**

**Authorized Dealers:**

108 Nepbrand Translation Service
FEWEN MONTHS AFTER REACHING the zenith of their influence on US foreign policy—due to the invasion of Iraq, neo-conservatives appear to have fallen entirely out of favour, both within the administration of President George W. Bush and in Baghdad itself. The signs of their defeat at the hands of both reality and the so-called “realists”, who are headed within the administration by Secretary of State Colin Powell, are virtually everywhere but were probably best marked by the cover of Newsweek last week, which depicted the framed photograph of America’s favourite Iraqi, Ahmad Chalabi, who had been sidelined during a joint police-US military raid on his headquarters in Baghdad [see pic. right]. Bush’s Mr Wrong was the title of the feature article.

The victory of the realists, who also include the uniformly military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), appeared complete last Monday with the unveiling of the interim Iraqi government to which an as-yet undefined sovereignty is to be transferred from the US-led occupation authorities by 30 June. Not only was Chalabi’s arch-rival-in-exile, Iyad Allawi, approved by the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) as prime minister, but neither Chalabi nor any of his closest IGC associates, especially Finance Minister Kameel al-Hassani, now has a seat in the new cabinet.

The neo-conservatives, a key part of the coalition of hawks that dominated Bush’s post-9/11 foreign policy, were the first to publicly call for Saddam Hussein’s ouster. Since the latter part of the 1990s, when they led the charge in Congress for the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act (ILA), Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress (INC) worked tirelessly to achieve that transformation.

Neo-cons, more than any other group, pushed hardest for war in Iraq after 9/11 and predicted, backed up by Chalabi’s assurances, that the conflict would be, among other things, a “cakewalk” and that US troops would be greeted with “flowers and sweets”. Within the administration, the neo-cons, again relying heavily on Chalabi’s INC, developed their own original analyses to bolster the notion of a link between former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the al-Qaeda terrorist group, and exaggerated Hussein’s alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to provide a more credible pretext for war.

While analysts and regional experts at the CIA and the State Department, which had dropped Chalabi as a fraud and a con-man in the mid-1990s, tried to resist the juggernaut, they were consistently outflanked by the neo-cons, whose influence and ability to circumvent the professionals was greatly enhanced by their access to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney, who served as their champions in the White House and with Bush personally.

Their influence reached its peak in early April when Chalabi and 700 of his paid INC troops were airlifted by the Pentagon to the southern city of Nasiriyah on Cheney’s authority against Bush’s stated policy that Washington would not favour one Iraqi faction over another. The neo-cons’ star began to wane last August when it became clear that their and Chalabi’s predictions about a grateful Iraqi populace were about as well-founded as their certainties about Hussein’s ties to al-Qaeda and his WMD stockpiles.

Sensing trouble ahead, Condoleezza Rice asked Robert Blackwill to return to the White House, where he had been her boss during the presidency of George HW Bush, the current leader’s father. By October, they formed an inter-agency Iraq Stabilisation Group (ISG) that gradually wrested control of Iraq policy from the Pentagon.

It was a process in which Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) chief Paul Bremer, who had come to detest Chalabi and his neo-cons backers in Baghdad and Washington, was an enthusiastic participant and which was effectively completed with the announcement late last month that the State Department was taking over the $14 billion in money that the Pentagon has not yet spent.

In the last month, the neo-con retreat has turned into a rout, particularly as reports of Chalabi’s coziness with Iran gained currency and, as important, senior military officers indicated that a military victory over the Iraqi insurgency was not possible. The public attention given to a blistering attack on the neo-cons by the former chief of the US Central Command, Gen Anthony Zinni, on the popular television program 60 Minutes also demonstrated that the media, ever cautious about taking on powerful figures, now saw them as fair game. When Perle, Woolsey and several other neo-cons visited Rice at the White House on 1 May to protest the shoddy treatment Chalabi was receiving at the hands of the CIA, Bremer and the State Department, participants said she thanked them for their views and offered nothing more. Neither Rumsfeld nor Cheney nor any of their neo-con aides attended.

