Two years ago, Surya Lama decided to send his daughter Nisha away to a circus in India. The middleman promised she would earn Rs 100 a day and go to school. Today, Nisha is among 30 Nepali girls who disappeared from The Great Roman Circus at Kamelgari near Lucknow, and Surya is in custody with three other parents at the Gonda police station. One of the circus girls who managed to escape, 14-year-old Nita Lama, is also in police detention.

Inside the police station in Gonda on Thursday, Nita caught me by the hand and wouldn’t let me go. “Take me home with you, take me back to Nepal,” she wept. Nita’s mother, Thulimaya, is in shock and can’t speak.

While the Nepalese parents are in custody, the circus owner, Fateh Khan and his son Reza Khan drive around Lucknow openly carrying firearms and have threatened Nisha and the Nepalis inside the station. The parents of the girls approached the Nepal Child Welfare Society (NCWS) in Butwal, which had rescued 29 Nepali boys and girls from a circus in Kenya in April. The society asked Indian child rights activist Kailash Satyarthi of the Bachpan Bachao Andolan for help.

When police raided the circus to rescue the girls on 15 June, it was clear the owner had been tipped off. Goons with iron rods started beating up the activists and parents. Reza Khan brandished a pistol in full view of the cameras. The police just stood by while the girls were bundled away. Except Nisha, none have been seen since.

Two other parents, Bishnukumari and Janak Lama are on hunger strike at the state assembly in Lucknow, demanding to be reunited with their daughters. Satyarthi, who got a knife wound in his head, has abandoned his hunger strike because of threats.

The District Court in Gonda has ruled that Nisha’s parents can take her away only after paying a Rs 50,000 bond. Says Kheem Thapa of the NCWS: “Parents are being forced to buy back their own daughters.”

On Sunday, Uttar Pradesh Labour Minister Kaushal Kishore told us: “I’m on the case. I’ll allow the girls to go back with their guardians and I’ll get the circus licences revoked.” It doesn’t look like these instructions have been passed down to the police in Gonda.

In the few minutes some of the parents got to see their daughters during the raid last week, the girls related horrifying tales of sexual exploitation, rape and beatings. Testimonies reveal the circus also operated a paedophile ring. The girls were forced to service policemen and state officials.

“The circus has full protection of the police and the state machinery,” Bishnukumari Lama looks for her daughter among Nepali girls at the circus (tag picture).

Top to bottom: Kailash Satyarthi escorts the girls, Reza Khan unleashes his goons on the activists and parents, Bishnukumari being beaten and led away, Bishnukumari cries for help. Surya Lama suffered a head wound during the raid.

Kailash Satyarthi told us. He estimates there are 1,500 Nepali minors and teenagers working in circuses in India, where many are virtual sex slaves.

At the police station, Surya Lama is full of remorse for what he made his daughter go through. “It is all my fault, I am a sinner,” he says breaking down. “I’m never going to let anyone else in my village make the same mistake I did.”

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The Working Procedure Regulation was never a hindrance to doing good work

commending on the Hindu society’s condition of chronic anarchy, historian Arnold Toynbee described it as a disintegrating civilisation compelled to admit alien architects (Turks, Brits) to furnish it with functioning order. The political dominant minority’s sterility is the current deliverer of that governments can or should do. Obsessed with procedures rather than substance, and personalities over vision, the discussion remains at the level of chatter.

A recent storm in a teacup has been over the Working Procedure Regulation under the Lokendra Bahadur Chand cabinet. Branded as ‘regression’, Brahminical puritans of Maoist and other hues saw it as a major hurdle to join the Deuba cabinet. The excuse was exposed this work as it became clear that an interim prime minister informing the head of state of important measures, and if rescue, even seeking royal advice, is simply good statecraft. What needs doing in Nepal today is restoring peace, initiating good governance and holding elections so that voters can choose a chief political executive. That task cannot, and should not, be done by the king, the parties or those who believe in getting it from the barrel of a gun. The Chand cabinet’s working procedure did not stop it from bringing about a wholly indigenous casuistry, or the Thapa cabinet from resuming fire when the Maoists failed to negotiate in good faith. Nor did it stop many cabinet ministers from initiating much needed reforms from within the existing framework of laws and regulations.

The apathy parties, whose last electoral mandates have expired, have no control over what the country is what exactly they hope to do that the Chand and Thapa cabinets could not. Play favouritism with civil transfers and politicise the bureaucracy as happened under old procedures? Sell old scores? Harvest resources for coming elections?

In a democracy, parties do not represent the people, voting does. That too for a fixed time with a periodically renewed mandate under campaign values. With change in trust and behaviour, the legitimacy of an old vote evaporates and a fresh mandate must be sought. With the last parliament, it happened right at the start with a two-month house deadlock over wreting. An all-powerful, all-party committee headed by the prime minister, the speaker as well as the leader of the opposition and chiefs of smaller parties decided to put off the debate. The seeds of illegitimacy were sown then. “We

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Lesser powers that be must read your last sentence. What use is power if there is no country left to exercise it?

Gautam K Maskey, Chapathali

Your editorial, ‘Nepali dystopia’ laments the conditions of a failed state in Nepal. Our neighbour, India has fully awakened from a deep Kumbakarna-like slumber to notice the Maoist support network in the Indo-Garassic plans. The Maoists have now become a security threat to the Indians because the Naxalite and tribal belts have even greater. If not the same, inequality, exploitation, poverty and entrenched caste discrimination as Nepal. Ironically, the Nepali Maoists have become a shining path for disenfranchised Indians in Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand to Andhra Pradesh.

India already deals with Islamic militant infiltration from Kashmir. It does not need a peasant-proletarian revolution sprouting at its doorstep.

Nepal is much more porous than Kashmir. It is quite mysterious why the Indian authorities did not nip the Maoist supply and activities in their area in the bud. India probably wanted to extract some favours from Nepal in a quid pro quo manner. Little did Big Brother notice that the fire had already spread to its own house. Now it may be too late. There is a lesson here for babus and all party committees headed by the prime minister, the speaker as well as the leader of the opposition and chiefs of smaller parties decided to put off the debate. The seeds of illegitimacy were sown then. "We

Here’s how: Let your milk go sour, empty the wye (feed your pigs), mix the curd with lots of salt, cut garlic, add herbs to taste. Pour in clean cardboard box, hang out to drip in any room. The cheese will be ready for consumption next morning. This is the recipe for the famous Bourin cheese, which comes in small round cardboard boxes, wrapped in foil, flavoured with garlic, pepper or herbs. It can be sold at attractive prices to trekkers and other tourists. Alternatively you can let it dry, spread out in the sun under a net. This will keep even longer. You can also keep in glass jars filed with brine (salted water) or veg oil with chillies for conservation, this will give you excellent tata to eat with your salads. Feta’s sharp, salty flavor—often referred to as tangy—and crumbly texture make it a popular addition to mixed salads. It is often cut into cubes and served with bread and
Deepak Bajracharya had his first public performance at 14, and recalls stepping on stage feeling calm and collected. Sixteen years later, he is still cool and confident as he emerges as one of the freshest and most creative young voices in the Nepali music scene.

Deepak didn’t get there by fluke. He worked hard, learning classical vocals and taking lessons in western classical guitar. But when Deepak finished college, his parents thought it would be better for him to take up the family business. So he dabbled in handicraft, tried his hand at wood carving and even opened a shop in Thamel. But somewhere in the back of his head the sound of music was always calling him.

On a visit to Japan, it suddenly dawned on Deepak why Nepalis were not making progress in modern music. “It wasn’t enough to be able to sing, you had to understand music,” he says. He returned to Nepal determined to set up a facility for aspiring musicians to have a proper academic approach.

Deepak’s Royal Tone Academy is a non-profit institution that ploughs fees back to students for materials. It has become a gathering place for young Nepali musicians, where they learn notes, rhythm and timing. It is a holistic approach to music, including everything from skill development and recording to stage presence and presentation.

His own music has evolved. Today, fans swing their hips to Deepak’s unique fusion of Latin rhythms and Nepali beats. “Music is about waves, not bound to any language. The trick is to find the right wave that’s appealing to the human ear,” he explains. Deepak is working on his seventh album, an exclusive compilation of Anita Khadka’s lyrics.

As Kodak brand ambassador he will donate Rs 1 from each of his new album sold to the Nepal Cancer Relief Society. Kodak donates an additional Rs 2 from each film roll developed to cancer patients. Why cancer? “Nepal has treatment, but it is too expensive for most people. The money we raise goes to who needs it most,” he says.

When he is not in the studio, Deepak and his 4-year-old daughter Cherisa are likely to be found splashing about in a swimming pool. Other things may come up, but he says one fact will always stay the same: “Music is everything to me and I want to encourage future musicians.”

(Sraddha Basynat)
The very bricks that give Kathmandu Valley its unique urban identity are now destroying it

Though the bricks that make up the capital’s temples, bahals and houses are a part of Kathmandu Valley’s architectural heritage, they are also turning out to be an environmental curse. As Kathmandu’s current population of 1.3 million grows at a breakneck eight percent per year, the furnaces of the brick kilns in the city outskirts can’t bake clay fast enough to meet demand. The effect can be seen everywhere: the malignant eyesores of smokestacks where green paddy fields used to be, the increased pollution and the destruction of the Valley’s fertile topsoil (see box, p5). Brick stack emissions make up more than one-third of the air pollution in the Valley, and since most of the kilns are located near the airport, poor visibility on approach forces many planes to divert. “Our main worry are particles below 10 microns because they lodge deep inside the lungs,” says Bhhusan Tuladhar of Clean Energy Nepal.