Given to rule

SUDEVENDRI KAKUCHI in TOKYO

Média reports suggesting that Japan’s Crown Princess Masako is suffering from severe depression—linked to heavy pressure to produce a son—has revived a debate over the idea of allowing an empress to reign over the 2,000-year-old Chrysanthemum Throne. Masako and her husband, Crown Prince Naruhito, have a two-year-old daughter, Aiko. Japan’s Constitution permits only sons to inherit the throne in the world’s oldest unbroken hereditary monarchy. The emperor is considered a symbol of Japanese culture and a Shinto deity, a position that has no female priests. But public sentiment appears to be shifting away from tradition. Surveys indicate that more than 70 percent of the population say they would be happy if Masako’s daughter takes over as the monarch is the first and, currently, the only child of the emperor.

While historical documents show that empresses did rule several centuries ago, Japan’s Meiji Constitution speaks of the country being ruled by a line of emperors “unbroken for ages eternal”. Article Three of the current constitution, which replaced the Meiji charter, states that only males can take over the Chrysanthemum Throne. Emperor Hirohito ruled Japan before and during World War II as a living god, commanding a fiercely loyal military and publicist Japan’s defeat in 1945. Against this backdrop, changing this law to allow an empress to reign—and given the alteration of notions of gender equality this would bring—is deeply disturbing for Japan’s influential rightists. The conservative Shukan Bunshun, a leading weekly news magazine, quoted imperial household watchers as saying a law to usher in female accession to the throne would be too complicated and pose a risk to the continuation of the monarchy.

But this contrasts with support for an empress in Japan’s increasingly Westernised society, one in which more women are now delaying marriage and choosing to not have children. Aiko was born to Masako Owada, a former career diplomat, after more than eight years of married life and some infertility treatment. Pressure to produce a son intensified this past year as Princess Masako approached her 40th birthday, leading to her breakdown, according to news reports. She is now reported to be “resting”, according to the Imperial Agency. The media have published photos of a

Crown Princess Masako with Aiko.

Forced into the role of a princess, Aiko lives in seclusion with her mother and daughter. The problem surfaced earlier in May, when her husband crossed the lines of traditional restraint in Japan to make the shocking revelation during a press conference that his wife is “haunted by trying to adapt to life in the imperial family since their marriage”. Crown Prince Naruhito spoke on the eve of his departure, alone, to Europe where he attended the wedding of the crown princess of Denmark and Spain. He also accused the Imperial Agency of “denying Masako’s career and her character”. The remarks causing a stir in Japan, forcing the stubborn and powerful Imperial Agency to quickly announce it would “take more care to do its best for the Princess”. But on Friday the agency announced, in yet another sign of its powerful control over the imperial family, that it has not scheduled a press conference for the prince’s return from Europe on 25 May. Still, Prince Naruhito’s rare expression of displeasure has touched off a storm of new media reports that has continued for weeks. News magazines have been portraying the lives of the Japanese imperial family as being extremely lonely and having very little social interaction with friends. [11/05]
When the world’s leaders met at the Millennium Summit four years ago, they agreed on a set of goals aimed at cutting global poverty in half by 2015. They also set targets for the environment, because they understood its centrality to long-term economic growth, human development and the stability of the planet. Ten years shy of when the 2015 goals are to be met, progress on the environment is alarmingly slow. So much more is possible.

The phase-out of ozone depleting substances through the Montreal Protocol, for instance, shows what can be done when the international community works together. Thanks to the protocol, it is estimated that up to 20 million cases of skin cancer and 130 million eye cataracts will be avoided. This kind of success should encourage us. But now we need to match our actions with the scale of the challenge.

Our world is not only unbalanced, but endangered. Deforestation is increasing and carbon dioxide emissions are rising. Twelve percent of birds, 24 percent of mammals and 30 percent of fish are either vulnerable or in immediate danger of extinction. The environmental challenge is even more stark in developing countries. More than a billion people lack access to clean water. More than two billion have no access to basic sanitation. Five to six million people, mostly children, die every year due to waterborne diseases and air pollution.