Jhaukhel, near Bhaktapur, used to be a bucolic town with terrace paddy fields and clumps of bamboo groves. Today, it looks like an open pit mine. The people of Jhaukhel approached the Department of Cottage and Small Scale Industries (DoCSt), which licenses the kilns, the Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE) and even the prime minister’s office demanding action. No one listened. So the Bhaktapur Environment Conservation Forum decided to organise a rally against the kilns in November 2003. Things turned ugly at one of the factories, as kiln owner and former ward chairman Tek Bahadur Lakhaniya got into a fight with several of the protesters. Maheswor Neupane, who led the rally regrets the violence, but is determined to continue the campaign. “We want to throw the illegal kilns out, and bring the registered ones under government guidelines,” he says.

This spring, the Bhaktapur District Office, with DoCSt and the CDO, used police to dismantle more than 35 illegal kilns.

HERO AND THERE Daniel Lak

McNamara has many regrets about his days of war mongering. He speaks frankly about them in the film, but says in the end, war has its own dynamic. He explains the title of the film as a reference to the way that truth is obscured and twisted when a nation is at war. The secretary of defense admin to a fair amount of twisting in his time.

Coming back from one of his many trips to South East Asia, a younger McNamara tells the media that the war is going in America’s favor and the communists are on the run. We know now that he was lying and time hasn’t diminished the falsehood. The chemical de facto, Agent Orange, came into wide use during McNamara’s time as secretary of defence. Chilling footage of soldiers rolling drums of the stuff onto aircraft illustrate his mea culpous, his insistence that had he known more about the effects of the poison on people, he might not have approved its use. In 1967, McNamara was fired by his boss, President Lyndon B Johnson. The war wasn’t going well. Young Americans were protesting in the streets, sometimes violently. The media was showing people across the US portraits from the theatre of war that chilled and shocked many. McNamara was eased out of high office but nothing changed.

In the end, nearly four million Vietnamese died in the ‘American War’, as it’s known in Vietnam. Tens of thousands of homes and villages were destroyed, vast swathes of countryside laid waste. Countless billions of dollars were spent in what was — ultimately — a failed attempt to stop communists. Because The Fog of War is an American film, McNamara is not asked whether he considers himself a war criminal. The tone of the documentary is judiciously neutral, and perhaps this is best.

But war, all war, is evil. That’s the message I take from this film. War happens because politics fail, or is made to fail by evil people. There is always an alternative to war. 
kils. “We have tried many times to dismantle the illegal kilns, but the politicians are on the take and always interfere,” says Bhaktapur CDO Gyth Nath Bhandari. The DoCSI banned further registration of the primitive and polluting bell trench kilns in December 2002, and plans to enforce a total ban by June 2004. According to the department’s guidelines, all bell trenches are supposed to be converted to less polluting fixed chimney technology or vertical shaft brick kilns by the end of this month. There are other provisions: all kilns should own property in a 60m radius around the stacks and have a lease for at least five years. The kilns should be at least five km from a forest area and one km from a residential area. It is hard to find a kiln that follows any of these rules.

The old bell trench stacks spew out seven times more soot into the atmosphere than the improved fixed chimney technology. Vertical shaft furnaces are even less polluting. But low grade fuel means that sometimes the supposedly ‘improved’ kilns are just as bad.

Mahendra Chitrakar, president of the Central Brick Association denies that his kilns pollute. “Matyasagai has seven kilns and yet it is the least polluted part of the Valley,” he fumes.

The Danish Supported Institute of Environment Management (IEM) is helping with the new technology, but at the present pace it will take at least until spring next year to replace all running bell trench kilns with fixed chimneys. “But new technologies need to be used properly, with the right fuel and right procedures,” explains IEM’s Sanjay Shab. Research in India has shown that a fixed chimney kiln can bring down pollution by 20 percent.

Meanwhile, the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) is supporting the vertical shaft technology and is carrying out field trials in Lalitpur. Although they are energy efficient and less polluting, owners are reluctant to use them because of the high investment and low productivity. But if run properly, Martin Karcher of SDC says the vertical shaft technology could transform an informal, seasonal and wanting activity into a formal manufacturing industry.

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**Land, but no soil**

**MINIMONY MAJUMDER**

The changing land-use pattern in the Valley is evident on the outskirts of Kathmandu and Lalitpur as more and more land is devoted by urban sprawl.

The remaining arable land is increasingly turned into clay mines to supply brick kilns. Farmers are leasing their land to these kilns, and in the process are losing the fertility of their topsoil. Degradation of land quality is a virtually irreversible process and the soil never gets back its fertility.

The 120 brick kilns in the Valley erode the topsoil completely, and what the farmer gets back at the end of the lease is a large pile devoid of any agricultural value. Brick kilns run mostly from December to June, and the farmer is paid the equivalent of a wheat harvest in the area being leased. Most brick kilns close down during the monsoon when the land reverts back to paddy cultivation.

At the Chum Devi Ita Bhatta in Bhaktapur, supervisor Shishcharak Yadav boasts that his kiln occupies 90 ropani of land and bakes five million bricks every season.

The farmer is compensated 160kg of wheat priced at Rs 11 per kg for every season his land is leased. What is not factored into the calculation is that in one year, the farmer will lose 220cm of his priceless and irreplaceable topsoil.

Mr Kumar Shrestha, a farmer in Bhaisepai reckons he has lost nearly two metres of his topsoil in the past four years after he leased his field to the SK Chimney Bhatta. “My land had become useless for wheat, but after hauling loads of compost and manure, I manage to salvage the paddy,” Mr Kumar says.

The farmer’s traditional risk-averse nature is overruled by the promise of windfall gains, opening them and their soil to exploitation by the brick kiln owners. The cash in hand is too tempting, and many can’t afford to think of the long-term consequences.

At Jhaukhel in Bhaktapur, 78-year-old Gyan Bahadur Swaul is ploughing his 5.5 ropani of land all by himself. For the past 12 years, he has been renting out his land to various brick kiln owners. Almost everyone in Jhaukhel these days sells off their top soil to the brick business, and those who don’t find their property sitting high and dry above the surrounding fields.

The relationship between environment and development in Kathmandu Valley is inverted and the environmental stresses are contributing to underdevelopment and poverty. One of the basic causes of poor land management is poverty, but its consequence is ever-deepening poverty. To get out of this vicious cycle, land use alternatives must be considered with demographic pressure. And this can only happen if the farmers have insurance against crop failure and other sustainable alternatives.

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Gyan Bahadur Swaul in Jhaukhel ploughing his field to plant paddy this week (top), a part of his fields is now four metres below the surrounding land because of topsoil extraction by a brick kiln.
Raghuram Lohi from Pipara in Kapilbastu had gone to Mumbai to work so he could support his wife, Inammat, and three children. The 25-year-old returned home two weeks ago on leave. At 10PM on 17 June, a group of Maoists came into his house and shot him dead. Hundreds of armed Maoists surrounded the village and then went from house to house.

They burst into the home of former chairman of Pipara VDC, Mohammad Musulman, and shot Musulman’s son, Mustafa, twice in the head. “We were on the roof with the whole family, and came down when it started to rain,” Musulman recalls. “Suddenly we heard gunfire nearby, then some Maoists came in and dragged my son away and we heard two shots.”

The same group went to the house of Mohammad Wakil, father of eight, lead him out to the front lawn and shot him dead. They also killed Gobadhan Lohi and Pradip Chaudhary.

In a statement the next day, the local Maoist command said the five killed in Pipara were members of a resistance committee and among the dead was the group’s leader, Pritam Pandey. However, Pandey is alive and told us in a telephone interview this week that only Pradip Chaudhary was a member of his anti-Maoist committee.

Pritam Pandey set up the 75-member resistance committee after villagers here got “fed up” with the Maoist actions and threats. In an interview before this week’s attack he boasted that he would shoot any Maoist “on the spot”. Pandey is regarded by some as a gangster, which he vehemently denies (see box). But it is clear that his armed anti-Maoist resistance group is similar to the Ranvir Songhat set up by landowners and high caste villagers to fight Indian Maoists in Bihar.

Pandey claims he is training and arming 500 young supporters and says he has help from Indian politicians. “We have received help from Kamaruddin Khan and Uttar Pradesh Labour Min- ister Mata Prasad Pandey,” he told us. “We are even holding talks with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav.”

The Indian police dismissed these claims: “Pandey has 22 criminal cases registered in our country, how can we help such a criminal?”

Pritam Pandey used to be known as a notorious don who called himself Sukhi Nath Pandey during the Panchayat era. After 1990, he joined the Nepali Congress and used his political connections in Kathmandu to widen his influence. Pandey does not hide his past. “Temples priests can’t deny the Maoists. It takes people like us to do that,” he says.

Pandey says the villagers killed in Pipara last week were murdered in cold blood. Superintendent of police at Taulihawa, Lok Bahadur Karki, says the wounds on all five look like they were from guns fired at close range. Says Pandey: “The Maoist have shown their cowardice by killing innocent villagers, they will pay for this.”

Pandey survived a Maoist assassination attempt six months ago and in the last month the group has already killed three rebels in retaliation. The father of Chetan Kami, one of the Maoists killed said a large sum of money was stolen from his son. “I asked them to kill me instead, but they shot him,” the bereaved father said. The Maoist Resistance Group tried to kill Rijendra Tiwari, chief of Madhesh Liberation Front in Kapilbastu last month. The rebels responded by bombing six places in and around Laben village two weeks ago, Musar Saroj Sharma said he would not spare anyone who defied the rebels.

Kapilbastu villagers fear the violence will escalate. A local school headmaster told us, “No dates leave their houses anymore.”

Not seeing the forest for the trees

UML BAGCHANDI in KAILALI

Unlike the east, the Swali foothills in western Nepal are over the tarai plains to nearly 3,000m. This altitude makes these slopes ideal for pines, and the mountains of northern Kailali are famous for their coniferous forests.

Unchecked felling and timber poaching is now endangering the forests. And with the forest cover gone, the Swalis, which are made of gravel, sand and soft conglomerate, are much more vulnerable to soil erosion during the monsoon.

Saw mills in the tarai are now running day and night up to 50 fathoms daily filled with pine logs from the stretch of mountains from Khanidanda in Kailali to Budar in Doti. Additionally, in the past month, local storms have felled 500 pine trees along the Dhangadi-Dadeldhura highway. Environmentalists are worried that at this rate of destruction, the famous pine forests of western Nepal may soon become extinct.

There are thousands of cubic metres of pine trunks piled up along the highway, ready to be loaded on to trucks. In the absence of security, there appears to be a free-for-all among timber contractors. Even if they have permits to fell trees, locals say, they often poach trees from neighbouring districts and protected community forests.

“The best thing that happened to these forests was the Nepali bands and the blockades,” said one Kailali villager, “at least the Shakhtiman trucks couldn’t ply for some weeks.” But now, it looks like the timber contractors are making up for lost time, and the trucks are roaring up and down the highway to Kailali and Kanchanpur fully loaded with timber again.

“There is no police or army here, so they are quite free to do what they want,” says another villager in Phulnande village. “No one is stopping them.” The Maoists aren’t concerned about the devastation either, as they are happy enough collecting their 15 percent cut from the timber merchants for their revolutionary coffers.

Villagers in upper Kailali despair for their forests, saying that at the rate the trees are being cut, their VDCs will soon have no forests left. In Doti, the District Forest Officer, Biswanath Mishra, says the felling of these trees is being carried out with all the legal provisions: a tender notice in Gothapara and strict limits on forests to be cleared for highway construction.

Mahato says permission has been granted this year to cut 8,000 cubic ft along the highway alignments, 70,000 cubic ft from community forests and 24,000 cubic ft of pine from other areas. The regional forestry director, Dwarka Pandey says the money “admired the driver of a Shakhtiman truck during a tea stop along the highway. On condition that we not use his name, he continued: “If they are paying us so much, our bosses must be taking it. They must be building houses in Kathmandu.”

Another truck driver confided: “I am only doing this to support my family, but when I see our forests being destroyed, I feel really sad.”
Hari Prasad comes home

This week, Hari Prasad Farhangi returned home after serving a six year sentence in Thailand for drug smuggling. He says he was framed. Hari Prasad spoke to Nepali Times about the terrible condition of Nepali inmates there who are hoping against hope for a royal pardon.

NARESH NEWAR

I

n 1997, Hari Prasad Farhangi met two men named Taranath and Resam in Kathmandu who offered to find him a job in Bangkok. He applied for a Thai visa and agreed to travel with them. While waiting for a taxi at Bangkok airport after arrival, police swooped on the three of them. Resam was caught with 13 kg of hashish, but managed to escape. Taranath and Hari Prasad were caught.

“Terrorist, I had no idea why they were arresting us,” Hari Prasad recalls. He could have escaped, but didn’t because he had done anything wrong. Later, the Thai customs officer demanded a 20,000 baht bribe but he didn’t have that kind of money. Officials seized his passport and possessions and packed him off to Kong Prem-Lard Yai Prison in Bangkok.

Ignoring advice from other Nepali inmates, Hari Prasad hired a lawyer to fight back. His family in Nepal sent all their savings, Rs 600,000, to pay a private lawyer who advised him to plead guilty for a reduced sentence. Hari Prasad refused and got a six year sentence. Later, Taranath told the court Hari Prasad had nothing to do with the drugs, but the judge refused to commute the sentence.

During his jail term, Hari Prasad came across many Nepalis who were in much more serious trouble. There are 12 Nepali inmates at Lard Yao, some of them women. At Banglung Prison outside Bangkok, there are 50 Nepali prisoners, many of them serving life or 50-year terms for drug offences. Nearly all claim innocence and say they were framed by traffickers.

“There are many innocent Nepalis like me jealously without proof”, says Hari Prasad, citing the example of a fellow inmate, 54-year-old Wangyal Chau who is in for life. “Wangyal is in the worst condition and will not survive for very long. Hari Prasad says, “his state of mind has deteriorated, he forgets to eat and hardly sleeps.” Wangyal has already spent 20 years in prison, and since inmates have to buy their own medicines, gets no medical support from the prison authorities.

Nur Sherpa, another 50-year-old at Lard Yao, suffers from chronic ulcer, hypertension and other ailments. Other prisoners have asthma, heart disease, insomnia, kidney and advanced glaucoma. In November 2003, inmate Harika Babadur Pun died of tuberculosis. At Boram Prison, prisoner rights activist say, Nepali prisoners face abuse, including being constantly cramped in leg irons.

Nepali prisoners often fare worse than others in Thailand because they don’t get money from family to bribe guards, the Nepali embassy in Bangkok takes no interest in them and they are bullied by other inmates. European, Japanese or American prisoners get regular visits from their embassies who help with pocket money as well as extradition procedures.

Luckily for the Nepali prisoners, there are international and Thai activists who have come to the rescue. “If it wasn’t for Peter Foster and his wife in England, for instance, Hari Prasad would have no money to pay his fines. He was released after release.

Another activist is American computer expert, Ben Parks, who has taken the welfare of Nepali prisoners as a personal crusade. Then there are Christian groups in Thailand who visit the inmates regularly bringing food, medicine and other essentials. As a result, many of the Nepali prisoners have converted to Christianity. The Nepali prisoners now have their own website so that relatives and friends can get updates on their health, release, extradition, or the possibility of a royal pardon.

Manakamana cablecar to resume

Manakamana cable car will resume its operation by the weekend after Maoists damaged one of the towers, sources within the company told us. The service to the popular pilgrimage destination near Gorakha stopped after the security forces said they wanted to investigate the explosion. The company denies that it is temporarily halted due to the Maoist attack. “We freeze our service for three months for three days and this was our opportunity to do that in order to elevate the poles,” was the official reason from Manakamana. He added that the pole near Keyapani village did not cause any major damage to the cable car. But the Maoists confirmed they had targeted the cable car service because it regularly transported security officials to Manakamana. The company line was adamant: “This is a public transportation business. We cannot deny services to anyone—be it Maoist or security personnel. King or beggar.”

Solar purified water

A solar-powered water purification system has been chosen by the EU’s Commissioner of the Environment for an International Cooperation Award, saying it has ‘massive potential’ to battle water borne diseases, particularly in remote areas in the developing world.

Called Naide, the units are manufactured by the Dutch firm Nerdag and was developed by a 63-year-old specialist in ultraviolet technology, Dick van Dijk. Prototypes are being used and tested in Ghana, Brazil, Turkey and India. An Indian company is presently identifying suitable sites for setting up the Naide system.

Contaminated water from a river or pond is poured into the Naide. After passing through two filters, the water is run through the UV unit powered by the solar panel that can produce enough pure water per day to satisfy the average drinking-water needs of a community of 250-300 with 2.5kilo litres a day. The unit costs just under $4,000 and if 80 percent of the price is borne by NGOs, the local community can pay for the rest with a soft credit program. “The locals must have a stake in the system, that is better for everyone,” says Van Dijk, www.rednapaide.com

Building friendship

Work on a new building for Dhawan’s Mahendradra Maitri Campus started with outgoing Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shyam Saran, laying the foundation stone on 22 June. The Indian government has sanctioned Rs 25.91 million for the classroom block, teachers’ rooms, library hall and furniture. The campus student roll of over 4,000 students from Sunsari, Morang, Saptari, Dhankuta and the Purbanahal hills will benefit from the building, which it is to be called Nepal Bharat Maitri Bhawan to symbolise of Nepal-India ties.

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Solar purified water

A solar-powered water purification system has been chosen by the EU’s Commissioner of the Environment for an International Cooperation Award, saying it has ‘massive potential’ to battle water borne diseases, particularly in remote areas in the developing world.

Called Naide, the units are manufactured by the Dutch firm Nerdag and was developed by a 63-year-old specialist in ultraviolet technology, Dick van Dijk. Prototypes are being used and tested in Ghana, Brazil, Turkey and India. An Indian company is presently identifying suitable sites for setting up the Naide system.

Contaminated water from a river or pond is poured into the Naide. After passing through two filters, the water is run through the UV unit powered by the solar panel that can produce enough pure water per day to satisfy the average drinking-water needs of a community of 250-300 with 2.5kilo litres a day. The unit costs just under $4,000 and if 80 percent of the price is borne by NGOs, the local community can pay for the rest with a soft credit program. “The locals must have a stake in the system, that is better for everyone,” says Van Dijk, www.rednapaide.com

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Building friendship

Work on a new building for Dhawan’s Mahendradra Maitri Campus started with outgoing Indian ambassador to Nepal, Shyam Saran, laying the foundation stone on 22 June. The Indian government has sanctioned Rs 25.91 million for the classroom block, teachers’ rooms, library hall and furniture. The campus student roll of over 4,000 students from Sunsari, Morang, Saptari, Dhankuta and the Purbanahal hills will benefit from the building, which it is to be called Nepal Bharat Maitri Bhawan to symbolise of Nepal-India ties.

Manakamana cablecar to resume

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Falling exports and plummeting investment are eating into Nepal’s reserves. But an even bigger crisis is looming: a lot of the interest and principle payments of our foreign loans are nearing their due.

Foreign debt now stands at nearly Rs 230 billion. Servicing it is already eating up the biggest chunk of Nepal’s budget and amounts to 70 percent of our GDP.

Worse, the government doesn’t have a mechanism to calculate exactly how much we owe to whom and how to schedule those payments. In most countries, this is done with sophisticated computer software. Here we depend on the good faith of our donors. When they ask us to pay, we pay.