We must recognize the fundamental imbalance in the global environmental equation. Richer countries do much of the environmental damage. Accounting for only 15 percent of the world’s population, they cause 50 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions but poorer countries pay much of the “costs”—losing up to 8 percent of their GDP per year due to environmental degradation as well as suffering devastating effects on health and human welfare. Rich countries must shoulder greater responsibility for fixing the problem. That means changing the way they produce and consume energy and providing more resources to developing countries for environmental conservation. Between 1990 and 2000, financing for environmental concerns followed roughly the same path as overall development assistance but as a proportion of gross domestic product fell. Aid for the environment averaged about $2 billion per year. Of terms of global priorities, this figure compares with the $900 billion that the world currently commits to military expenditures each year.

If the war on environmental degradation is to be won, we need a major turnaround. Three areas can help speed progress:

- Developed countries must set the example by moving toward environmentally friendly production and consumption patterns, including more control of greenhouse gas emissions and use of innovative mechanisms such as Carbon Funds to buy offsets (reductions in greenhouse gases) from developing countries. Richer countries must also increase bilateral and multilateral aid commitments.
- Developing countries must improve their policies governing the critical sectors of water, energy, transportation and trade, including pricing policies. This would help reduce consumption of scarce natural resources. Beyond this, environmental concerns must be integrated more fully into development policymaking.
- The international community must make a much more serious commitment to renewable energy, efficiency and other environmentally-friendly energy sources. We need the kind of common effort launched a generation ago in agriculture that led to the Green Revolution.

It will be too late 25 years from now to make the right choices. For the sake of our children and our children’s children, we must act now.

James D Wolfensohn is president of the World Bank.

'Sustainable consumption'

Consumerism a global phenomenon. There are as many consumers in China as in the US, as many in India as there are Japanese. The per capita consumption in these countries is lower, but is quickly catching up. "Consumption has been going up and there is no point at which it becomes satisified," says Chris Flavin, director of the Worldwatch Institute. The consumer society now numbers about 1.7 billion people, "and of these just under half live in developing countries," Flavin adds.

"Sustainable consumption" is now another buzzword. It was much debated at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The world has not begun to consume less since then. Much of the governmental world has interpreted sustainable consumption as meaning cleaner and greener consumption—not less consumption.

That will not be enough for society, says the New Economics Foundation (NEF), a London-based NGO. The idea of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues to "dominate national policy and fashion the minds," the NEF says in a report. Instead it advocates a Measure of Domestic Progress (MDP) that bears a close resemblance to life-satisfaction data.

In the end, there is no getting away from the simple idea of simply consuming less—easier said than done. "The consumption mentality is deeply imprinted in the human psyche and in the commercial psyche," Flavin said. The system of taxation and subsidies also needs to be reviewed, he said. And the industry itself will have to take greater responsibility for what they are doing. That still begs the question, but how?

"The pendulum is going to swing back in a dramatically different direction in the US," he said. Behind the change is a faith that people are beginning to look at the right information and as they look at the right information, they will choose to do the right thing. And beyond that is the question of the larger faith.
A bahun Gurkha

Jivanath Bhattarai lied about his age and caste to get into the British army and spent a decade fighting in Burma. He talks about the rush of battle, the hardships of war and the terrible casualties on both sides. This is the last in the testimonies of Gurkha soldiers translated from Lahurey ka Katha by Dev Bahadur Thapa for Nepali Times.

Official rules prevented bahunis from joining the army, so in 1935, at the age of 13, I lied about my caste and was enlisted in Gorkhpur as Tek Bahadur Chhetri. Luckily, I was tall enough to pass as an 18-year-old. After six months of training, we reached Burma in 1936, after travelling by ship for seven days and nights. We fought in Taopi, Marmyr and Charksoli and finally arrived at Peruma.