As more and more of Nepal’s past loans mature, its servicing is being off an ever larger chunk of our foreign reserves. The Financial Comptroller General Office admits the highest share of the government expenditure went to debt repayment in the last three years.

Last year, approximately 20 percent of the total budget expenditure was spent on servicing domestic and foreign loans. The percentage of regular expenditure is almost 30 percent.

The grace period of Nepal’s major long-term loans have now ended, increasing the debt burden. Between 2000 and 2002, debt servicing increased by nearly 10 percent, depleting the country’s foreign exchange reserves. “Apart from debt servicing, foreign loans have more than doubled since the 1990s,” says economist Bishwambher Pyakural.

The alarm bells should be ringing, but in the corridors of the Financial Comptroller General’s Office it seems to be business as usual. Officialdom can’t even calculate the amortisation on loans. “We don’t yet have a mechanism to calculate and tally what the donors claim as the principle and the interest to be paid,” one official admitted sheepishly.

“We have been servicing the debt purely on the good faith of the donors. They send us the bill and we simply pay them.”

With such blind faith, the comptroller’s office has ended up paying interest on even those loans whose principles were paid long ago. “It has happened many times in the past,” one Finance Ministry official said.

The Asian Development Bank is trying to equip the government agencies to deal with debt servicing through the Strengthening Institutional Capacity for Effective Public Debt Management Project. It has introduced the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording Management System, a software that helps update debt repayment schedules. The trouble is, no one has been trained to work this software.

“There seems to be some problem about training the staff at FCGO,” Finance Ministry Joint Secretary Krishna Gyawali told us. “We are aware that our debt management is not satisfactory.”

Paperwork on loans received since the 1950s are contained in dusty cloth and stacked on top of the steel cabinets where insects have been feasting on them for decades. The communication gap between the Finance Ministry and the comptroller’s office doesn’t help calculate amortisation since donor commitment, the actual disbursement, the interest rate and the negotiated exchange rate all need to be considered.

Yet, Nepali officials made pride in the fact that Nepal has never defaulted on a foreign loan. “We have paid on the dot every time in the last 50 years,” said one official proudly. The ADB project in a recent study showed Nepal’s loans are highly concessional and the real rate of interest is less than the economic growth rate. “That is why such loans are deemed to be sustainable,” says Bhuvan Bajracharya, team leader of the project at the Finance Ministry.

Luckily, the devaluation of the US dollar has already saved the country some Rs 700 million in repayment of dollar denominated loans in the current fiscal year. The money has been used to offset part of the Rs 77 billion internal debt, officials said.

The IMF’s Nepal resident representative, Sukhwindar Singh, says Nepal’s debt service ratio is still not so bad. “Considering the net present value, Nepal’s foreign loan component comes down to 22 percent of the GDP and the loan repayment ratio to the GDP is 3.6 percent which is quite normal by international standards,” he told us.

But some economists say Nepal can’t afford to service its loan burden and should seek debt relief from donors and join the group of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPIC) to get the debt relief. “We should try to get our kuna written off,” says expert Devendra Raj Pandey. “Especially because we know these are loans given to past authoritarian regimes and are now being paid by ordinary Nepalis.”

But Finance Ministry officials say joining the HIPIC club would be a shame on Nepal. “We have never been a defaulter, so why should we be called HIPIC?” they ask. “We will lose all our hard-earned international credibility.”

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**ECONOMY**

25 June - 1 July 2004

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Rs 228,039,113,441

That is exactly how much Nepal owes foreign creditors, which comes to Rs 10,000 for every man, woman and child in this country

**Navin Singh Khadka**
The Ugly Nepali

It is impossible to avoid the tipsy junketeer while travelling on Yeti Airlines

These days, your Beef travels with forged crossed that a fellow Nepali will not be in the seat next to him. This isn’t an indication of Nepali travellers, but the last few close encounters bruised his already shattered pride.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beef

in being a second class global citizen based on his country of origin. Having finally made it into the aircraft, and upon opening to the international pages of a foreign newspaper, one finds Nepal right next to hot spots such as Sudan, Haiti and Rwanda. Unlike in Hollywood, on the road bad publicity does translate to bad news. Some effects are tangible, like the harassment by immigration. But the other manifestation of how low our country’s stock have sunk is our own lack of self-esteem.

The planesheads of overseas workers coming out with a carry-on bag full of dreams at least prop up the economy, although they are treated like the scum of the earth by Nepali immigration, watchdous and airport officials at the other end. No, it is the parasitic professional government junketeeer who gets on my nerves. In what must be a classic reversal of rules, they become the boorish and uncouth Ugly Nepali as soon as they get into the cabin. After the second whisky somewhere over the Indus-Gangtey plains, they are already getting on the nerves. The questions begin, starting with the classic opener, “chichlathal.”

A rapel descent into a half of minute unsolicited details follow, right down to a tacky companion on daily allowance. CAN has a club, the most to squeeze out a few extra dollars from the sponsors and the fantastic baggin shopping.

Given the finest hint of encouragement, your fellow Nepali will tell you exactly how to wangle a different route through another city to visit the second cousin on your maternal side. It is all an extension of the ego, an unsolvable challenge to your own worth. Without any qualms they will divulge details on how much “extra” they made.

Boistered by alcohol, the intrepid Nepalese junketeer on any home tour will seek to inculcate himself on any foreigner within speaking distance. One incident stands out in memory: a trapped Englishman was subjected to wounding narrative on the land of Mt Everest, Pushpapatnath, the god-fearing natives followed by the Maoist insurgency and compulsory taxation on the royal massacre. In such a situation, the emergency exit looks like a tantalisingly tempting escape.

In the interest of upholding the good name of Nepali nationalism, we should apportion a part of our junket funds to give our own ambassadors a crash course on travel etiquette and interpersonal skills. Travelling Nepalis are part of Brand Nepal® and we can’t afford to got it wrong. But till we get it right, the Beef will continue to travel with an extra copy of Nepali Times to act as a handy junketeeer deterrent.

Video stars

It was merely a matter of time before a video music award was instituted in the grand tradition of corporate-sponsored awards. Over the last two years, the video music industry has grown in tandem to the leaps made in private sector television. What started as an in-house exercise quickly became a popular and lucrative niche with young directors at the helm. In recognition of the convergence between music and visuals, Close-Up, in association with Channel Nepal, presents the first Close-Up Video Music Awards 2061 on 26 June at the BICC, with a live telecast on Channel Nepal from 4PM.

Various nominees from the 15 categories, which include a Critics’ Award and Viewer’s Choice, will be performed at the event.

Yeti’s SAAAB

Yeti Airlines has a second SAAAB 340B 36-seater aircraft. The Swedish-made commuter turboprops will be used in the Biratnagar, Pokhara, Bhairawa, Baratpur and Nepalgunj sectors and will make the airline the biggest domestic operator in Nepal. The seven-turboprop aircraft SAAB 340B 36-seater aircraft. The Swedish-made commuter turboprops will be used in the Biratnagar, Pokhara, Bhairawa, Baratpur and Nepalgunj sectors and will make the airline the biggest domestic operator in Nepal. The seven-turboprop aircraft.

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NEW PRODUCTS
NO COMPROMISES: Translated, that is exactly what the new model of Yamaha Libero Lx offers in its ‘No Samjhauta Bike’. The 106cc engine provides 65kmph speed at Rs 130,930. To celebrate 25 years of successful business, Morang Auto Works, the authorised dealers in Nepal, will let you ride away with a brand new Libero Lx after paying just 25 percent of the amount followed by 36 easy monthly installments.

STEEPLY RESOLVE: After two decades in the business, Pushpati Iron & Steel recently introduced Pushpati Turbochargers TMT Steel Bar to the Nepal market. With high strength and ductility combined with excellent durability, the product is said to be ideal for our earthquake-prone country.

SELF-PROJECTION: Boxlight Corporation USA is the world’s premier resource for digital projection equipment. Its multimedia projectors, based on LCD and DLP technology, are available in portable, ubiquitous, multipurpose, fixed and home theatre models. Visit CAS Trading House at ComputerLand Building in Putalisadak.

Sky train

Cedar Airways has launched an innovative Fly & Rail service in Germany last week with Deutsche Bahn. Qatar’s air passengers can connect with nearly 6,000 German railway stations as part of the program, allowing travelers to make simultaneous rail train plans, cutting down on paperwork and ensuring reliability and comfort.

Yetti fills gap in domestic capacity

Yetti Airlines is on an ambitious expansion drive, and has become the airline with the largest domestic network in Nepal. But this not because demand for domestic flights is up, says General Manager Vijay Shrestha in this interview with Nepali Times.

Over the last few years, the global airline market has gone down radically. In Nepal, since the GDP is plummeting, it reflects on the airline industry too. The airlines that closed used gas guzzlers like Aevos, and as soon as better and newer aircraft were introduced, passengers choose to fly in them.

Given increasing air accidents, are we to deduce air safety is being compromised? Actually, Nepal’s air safety record is very good. The accidents and incidents that took place in the past had to do with the weather. Yeti Airlines has never compromised air safety. Every airplane knows safety enhances profit. An accident slashes sales growth.

Airline pilots can’t afford to get it wrong. But till we get it right, the Beef will continue to travel with an extra copy of Nepali Times to act as a handy junketeeer deterrent.

Nepali Times: Your expansion means business is good. Vijay Shrestha: In the international sector, Nepal is making some progress by having an open sky policy. In the domestic sector, however, people see the rush for licences and assume that there has been growth in passenger traffic. But that is because capacity dropped by half after Neuron Air’s collapse. Many mistakes are to avoid. Over the last six years we have grown into a company that has provided sufficient services to remote areas—more than any other airline. We’ll also like to operate internationally in the near future.

What lead to the shakeout in the domestic airline industry? It has to do with how the operators look at the entire market. The bottom line for airlines is economics. The profit margin is very slim—about three percent—even when things are going well. For instance, the traffic from Nepalgunj to Jumla has grown by more than 70 percent. Passenger traffic has grown even in remote areas.

Any reason why private operators ignore remote areas? It isn’t so bad. If you consider the traffic growth in the last 10-11 years. After RNAC withdrew from remote areas, private operators have filled the gap. For instance, the traffic from Nepalgunj to Jumla has grown by more than 70 percent. Passenger traffic has grown even in remote areas.
If it seems that everyone everywhere is watching the same movies, then we have good news for you. It’s that time of year when movie buffs flock eagerly to Gopi Krishna for the fourth annual British Film Festival. This year’s selection (see p11) promises to be an entertaining array of comedy, thriller, adventure and epic journeys to showcase modern British films.

It has been a good year for films made in the UK: many did very well in worldwide box office takings and nearly 75 films were produced with British investment or talent. It was a welcome relief from 2002, when the industry went into a slump after waning Hollywood investment that had become a mainstay for UK film production in the 1990s.

Though the US is still a huge investor, the UK film industry continues to make its distinctive mark in cinema. The tenacious partnership, if it can be called that, is a balancing act between artistic integrity and summer blockbusters. More often than not, films co-produced with US moviemakers mean most UK movies are appearing on international markets.

Barbara Hewitt, director at the British Council in Kathmandu, says, “The problem is finding the stories to engage audiences used to Hollywood product, but Britain is lucky to possess enough good directors, actors and technicians to make much of the rest of the world distinctly envious.”

Recently the UK Film Council decided on a new mandate: commercial cinema would be at the heart of the British film industry but without compromising on quality. The end product would be distinctly British but with the appeal of greater diversity.

The organisers at the British Council are excited about the selection this year’s festival. The five films that make the grade—each a powerful representation of modern British cinema—does exactly that, taking into account a patchwork of ethnicity both in the UK and here in Kathmandu. “Every story is a compelling drama of people struggling to survive and make sense of their lives, winning but sometimes failing, in ways we all recognise. Yet each story emerges from a totally different context and this tells us much about the rich multicultural world of modern Britain,” says Hewitt.

Discovering young Nepali moviegoers are the target audience for the festival this year. It should be an exciting alternative to the usual Bollywood and Hollywood fare.

(Shraddha Panta)
28 June
Touching the Void
Running time 106 mins
Certification 15
Director Kevin Macdonald
Starring Joe Simpson, Simon Yates, Brendan Mackey, Nicholas Aaron

This film is based on the international bestseller by renowned climber Joe Simpson, which describes one of the most extraordinary true stories of survival and adventure of our time. The book recounts a climb Simpson and his partner, Simon Yates, undertook in the Peruvian Andes in 1985. The two young and ambitious mountaineers set off to scale the hitherto unclimbed west face of Siula Grande, a remote and treacherous 21,000ft peak. Starting the descent through a blizzard, Simpson fell, shattering his leg. A heroic battle for survival unfolded in which both men were faced with life or death decisions which test the human spirit to its limit. Simpson and Yates returned to Siula Grande together for the first time to retell their story for the camera.

29 June
Dirty Pretty Things
Running time 97 mins
Certification 15
Director Stephen Frears
Starring Audrey Tautou, Sergi Lopez, Chiwetel Ejiofor

In this urban thriller, an African night porter enlists the help of a prostitute, a Turkish chambermaid and a Chinese mortuary technician to solve a bizarre murder. Set in a world of asylum seekers that lies behind the familiar urban metropolis. This is a tale of two cities, both of them in London. Pietter Okwe is a doctor who was framed for murder in Libreville and now scrapes a living in London, driving mini-cabs and working as a night porter in a West End tourist hotel. When he discovers a human heart in one of the hotel rooms he knows that as an illegal alien working without papers he cannot ask too many questions. Okwe struggles with his sense of injustice as evidence emerges that the hotel is being used to remove human organs from third world donors. Finally, with the aid of his motley crew, he investigates the murder and enforces a strange kind of poetic justice. Dirty Pretty Things explores a Dickensian landscape of rag trade sweatshops, hotel kitchens and mini-cab venues in a London that most Londoners never see.

30 June
The Warrior
Running time 86 mins
Certification 15
Director Asif Kapadia
Starring Irfan Khan

A timeless tale of an epic journey from the deserts of Rajasthan to the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, the story follows Lafcadia, head of a small band of warriors employed by a tyrannical lord who rules the region from his crumbling fort in the desert. The warriors are ordered to wipe out a village that is late with its payments. The warriors set off on horseback and proceed to raze the rustic village to the ground. In the midst of the slaughter Lafcadia has a mystical encounter with a young girl. He drops his sword, vows to never kill again and he decides to escape his violent life. He sets off with his young son, Katiba, for his native village in the mountains.

1 July
Anita and Me
Running time 92 mins
Certification 15
Director Metin Huseyin
Starring Chandeeb Upal, Anna Brewster, Sanjeev Bhaskar

It is 1972 and Meena, a 12-year-old, lives in the village of Tolland in Britain. She is the daughter of Indian parents who have come to England to give her a better life. Her stony adolescence, surrounded by eccentric relatives and friends, is disrupted by the arrival of Anita Rutter and her dysfunctional family. At 14, blonde, aloof, beautiful, cut-throat and fast, Anita is everything Meena thinks she wants to be. Meena wheedles her way into Anita’s life, but the arrival of a baby brother, teenage hormones, impending entrance exams for the posh grammar school and a motorcycling rebel without a future, threaten to turn her salad days sour. Anita and I like pants a comic, poignant, compassionate and colourful portrait of village life in the era of flares, power cuts, glam rock, decriminalisation and Ted Heath.

2 July
About A Boy
Running time 101 mins
Certification 15
Director Paul Weitz and Chris Weitz
Starring Hugh Grant, Toni Collette, Rachel Weisz

About a Boy tells the story of Will, a rich, child-free and irresponsible Londoner in his thirties, who, in search of available women, invents an imaginary son and starts attending single parent meetings. As a result of one of his liaisons he meets Marcus, a strange 12-year-old boy with problems at school. Gradually, Will and Marcus become friends and as Will teaches Marcus how to be a cool kid, Marcus helps Will to finally grow up.

Venue: Gopi Krishna Cinema, Kathmandu
Movie Timing: 6:30 PM
Free tickets available in advance from the reception at the British Council, Lainchaur, remaining tickets on the day of the film from 6:10 PM at the cinema.
Contact: Sangha Bhattarai, 4410798
Learning fear

Nepal Samcharpatra, 22 June

Seventy-four percent of students in Maoist-affected areas are suffering from the fear that they might be abducted either by Maoist rebels or security forces, a recent survey in Gulmi reveals. Of the 281 high school students from Dhurkot Bastu and Jaithok villages that took part in the study, 74 percent said they were afraid that the Maoist rebels or the security force would forcibly take them away. “That fear haunts us all the time, whether we are attending class or even our way to or from school,” said Ramita Pandey and Ranju Bhandari of Himalaya Higher Secondary School. “We feel afraid even when we study late at night.”

Perhaps more alarming is that 14 percent said that they looked forward to learning more if the rebels take them. The surveyed students underwent Maoist indoctrination that lasted anywhere between a few hours to over a day. Most students had to walk up to 10 hours at a stretch to reach the rebel camps. They were told about the negative aspects of the present curriculum and promised that the ‘people’s education’ would be scientific and practical. Most of the students were too afraid for their own safety to comprehend or embrace the revolutionary rhetoric. Their biggest concern was a military ambush along the way and being caught in the crossfire.

The students said that the rebels used them as labourers during Maoist programs and training. They were made to carry firewood, stones and soil, build roads, clear drains and grounds, cook food and clean utensils. The students said they had no choice but to do what they were told after the rebels threatened to send them to Rolpa and Rukum as guerrillas if they defied orders. Parents are equally worried. “When our children are taken, their education is disrupted and we are left to worry about the security forces thinking we are Maoists,” they say. Bright students and those who can afford it have left the villages to pursue their studies in safer urban areas.

During the survey, even primary level students attended Maoist political programs and the second-in-command at the local ‘people’s government’, Dhurkot Rajasthal Bishnu Bhandari, said data could be collected only after permission was granted by the rebels. The survey established that rebels go to the schools more often than the security forces. When soldiers come, they force teachers to kick off Maoist slogans from school walls before making them erase it. “When we, the caretakers of the students are ridiculed in front of the students they are traumatised,” says Madan Kumar Singh, a teacher. He says if they don’t erase the slogans, the security forces punish them, and if they do, they become rebel targets. What the students want is simple: “We need peace, we don’t want to live with fear. May the war end forever and let us go back to school to study.”

Constituent assembly, or else

Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in Kankai, 22 June

The appointment of Sher Bahadur Deuba as prime minister, the exit of the UML from the agitations and Girija Prasad Koirala’s anti-constituent assembly statement prove that foreign powers are at play in Nepal. The international power centres are of the opinion that the outcome of the present political crisis is possible only when the trilateral conflict among the king, the parliamentary parties and the rebels can be transformed into a bilateral tale. Therefore, we see the game of bringing the king and the parliamentary parties together to pit them against the revolutionary people’s power—a new political strategy of the old regime.

If Girija’s statement against the constituent assembly has to do with his concern that Deuba’s Congress and the UML will now support the royals’ conditional constituent assembly, then the issue should be taken seriously. What makes it more serious is the fact that some foreign quarters are also pushing the idea of a conditional constituent assembly.

We have already made it clear that we will not agree with such a proposal. This would be similar to an improved Panchayat system, which proved to be a trap. Just when the tide is turning in favour of a constituent assembly, even in the Congress camp, why is Koirala against the idea? Unless the mystery behind this becomes clear, we cannot easily and specifically talk about such a development. If Koirala means that there cannot be free and fair elections for a constituent assembly trapped between the purrs of the royal army and the people’s army, we must eliminate such fear.