Our team of 17 was led by Jamarad Krishna Bahadur Khadka of Baglung, but he hid and evaded his duty, I was a sergeant at the time. We paratrooped at night in complete silence, each holding on to the gun of the soldier in front. We encountered a Japanese patrol once. The commander hid but fought and captured an M1 gun, three rifles one stern gun and five grenades. Later, in our report, we said the two companies went in and defeated the Japanese troops although only 15 of us were there.

A bomb dropped from a plane fell nearby, shrapnel hit me on the chest and blackened my flesh. Another time, a bullet took a chunk of flesh out of my chin, leaving a permanent scar. Surprisingly, during action in Peruma I didn’t even realise when a bullet hit my leg. One of my companions told me I was hit, and only then did I realise that my leg was bleeding badly. I suppose this was because during battle you are very excited and there is a lot of confusion.

The Japanese forces outnumbered us and were driving us back. They entered Manipur through Kalya River, and were aiming for Dimapur. However, in Kohima they were in trouble as the British forces started arriving both by ship and via the Tidim road, squeezing them from both sides and eventually defeating them. At least 150,000 soldiers perished at Kohima alone. Even though they were defeated, the Japanese are a daring people. We could not match them. Once, they dug a tunnel, came up behind us and attacked. Before we even realised what was happening,

There were piles of dead men, sometimes up to 10,000 lying together. They looked like dead fish. No one can say exactly how many died, and even then it was often unclear if the fallen was one of us or a Japanese. Sometimes we saved ourselves by lying under layers of corpses. Even in minor encounters at least 200 people lost their lives. In Burma alone, we lost about 50,000 men, compared to the 60,000 casualties the Japanese suffered. I myself killed between 20-30 Japanese. The khukuri was useless, there was never time to take it out. Even if we drew it, only one or two adversaries could be taken at a time. Bullets and bayonets were better. When the enemy gets close you can strike him down and spear him with the bayonet. I killed about 10 men like this, but in battle, it is hard to say.

You are scared only until the fighting begins. After that, as the bullets start flying around, fear vanishes. The only thing you can think about is killing or being killed. I forgot about everything besides staying alive. At times like that, I was so focused that I never thought about home or my family.

Wart was scarce, and no one was allowed to take water from the supplies without the commander’s permission, even if we were dying of thirst. In Peruma we went without food for 11-12 days. When we found some bananas, I almost choked and died in my haste to eat them. A while later, we came upon a cucumber and gourd plantation where an old woman was cooking rice. All of us rushed to her and I didn’t get even a mouthful.

Sometimes our rations were dropped by plane, but often it fell into enemy territory and we starved. We got lucky with a consignment of meat in TaO. We ate so much that we got severe diarrhoea and nearly died.

We were still fighting in Burma when, at the end of 1945, there was a radio announcement that the war had ended. I returned to our headquarters on 26 October 1946. Then, 12 years after my enlistment, I went home. No one recognised me: my mother had to ask my sister-in-law if I was her older or younger son. My wife, who was still a child when we married, didn’t know who I was. When I paid my respects to my father, tears rolled down his face and fell on my bowed neck.

Army service is not what it is made out to be. You can send a letter home saying you are well, and the next instant a bullet can kill you. This, and the treatment we got from the Indian government later led me to dissociate my son from joining the army.

After the war, the troops were distributed between Britain and India. Following my allotment to India, I took part in quelling the uprisings in Kohima and Manipur and fought in India-Pakistan border skirmishes and in Tripura. After that, I was assigned as a trainer to the Assam Rifles and held that position till my retirement.

We offered our lives for India, yet India has not done us justice. They denigrated and ridiculed us.

The Nepali government never did much about the promises the British made to us. Now, even though our pensions are inadequate, it is all we have to sustain us and prove that we didn’t fight for nothing.
How your head should move during your swing

“Scintillating seven
These are the players to watch during EURO 2004

Francesco Totti (ITALY)
A maker as well as a scorer of goals, not least from free-kicks, Francesco Totti can operate from a variety of attacking positions but is in the free role behind the strikers that his magnificient skill and technique are best showcased. Knee and thigh injuries meant that he missed the first three qualifiers for EURO 2004, but Totti started both Finland games, scoring in the 2-0 away success. Italy’s Player of the Year in 2000, he helped AS Roma secure their first league title since 1983, scoring 13 Serie A goals.

Anderson Luis de Souza-Deco (PORTUGAL)
When you are described as a ‘naive didly’ and nicknamed SuperDeco, you must be doing something right. That is the status Brazilian-born playmaker Anderson Luis de Souza-Deco enjoys at FC Porto. After being granted Portuguese citizenship in March 2003, Deco crowned a spectacular debut for the EURO 2004 hosts Portugal with the winning goal in a 2-1 victory over his native Brazil, their first visit to the South Americans since the FIFA World Cup of 1990.

Jérôme Rothen (FRANCE)
A small, speedy left-winger, Jérôme Rothen has started to fulfill his immense promise. His direct running and accurate crossing is one of AS Monaco FC’s most potent attacking threats. He made his debut for France in March 2003, coming on as a substitute in the 6-0 qualifying victory against Malta and was part of the France squad that lifted the 2003 FIFA Confederations Cup. The Paris-born player was whisked off to first division side ES Troyes Auberge Champagne in the summer of 2000 where he made a resounding success. He was hauled to Monaco in a Euro 4.5m move in January 2002.

Fernando Torres (SPAIN)
A technically-gifted attacking player with a surging turn of pace, Fernando Torres possesses self-confidence and ability in equal abundance. Torres enjoyed a magnificent career with Spain’s representatives sides, earning a place in the youth football pantheon by scoring the only goal of the 2001 UEFA European Under-16 Championship final against France and repeating the feat against Germany at Under-19 level the following summer. Torres has been a key component in Club Atlético de Madrid’s attack since scoring on his debut against Albacete Balompié in June 2001 aged 17.

Tomáš Rosický (CZECH REPUBLIC)
A playmaker combining speed, creativity and technical ability, Tomáš Rosický has shown remarkable maturity and composure since burstiing on to the European scene. Having started for the Czech Republic’s youth teams, Rosický made his international debut against the Republic of Ireland in February 2001. He registered in the opening 2-0 victory against Moldova at the EURO 2004 qualifier, surprisingly his only goal. After just 14 appearances with AC Sparta Praha, Rosický elected to join BV Borussia Dortmund for Euro 15.3m in January 2001.

Rafael van der Vaart (NETHERLANDS)
AFC Ajax supporters caught their first glimpse of a superstar-in-the-making when the left-sided footballer Rafael van der Vaart took his first team bow in the 1-1 draw at FC Den Bosch in April 2001. And nothing has happened since to persuade them otherwise. Having appeared for the Netherlands at the FIFA World Youth Cup in Argentina in the summer of 2000, he stepped up a level to make his full international debut against Andorra in October 2001 and is now a regular in the national set-up. As for comparisons with legendary Johan Cruyff, he dismisses them: “It’s nice but Cruyff was really fantastic and I am still young.”

Steven Gerrard (ENGLAND)
A powerhouse of a midfield player with remarkable mental strength and confidence for one so young, Steven Gerrard can play in a variety of positions but it is his devastating beat in the centre of the park. It was hugely disappointing for both Gerrard and England that injury ruled him out of the 2002 FIFA World Cup finals, especially as the scored one of England’s goals in the famous 5-1 defeat of Germany in a Munich qualifying game. One of four England players to feature in seven qualifiers for EURO 2004, Gerrard scored in the home draw against FYR Macedonia but missed the corresponding future, a victory in Slovakia.

Be there with Hyundai

Andersson Luis de Souza-Deco (PORTUGAL)

Scintillating seven
These are the players to watch during EURO 2004

Francesco Totti (ITALY)

Surya

Statutory Directive: Smoking is injurious to health

Tee Break

Deepak Acharya

While keeping your head down and as still as possible throughout most of the golf swing, you end up using smaller muscles like the arms to swing back and through, which causes a lot of stress on other parts of your body. You may risk straining your neck muscles, creating unnecessary tension in your neck, back and arms. You also restrict upper body rotation in the whole swing. Preventing your head from swiveling has the effect of limiting your upper body rotation, both on the back and down swing. When this happens, the natural centrifugal force created in the swing weakens and prevents your arms from extending to their widest position, making it more difficult for you to hit the ball. By trying to keep your head down and completely still, you end up very rigid, impeding the correct transfer of weight. Proper weight transfer and a correctly executed turn is the source of power in the golf swing.