With regard to this concern, quite some time ago, we stressed the importance of the involvement of the United Nations. Since it is the army that becomes the decisive issue in politics, we have been talking about its management in a way that it becomes acceptable to all sides. The parliamentary forces have always feared the people’s liberation army that has risen from among the exploited people. They believe that the royal army, which has always been the puppet of the Shah and Rana families after the Sagauli Treaty, is common and neutral. This difference on the part of the parliamentary forces is suicidal.

One must understand that the slogan for a constituent assembly is not ours. We have always maintained that our ultimate destination is a people’s republic. World history and that of our own country shows that it is the parliamentary forces that have always raised the issue of a constituent assembly. They should have made it their prime demand because it is the supreme form of the capitalist republicanism.

We considered the idea of a constituent assembly, given the historical transformation of Nepali society from feudalism to capitalism and the geopolitical situation. In other words, a constituent assembly is not our desire but our compulsion—one that is fraught with many dangers. In many countries, parties like ours have got bogged down in the quagmire of a constituent assembly but we are determined to march ahead. This, however, does not mean that we are merely paying lip service to the idea and will not accept the results of a constituent assembly.

If it is done in a free and unconditional environment, we are ready to accept the challenge and this is our commitment. But if the leadership in the main parliamentary parties still balk at a constituent assembly and if various international quarters continue their conspiracy to isolate us by bringing the king and the parties together, history could take a turn that will make this whole issue redundant. This is not being said in anger, it is a clear declaration made in with total comprehension.

Maoist tax

Rajdhani, 21 June

SINDHULI-The Maoists have announced in all the villages that the people no longer have to give donations. Instead, the rebels will levy taxes based on personal income. So far only teachers have been subjected to this ruling. Previously they handed over a month’s salary every four months but now they will have to pay a yearly tax amounting to 1/3 days of their salary. Farmers are not exempt: they must pay for every

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We human rights activists have been unable to do anything.”

Activist Sudhid Pathak, president of Nepal Human Rights Organisation, in an interview with Deshatartha, 20 June

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Umesh’s nightmare

Nepal Samacharpatri, 22 June

“Chant our slogans or face the people’s army punishment,” a Maoist militant warned Umesh Mahat. The 12-year-old schoolboy was forced to run shouting Maoist slogans with the rest of the 200 students and teachers who were abducted on 20 May from the Asekukharka School in Sindhupalchok. All students and teachers of Class Six and above were forced marched to the Maoists meetings. Umesh, now at a hospital in Kathmandu, still shivers with fear. The Maoists forced the group to run up the mountains shouting revolutionary slogans. When his principal became breathless and couldn’t shout slogans, they made him carry their flag all the way up to Sipapokhre village. Umesh was so traumatised that he developed heart problems and is now at Sandh Gangalal Heart Centre in the Valley. He has recurring nightmares about the Maoists.

“We were made to run all morning, forced to listen to speeches in the sun all day long, and then we had to walk all the way home in the evening,” he recalls. Umesh’s health started deteriorating. First, he just had fever. But later he was diagnosed with a heart ailment.

This was the second time he was abducted. The rebels took him and his friends a fortnight earlier for military training but Umesh managed to escape. When he was taken to the training area again, he saw his classmate armed with a gun and dressed in combat fatigues. “If they had taken me, I’d have ended up like him,” says Umesh. His elder brother, Purna, says many schoolchildren in Sindhupalchok live in fear of Maoists threats and abductions. He says: “Some join the people’s army, others live in fear, there is no other alternative.”

Khabadi cop

Kamarpur, 21 June

DHANGADI – Villagers in Dhangadi captured a policeman who has been accused of terrorising locals and handed him over to the Kailali district police station. For the past three days, police constable Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary had been robbing passers-by near Campus Chowk in broad daylight by brandishing a fake pistol. And at night, he extorted restaurant owners, robbed motorists and harassed girls. He intimidated the people by calling himself a Maoist and even looted the deputy chief of Dhangadi. Fortunately, the villagers decided not to take this and got together to capture him. After beating him severely, they handed Chaudhary over to the police, who assured them that strict action would be taken.

Branch in Birgani

Rajdhani, 20 June

Five months ago, when the Council of Ministers asked for permission to open a Foreign Ministry branch office in Birgani, the okay came through. The process to set up the office is to begin soon. This marks the first time the Foreign Ministry is opening an office outside the capital and undoubtedly has to do with India establishing its consular general’s office at Birgani. The branch office will coordinate between government offices and the consular general and commercial dealings will be the priority. An under-secretary-level official of the Foreign Ministry will be heading the branch office team. Although India has yet to formally inaugurate the consular general’s office that was established three months ago, the branch has already started.

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While more than 140,000 US troops in Iraq continue trying to impose security in advance of the 30 June handover of limited sovereignty to the new Iraqi administration, the security situation in nearby Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. With national elections just three months away, observers here say that tribal warlords, as well as ne'er-do-well Taliban forces, appear as strong as at any time since the Taliban was ousted 30 months ago, making it increasingly unlikely that the balloting, if it goes forward as scheduled, will be judged free and fair by international and other observers.

"Trends are going the wrong way," according to Mark Schneider, the Washington director of the International Crisis Group (ICG), a Brussels-based conflict-resolution think tank. "Militias around the country pose a threat to the possibility of any credible elections taking place." While US and international media attention has been focused almost exclusively on the problems encountered by US occupation forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, where the US has some 20,000 troops mostly chasing Taliban and al-Qaeda forces, has been pushed far into the background.

That was made painfully clear in the US last week when visiting President Hamid Karzai received virtually no media attention despite his address to Congress and his joint appearance with President George W. Bush for a White House Rose Garden press conference, during which he remained largely silent as his host fended off questions about US abuses of detainees in both Afghanistan and Iraq and the domestic economy.

Officially, Washington remains upbeat about Afghanistan. Addressing a group at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Monday, Ambassador William Taylor, the State Department coordinator for Afghanistan, insisted that UN officials had registered more than four million voters to date and that as many as 100,000 more were being registered each day. He said about 36 percent of the registrants are women. The UN estimates the total number of eligible voters in Afghanistan at a little more than 10 million. "If we get at least six million voters registered," Taylor said, "that will be a critical mass."

At the same time, the envoy admitted that the security situation leaves much to be desired and could easily interfere with the fairness of the upcoming election, which will determine the president and the Lower House of parliament. "That is not going to be pretty," he said, noting that local militias, many funded by revenues from the thriving opium trade, are likely to practice intimidation against voters, particularly in the balloting for parliament.

US military casualties, although still minimal compared to Iraq, have risen sharply, even as Washington increased the number of troops it is devoting to fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the mainly Pashtun south and southeast, particularly along the border with Pakistan. In addition, more aid workers—at least 18, five of them foreign nationals—have been killed by suspected Taliban forces than at any time since US-backed forces ousted the Taliban in late 2001. As a result, many NGOs have withdrawn their staff, bringing reconstruction efforts to a standstill.

In addition to the US troops, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has some 6,000 peacekeepers in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), all of whom, however, are confined to Kabul. Another 250 German-led troops make up a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) assigned to Kunduz, a relatively quiet northern city, NATO pledged to provide the equipment (including helicopters) and troops to supply another four PRTs to strategic cities around the country in order to extend Karzai’s authority well into the countryside and stabilise the situation through the deployment of rapid response forces there, but these have not been forthcoming—to the great frustration of the US, as well as Karzai himself. • (AP)

"My life is important”
After the beheading of Kim Sun-il, public pressure grows against troop deployment

Although the government announced that its decision to deploy 3,000 troops to Iraq is unlikely to be swayed by the beheading of a South Korean hotel employee and furor in public protests, however, could force it to cancel the deployment.

In a video broadcast Sunday on Arab television stations, the hotel manager, Al-Jazeera, Kim Sun-il cried in English, “Korean soldiers, please get out of here. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die. I know that your life is important, but my life is important.” Kim worked for a South Korean supplier to the American military and was abducted on 17 June while making a delivery in the Iraqi city of Fallujah.

His captors from Jamaat al-Tamhid and Belad al-Mu’mineen and Jihadi, the militant group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, threatened to behead him if Seoul did cancel its plans by Tuesday to send troops to Iraq. The deadline passed and the beheaded body of the 35-year-old translator was found on the road between Baghdad and Fallujah. But South Korea’s President Roh Moo-Hyun was adamant and said he will send more troops to Iraq despite the beheading.

"The South Korean plan to send troops to Iraq is not to engage in hostilities against Iraq or to help people but to help reconstruction and restoration in Iraq," Roh said in a brief, nationally televised speech Wednesday morning after news of the killing reached the country. On Monday some 700 Koreans took to the capital’s streets in a candlelight vigil, urging Kim’s release and calling on the government to cancel the troop dispatch. More protests are planned this week.

A coalition of 365 civil organisations announced it would hold massive protests and candlelight vigils this weekend in central Seoul to force the government to reconsider its decision to send 3,000 troops to Iraq’s Arabi area in early August. The coalition also warns the South Korean president to order the pull back of 650 medics and engineers already in Iraq.

At the heart of the matter is South Korea’s relationship with the United States. Seoul is very keen to strengthen its relationship with the US, thereby winning more support from Washington for a peaceful end to a long-running dispute over North Korea’s nuclear weapons development. When the deployment of the 3,000 troops is complete, South Korea will be the biggest coalition partner in Iraq after the US and UK. • (AP)

Fundamental
$900 billion on arms, $80 billion on aid

A rms-exporting governments are undermining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by diverting vital resources from crucial areas such as health and education, warns a new report. New research by Oxfam International and Amnesty International says that arms sales are diverting resources from areas such as health and education, as well as undermining the security and human rights of the population. The report ‘Guns or Growth’, released on 22 June, says six developing countries— Oman, Syria, Burma, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Burundi—spend more on arms than they do on health and education combined.