How to do it right
For a successful backswing, it is likely that your head will swivel slightly to the right, depending on the flexibility of your neck muscles. By doing this, your swing arc becomes wider, making it easier for proper shoulder and hip rotation. Having hit the ball and between half and three quarters of the way into the follow-through, your head will naturally turn left and your eyes will catch sight of the ball on its way to the target. This motion encourages you to extend your arms right from the time of impact. (Don’t forget, your hip and upper body needs to keep rotating at this position as well.) In any kind of ball sport, it is the eyes and not the head that coordinates the body’s movement. What is vital to understand is that while there is some slight head movement in the backswing and the downswing, the eyes remain focused on the ball until impact. Try this, feel more flexible and enjoy hitting the ball better every time you swing your club.

Deepak Acharya is a Golf Instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kalmunadi.
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Climbing down completely seems to be the only way to keep pollution down in the Valley, as the abnormally fresh air we had during the banda days in mid-May was replaced last week by usual PM10 particles small enough to enter the human body concentrations with pollution in Patala Sadak increasing by 44 percent. The only relatively good day last week was Wednesday (26 May), when pollution levels dropped by 32 percent. However, with meteorologists predicting an early monsoon next week or not. Our bet is that it will. Either determine whether the real monsoon will start.

Good < 60

Ok 61 to 120

Unhealthy 121 to 350

Harmful 351 to 425

Hazardous >425

The pre-monsoon this year exceeded the normal by 40 percent. After this wet and early pre-monsoon, Kalo Holi June will be just a wet. This sighting picture taken on Thursday 11th shows the Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon moving up in southern India and the Bay of Bengal branch entering eastern India. This cloudburst is now going to play a major role with the long waving waves. Another front of this pattern will determine whether the real monsoon will start next week or not. Outlook is cloudy. Either way, Kathmandu can look forward to overcast, humid days relieved somewhat by night and evening rain.

Hum Tum is old wine in a new bottle. The up-to-the-minute attitude has a very traditional Bollywood heart. India's packaging may be contemporary, but the content is quintessentially Indian emotions. Kunal Kohli's movie is a romantic comedy starring Saif Ali Khan (Karan Kapoor) and Rani Mukerji (Rhea). Essentially, Girl meets boy, girl hates boy, boy meets girl again, they fall in love. Hum Tum is fun in a man are from Mars and women are from Venus kind of way. Luckily opposites attract and despite the foibles, we get a happy ending.

Hum Tum

From 22 May

Bookings open 21 May.

Call 4442220 for show timings.

www.japi.com

Dosa Festival with Master Chef V Karupswamy till 5 June at the Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti.

Unlimited dosa for Rs 500 plus tax.

Dosa Festival with Master Chef V Karupswamy till 5 June at the Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak & Yeti.

Unlimited dosa for Rs 500 plus tax.

Dig into dosa

The old saw of variety being the spice of life tends itself extraordinarily well to the dosa. Even here in the Himalayas we are familiar with the standard plain and masala versions of south India. And the first two weeks of June peppered with bandas, we can expect clean air in the days ahead.

Visit Femelines, the exclusive lingerie store for ladies' undergarments, nightwear, bathrobes, and more. Ladies staff. Opposite Sajha Yatayat, Hanhar Bhawan, Pulchowk. Tel: 547428

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As a child, Sangina Vaidya spent hours watching Bruce Lee movies. Like most Nepali children at that time, she was impressed by his kung-fu skills and wanted to follow in his footsteps. Unlike them, she was made of sterner stuff.