"Government failure to stick to their own promises on arms exports means that children are denied an education, AIDS sufferers are not getting treatment and thousands are dying needlessly," Barbara Stocking, director of Oxfam said. According to the report, an average $22 billion is spent on arms by countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa every year. This sum would have enabled those countries to put every child in school and reduce child mortality by two thirds by 2015—two of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
The lawless sheriff

Something has gone wrong with the system of checks and balances in America’s democracy

When abuses occur in one area, they can quickly spread to others. For weeks the Bush administration kept the report on abuses in Iraqi prisons from the American people by pressuring CBS not to air the photographs in its possession. Similarly, it was only through the use of the Freedom of Information Act that the dramatic photographs of the coffins of US soldiers coming home were finally made public.

Defenders of President Bush, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the military emphasise the difficulty of the task they face in Iraq, human frailty and fallibility and the fact that there are always a few “rogue apples”. America’s system of government, however, recognises all of this and attempts to guard against it. Had the letter and spirit of these safeguards been followed, we would not have been in this war at all, or not at least alone.

Wars should not be undertaken based on the judgment of one individual and his cabal. Had Bush only gone along with the democratic processes enshrined in the UN Charter, the trauma of Iraq need not have occurred.

We know that individuals and institutions make mistakes. Such mistakes are all the more likely in times of stress. We have to put in place rules and procedures, safeguards, a system of due process, to make it more likely that justices is done. It is clear that the checks needed to prevent such abuse in the Iraqi and Afghan prisons were not in place, and that the Bush administration had created a climate that made such abuses more likely, if not inevitable.

Something has gone wrong with the system of checks and balances in America’s democracy. Congress and the press should have checked the president. The international community tried. Unfortunately, the global system of international law and governance remains too weak to prevent the determined misbehaviour of the president of the world’s most powerful country if he is hell bent on starting a war on his own.

Joseph E Stiglitz is Professor of Economics at Columbia University.

Imbalance

The goals agreed by heads of state in September 2000 aim to reduce poverty, improve access to basic services, bring disease under control and ensure universal primary education by 2015. The Oxfam-Amnesty report says it is “shocking how few governments make a serious attempt to consider the impact on development of their arms exports. Paying lip service to such a commitment means that scarce resources are being diverted from the fight against poverty, and millions are suffering as a result.”

In 2002, arms delivered to Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa represented more than two-thirds of the value of all arms deliveries worldwide. Of the total arms exports to these regions, 90 percent came from the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

In 2001 Tanzania spent 40 million dollars on a British military Watchman radar system—enough to provide healthcare for 3.5 million people. In 1999 South Africa agreed to purchase armaments—including frigates, submarines, aircraft and helicopters—for $8 billion. This money could have purchased treatment with combination therapy for all five million South African AIDS sufferers for two years. The report says that governments that sell arms can assess the impact it will have on poverty, and argues that governments should agree to an international arms trade treaty to control the arms trade and safeguard sustainable development and human rights.

Paul Eavis, director of Safeworld, a group that promotes new strategies to increase human security and to prevent armed violence, says governments should be ashamed. “Inappropriate arms sales are responsible for entrenched and exacerbating poverty,” he said in a statement. “Despite assurances, most governments are still only playing lip service to assessing arms sales against their impact on poverty. To ensure we have strict international controls we need an arms trade treaty.”

Of 17 main arms exporting countries surveyed—Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Sweden, Turkey, Britain, Ukraine and the US—the report found that only Britain and the Netherlands had policies involving the government department responsible for development in export decision-making. Only four countries—Bulgaria, Sweden, Britain and the Netherlands—had ever refused a sale on the grounds it might undermine sustainable development. Tuesday’s report follows a warning from World Bank President James Wolfensohn last month that there is already a “fundamental imbalance” between global defence spending of $900 billion compared with $325 billion on agricultural subsidies and only $60 billion on aid.

ART ON GOOD ROADS... ARTIST ON BAD ONES

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Bill’s oral office

Don’t look here for a personal account of Monica Lewinsky

My Life by Bill Clinton is 900 pages long and will barely fit in your carry-on bag on your next flight to Johannesburg, but it is the one new book that is destined for every bestseller list this summer (it’s already number one on Amazon.com). But if reading a US presidential memoir is not your idea of fun, sample what Clinton has to say about his personal “War and Peace” on the American presidency and his experiences there: “Most presidential memoirs are dull and self-serving; I wanted to write a memoir on the Presidency that was interesting and self-serving.”

Clinton’s new book is not just about being the 42nd US president, and all that went on in the White House between 1993-2001. It is the story of how a simple Bill from a broken home in rural America grew up to be one of the most popular as well as controversial presidents in recent history. Not many have the legacy of near-impeachment over oral sex in the Oval Office.

However, if you are looking for a personal account of the Monica Lewinsky affair, you will not find that in My Life. To say anything more about Monica would be telling… What you will find in this weighty tome is a comprehensive and well-written memoir divided into two parts: one, the life of the man and his family, and two, the policy thinking of a past president caught in a quagmire of controversy, all at a very critical time in American history. The first half of the book is told in a narrative style, just like how his small-town uncle taught him to weave a good tale back in the 1950s. The latter half of the book, however, appears to be a justification for most of the major policy decisions made or ignored by Clinton in his eight years as the most powerful man in the world.

Surprisingly lacking in this huge book are any signs of anger, resentment or ill-feeling towards any of his opponents during the Whitewater investigations, even when it seemed like bipartisan policymaking had stopped and gossip mongering had taken over completely in 1998. I was living in Washington DC at that time, and I can tell you, the executive branch of the government had pretty much shut down and gone into defensive-retailation mode, combating everything from rumors of murder-suicides over corrupt investment deals to date rape while Clinton was Governor of Arkansas.

By 1999, any policymaking that was in the making had stopped. This happened at the worst possible time for America, as we see in My Life. Many of the shenanigans that went on in the capital during those years happened when important policies were being formulated and the book gives some insight into why the CTBT failed, why US policy in the Middle East went on the rocks and why the Republican Party refused to pay up on UN dues.

Nevertheless, don’t expect much rational thinking into why Clinton decided to bomb Iraq especially when he admits, “Iraq was no higher than number six on my list of priorities.”

While one does not get a feeling of anger over all the problems that Clinton faced in his life at the White House, you do get hints of frustration over the way Washington works, or doesn’t. After all is said and done, at least you believe Bill Clinton when he quips, “There are no Good and Bad people in Washington, there are just people who are Right and Wrong.”

I was glad this book ended when it did, for after hundreds of pages of thinking about how the US government is steering the people of America downhill over a slippery slope of social decay, increased colonialism and an alarming rise in nationalism, I was ready for Bill Clinton’s unifying optimism: “We are more alike than we are different. On a global level, all we have to do is to see that there are more similarities between us all than there are differences.” That’s the good news, as in the news that this presidential memoir, while definitely self-serving, is indeed very interesting and is a must-read for all America history buffs.”

My Life
Bill Clinton
Alfred A. Knopf, 2004
ISBN: 0374528763
$35 (Hardcover)

Jiggy Gaton is a cartoonist and columnist for Nepal Times and WAVE, who visited Bill Clinton’s hometown of Hot Springs, Arkansas many times and always wondered, “How does a boy from this place wind up as president of the US?”

Nepal Studies in the UK: Conversations with Practitioners
Pratyusha Ona
Martin Chautari, 2004
Rs 100

Pratyusha Ona interviews 19 scholars, including Michael Hutt, Ian Harper and Mark Turin, to get an in-depth understanding of how research on Nepal is produced in the UK. Arguing that the UK has been the centre of social science writing about our country, Ona aims to provide insights into research interests and perspectives, as well as include personal backgrounds of the researchers and sketches of the institutional environment in which such studies are carried out. This book will be useful for anyone wanting to know about the contemporary history of Nepal Studies.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@local.com.np

Sunset cruise in Chitwan, burning elephant grass...

Arkansas many times and always
Nepali Times
$35 (Hardcover)

My Life
Bill Clinton
Alfred A. Knopf, 2004
ISBN: 0374528763
$35 (Hardcover)
Single handicappers
How to play those lob shots

When approaching the green, most seasoned golfers prefer to chip rather than pitch. This means they are more comfortable playing a relatively low shot and run the ball up the pin, rather than hitting a higher lob shot that lands close to the pin and stops immediately.

The reason for this is that the former is a good percentage shot, and the latter is much harder to execute consistently with a much larger margin for error. However, every so often during a round, there will be situations where there is not much green to work with or there is a heavy rough, water or perhaps even a deep bunker to clear.

In these instances, a low running chip shot is not an option. The only shot is the high flying, soft landing pitch. Even though the percentages are against executing this shot well, and the risks of taking this option are high, there is no choice but to play it. This is something every golfer needs to have in order to improve their score. If you know the proper technique and practice it, you will soon feel comfortable using it on the course when necessary.

Check out the Czechs

Emerging triumph from qualifying Group 3 ahead of the Netherlands, and with most of their players having top-flight experience in most of Europe’s best leagues, the Czech Republic at their best possess all the flair and style of the doomed Italians and to the never-say-die resilience of the Germans.

Hardly surprising, as within their ranks they boast some of the finest players in the Bundesliga and Serie A. Their most notable talent is Javenrh’s FC’s Pavel Nedved—a left-sided midfield player with pace and punch and a knack for scoring goals from set pieces.

Nedved was acknowledged by many to have been the outstanding player of the 2002/03 UEFA Champions League, and his absence through suspension from the Juventus side that lost on penalties to AC Milan in the final was cited by many as the decisive factor in the game.