Sangina started with Wu-Su in her teens but a month into her training and after a few demonstration games, she turned to taekwondo. For the next 12 years she dedicated herself to the discipline and now it is paying off for the 29-year-old.

Sangina won gold medals for Nepal in the last two South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. Now she is getting ready for the ultimate challenge of her career as the first Nepali to formally qualify for this year’s Olympics in Athens. Yes, we’ve competed before, but only in events such as swimming, shooting and athletics that allow ‘wildcard’ participants. Sangina is the only taekwondo participant from South Asia. Other Asians participating are from China and Malaysia.

Sangina gives her family full credit. “They were very supportive from the beginning and let me go when and wherever I needed,” she says. Sangina wonders if restrictions put on young Nepali women by their families and society isn’t partly why more girls don’t compete.

Recently, six top Nepali business houses—Vaidya’s Organisation of Industries and Trading House (VOITH), ICTC, Nepal Lever, Jyoti Group, Nabil Bank and Dabar Nepal decided to pitch in with financial aid for Sangina. This will help the Sports Council with expenses like visa fees, airfares, medical treatments, sports gear and a daily allowance. The corporate sponsorship will cover 85 percent of Sangina’s costs, including an endowment fund and promotional expenses. “Sangina is our representative and we want her to feel Nepal is doing something for her. Maybe she’ll bring home the gold,” says Sabina Shakya of VOITH.

This week, Sangina is off to Korea to train in the lead up to the Olympics. The pressure is immense and every moment she can get away, Sangina is on her Yamaha heading for the hills to unwind. “My dream is to win a medal for Nepal,” she says. Sangina wonders if restrictions put on young Nepali women by their families and society isn’t partly why more girls don’t compete.

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A long, long time ago, when the world was still young, our forefathers had just shed their tails and learnt to walk erect when they discovered that one needn’t actually get up and physically transport oneself to the television set in order to change channels. One could do it from the comfort of one’s prehistoric sofa while balancing a large helping of donuts on one’s belly. What exact sequence of events led to the invention of the remote control we will never know for sure, but it probably had something to do with necessity being the mother of invention. This dramatic discovery of the wireless wand was to have a profound impact on human beings and determine their current shape and size.

The possession of a remote control was a symbol of where executive authority actually resided among our cave-dwelling forebears. Whoever controlled the remote control was in control. And, usually, it would be the patriarch. It was unthinkable for him to pause on one channel for more than a split second, so he would surf ad infinitum and the entire clan was forced to watch what he watched. They got a tour de horizon of the programs on offer, but he never stayed on MTV long enough. His grandchildren had been taught to respect elders so they tolerated this for a while, but they soon realised that the only way to change such a hereditary feudal system was to rise up and physically wrest the remote control away from grandad’s hands. Which is what they did.

Thanks to parliamentary democracy and advances in modern science, it is hard for us to imagine that in those primitive times a remote only controlled the television set. Today, there are remotes for the DVD, cable decoder, air-conditioner, radio, laundry machine, garage door, dishwasher, vacuum cleaner and even the remote controlled toilet seat so that one needn’t physically be present in the bathroom while attending to calls of nature anymore. Come to think of it, there was really no need for homo erectus to learn to walk upright at all, we can progress to all fours and grow back our tails.

I don’t know about you, but the real challenge these days is to manage all the remotes around the house. There are so many of them that finding the right one for the right gadget itself eats up a large chunk of time. Some ideas:

Master Remote: This is essential piece of household equipment allows you to locate lost remotes using an in-built GPS and also be programmed to simultaneously control your remote toothbrush while having a remote shave.

Husband Remote: Modern housewives can use this like a cattle prod to zap their husbands with laser beams in their vitals when they fail to get up in the morning or vegetate for a whole month in front of the telly watching Euro 2004.

Super Remote: Can be incorporated into your mobile turning your cell phone into an omnibus remote that can do everything from changing channels at home while you are at work, thawing the lasagna in the microwave from five km away and adjusting the volume control on your live-in mother-in-law.

Royal Remote: This is the remote that controls all other remotes remotely.