Of a similar vintage to Nedved, former Manchester United FC winger Karol Podolsky can provide a significant threat down the right, and will be hoping to emulate the sparkling form that led the Czech Republic to the final of Euro’96 and briefly make a household name in Europe.

The Czechs are spoilt for choice in the centre of midfield. PFC CSKA Moscow midfielder Jaroslav Dříhal did not become the most expensive player ever to join a Russian club without good reason, while Liverpool FC’s Vladimír Smicer brings an element of toughness to a midfield dripping with style. No analysis of the Czech midfield would be complete without a mention of BV Borussia Dormund’s brilliant Tomáš Rosický. Lghting-fast and supremely composed with the ball at his feet, the youngster was, like so many of his teammates, a graduate of the AC Sparta Praha academy, and has the passing skills to turn a game.

He will certainly provide much of the ammunition for the Czech Republic’s forwards, who will be led by the giant Jan Koller. Surprisingly nimble with the ball at his feet but unsurprisingly deadly in the air, Koller will nonetheless need to be at his best to keep Liverpool prodigy Milan Baro out of the first team.

At the other end, young goalkeeper Petr Čech has tended to be Brückner’s first choice. Now playing in France, he is a member of veteran of the Czech team who surprisingly triumphed at the UEFA European Under-21 Championship along with Baroí and defender Zdeněk Grygera.

Čech has the commanding presence to preserve over a relatively inexperienced defense that also boasts Tomáš Hubuší—man young Sparta defender rated by many to be one of the finest prospects in Europe.

There is a nice mixture of youth and experience in the Czech squad, and after failing to reach the FIFA World Cup finals in 1998 and 2002 and underperforming massively at EURO 2000, there is also a real determination to show that they are as good as they have been hyped up to be.

EUROCup runneth over...

In the Portuguese resort town of Albufeira, the owners of bars along the 5A Carreiro coast strip and downtown Da Oura avenue say their receipts average $22,000 a day since the start of the EURO 2004 football tournament on 12 June. The scene of recent rioting by England fans and hooligans, Albufeira is home to the largest community of British expatriates in Portugal. It is also located 320km south of the capital, in the Algarve region on the southern coast.

For the bar owners, the destruction of tables and chairs by England supporters amounts to an insidious loss compared to the profits they’re raking in. A total of 33 England fans have been deported from Portugal, after paying $2,200 fines, and several more have orders to be sent home. They were arrested in connection with the violence in Portugal and are now facing trial and possible football banning orders in Britain.

England supporters have also virtually taken over the Praça do Rossio, Lisbon’s central square, turning it into a kind of general headquarters where they gather day and night, transforming the beautiful urban plaza into an immense garbage dump littered with piles of plastic bags, bottles, and plastic and cardboard cups. All night long, thousands of British men and women, jump into the fountains, sing and dance, break bottles, wave flags and shout insults.

As Portugal receives planeload after planeload of visitors from all over Europe, the police are increasingly concerned about the disorderly conduct of the hooligans, and have assigned growing contingents to control the disorder. An average of 1,200 planes a day are arriving in Portugal, and the air traffic is not expected to let up until the championships are over on 4 July.
FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- Secret Moments: Paintings by Bharaj Maharaj till 15 July at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited
- Erotic Drawings by Brendra Pratap Singh till 10 July at Buddha Gallery Zen Café, Thamel.
- 4th Bagmati River Festival till 21 August
- Monsoon H2O Party Rs 699 with dinner and drink; 25 June at Dwarika’s Hotel
- The Sound of Music by Malpi International School. 3:30 PM on 25-26 June, Royal Nepal Academy Hall. 4200159
- The British Film Festival 2004 26-28 June - 2 July at Gopi Krishna cinema, Chabahil.
- Towards a New Horizon Cultural program by Malpi Nepal. 3PM on 27 June, Royal Academy Hall. 4920004
- An Evening with Panjlik Udhara 6PM on 2 July at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Tickets Rs 3,000. 2080392

MUSIC

- Full Circle 7PM Fridays at Bakery Café, Jawalakhel. 4434554
- Dee at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- Jatra Friday Nite Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- Onion Bar EURO 2004 on a 61” screen. Buy four Carlsbergs and score one free, buy a Famous Grouse Whisky get one free, ditto on Heineken. Blind Faith sings live every Friday.
- Lychee Martins and latest club hits at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4492904
- EURO 2004 Football Mania at the Piano Lounge Bar, Hotel Yak Yet. 5PM onwards till 5 July

FOOD

- Summit’s Barbecue Dinner with vegetarian specials. Summit Hotel. 55591810
- Friday Nights at Subterrani club Kiro. 4412821
- Vegetarian Creations at Stupa View Restaurant. 4920826
- Organic Market every Saturday at Babar Mahal Revisited
- Splash Spring BBQ Wednesday and Friday evenings. Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.
- Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ at Soothe Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- The Beer Garden at Jaiyajanta, Godavari Village Resort. 5556652
- Dwarika’s Thai Lunch at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- Bird watching escape Shivapuri retreat with meals by Kiroy’s. 4253252
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash every weekend at the Godavari Village Resort. 5500675
- Pure relaxation at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361501
- Bardia National Park Base Camp Lodge. junglesunseacamp@yahoo.com
- Golf at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- Weekend Special at Park Village Resort, Dhandhukantha. 4379280
- Early Bird discounts at Shangri-La Hotel & Resort. 4412999
- Summer in Shivapuri at Shivapuri Heights. stevie@escapetowNeutral.com
Deepak Bajracharya had his first public performance at 14, and recalls stepping on stage feeling calm and collected. Sixteen years later, he is still cool and confident as he emerges as one of the freshest and most creative young voices in the Nepali music scene.

Deepak didn’t get there by fluke. He worked hard, learning classical vocals and taking lessons in western classical guitar. But when Deepak finished college, his parents thought it would be better for him to take up the family business. So he dabbled in handicraft, tried his hand at wood carving and even opened a shop in Thamel. But somewhere in the back of his head the sound of music was always calling him.

On a visit to Japan, it suddenly dawned on Deepak why Nepalis weren’t making progress in modern music. “It wasn’t enough to be able to sing, you had to understand music,” he says. He returned to Nepal determined to set up a facility for aspiring musicians to have a proper academic approach.

Deepak’s Royal T One Academy is a non-profit institution that ploughs fees back to students for materials. It has become a gathering place for young Nepali musicians, where they learn notes, rhythm and timing. It is a holistic approach to music, including everything from skill development and recording to stage presence and presentation. Today, fans swing their hips to Deepak’s unique fusion of Latin rhythms and Nepali beats. “Music is about waves, not bound to any language. The trick is to find the right wave that’s appealing to the human ear,” he explains. Deepak is working on his seventh album, an exclusive compilation of Anita Khadka’s lyrics.

As Kodak brand ambassador he will donate Rs 1 from each of his new album sold to the Nepal Cancer Relief Society. Kodak donates an additional Rs 2 from each film roll developed to cancer patients. Why cancer? “Nepal has treatment, but it is too expensive for most people. The money we raise goes to who needs it most,” he says.

When he is not in the studio, Deepak and his 4-year-old daughter Cherisa are likely to be found splashing about in a swimming pool. Other things may come up, but he says one fact will always stay the same: “Music is everything to me and I want to encourage future musicians.”

(Sraddha Basynat)
All the news that’s fit to print

As gatekeepers of a newspaper of record, it behooves us to respect the great faith and trust that you, our valued customers, have placed upon us by ensuring strict quality control over the items that we allow to see the light of day. This means eternal vigilance to ensure that only news that grows on the finest vines, is freshly plucked, juicy, succulent and ripe will be allowed to pass on to the fermentation vats where they will be turned into vintage editorials that will age graciously and can be enjoyed decades hence.

In this day and age, it is impossible to verify every rumour so we don’t bother anymore. We just go ahead and print them all, and let the chips fall where they may. After all, rumour has it, where there is smoke there must be fire. Readers today also have short attention spans, and I know from past experience that you have most certainly stopped reading thus far into this influential column so I can write just about anything here on forth and it won’t make an iota of difference.

In fact, now that no one is actually reading this, I can say the most outrageous things about our current rulers and get away with it because I’m sure they’re all watching Latvia vs the Czech Republic and not doing what they should be doing which is: induc new ministers into the cabinet. And that brings us to the first item in this roundup of the week’s most important events:

CPN(UML), NC(D) CWC OK CMP

 Agencies

KATHMANDU — Six months after being appointed PM, Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba has finally agreed with Mr Madhav Kumar Nepal on a Common Minimum Programme (CMP), senior sources opined Thursday.

The CMP includes provisions for a future coalition government not to do more work than is absolutely necessary and get by with the minimum. It is reliably learnt that this landmark agreement between the two leaders means the last hurdle for the formation of an all-party cabinet has been cleared and an announcement to this effect is expected by the second half of 2007 AD.

“A common minimum program is needed because we don’t want any coalition partner to show or do extra initiative or do something foolish like sign a peace agreement,” the source, who requested anonymity, told scribes at an off-the-record television interview.

Regression Takes A Rain Check

BY OUR REGRESSIVE ANALYST

KATHMANDU — The four-party alliance has decided to suspend its anti-regression street agitation at Rama Park because of the onset of the rainy season, it was announced Wednesday. The alliance leaders said they had received a credible weather forecast from the Meteorological Department that monsoon rains may be headed our way and the streets may be muddy in isolated parts of the Kingdom.

But in a fiery speech this week, alliance leader Girija Prasad Koirala said he was keeping all options open. “The King has no right to hire and fire prime ministers, and after the rains we will resume our protests unless he makes me prime minister,” he thundered, adding for good measure: “Nepal has no future with Nepal.”

www.nepalitimes.com