D eputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari has had to work, somewhat literally, on a war footing to prepare for Friday’s budget announcement.

Appointed only two weeks ago, the 68-year-old minister (pictured, right) needed to bring himself up-to-date with state finance, accommodate the interests of coalition partners and still be true to his UML party platform.

Adhikari has already been mocked for toning down his position on slashing the military and royal palace budgets. When his party was agitating on the streets those were great slogans, but things seem to change once in government.

Senior sources in the Finance Ministry told us privately that Adhikari has come under pressure from Prime Minister Deuba, who holds the royal palace affairs and defence portfolios, not to touch the two allocations.

UML central committee members grilled Adhikari earlier this week for not being more assertive. In last year’s budget, security expenses stood at Rs 13.5 billion and nearly Rs 3.0 million was set aside for the palace. The increase in the military budget has been justified on the grounds that it is still within three percent of the GDP.

The government’s mid-term evaluation of last year’s budget had stated that security expenses would have to be raised, but did not say by how much. The army wants a 30 percent increase for new recruitment and weapons.

Even though only three-quarters of the last development budget was actually spent, allocations are being raised from Rs 41 billion to Rs 47 billion this year. Donors want a cap on development expenditure unless there is a change of government.

The Finance minister has been working on a strategy he calls ‘Participatory Community Based Projects’ to increase development spending by giving grants to village bodies. But the plan is controversial because some believe the money allocated for grassroots service delivery could fall into Maoist hands.

But Adhikari is not worried about this. He says, “We want to use this budget as a confidence building measure to build trust with the Maoists.”

Other members of the coalition are sharply opposed to the money falling into Maoist hands. Science and Technology Minister Balaram Gharitungar of the RPP said the idea was absurd. “We haven’t discussed it, so how can such an idea be implemented,” he asked.
Mandated legitimacy

How much freedom are we willing to forego today to ensure future Nepal has the full spectrum of liberties?

On the opposite page, CK Lal contended two weeks ago that Deuba holds office at the pleasure of the king. (‘The lure of legitimacy’, #203), and gives his audience a lesson on the evolution of American foreign policy, alluding to ‘regime sponsors looking for peace and stability rather than democracy and justice’.

Without doubt, American foreign policy has transformed in response to the threat of terrorism. And in the process of the war on terror, the US has forged alliances with the likes of President Musharraf in Pakistan, Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan and Jayal alivvi in Iraq. All these offer examples of ‘mandated legitimation’, and yet, the state of geopolitical affairs, are indispensable forms of governance. While these examples pose a complex system of double standards and hypocrisy to some, they exemplify skillfully crafted, credible policy initiatives to others. Lal’s implicit suggestion of the US as a ‘regime sponsor’ is not uncommon. His play on reductionism by superimposing past outcomes on current trends however, is a major defeat. Nepal’s current situation is not a consequence of the ‘certainty’ fostered by ‘dactrorial stronghold’, it is a direct-by-product of a number of factors, the ineptitude and lack of culpability of past, ‘legitimately’ being the most prominent. Lal’s assertion that ‘competence and cleanliness aren’t attributes that determine the fate of a government’ is absolutely correct in the context of a semi-functional or even, dysfunctional democratic environment such as Nepal. In any functional democracy these attributes serve as the hallmarks of credible candidacy. There is a palpable shift from liberty and the promise of peace. The question is, which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Perhaps the more relevant question is, how much liberty are we willing to forego in the present to ensure that upcoming generations are extended the full spectrum of liberties in the future? What is the cost of Deuba’s premiership as a form of ‘mandated legitimation’, the cost of daily riots, general strikes, or the potential benefits of a negotiated peace? Lal extends an argument that pecks at every possible flaw in Deuba’s nomination as prime minister, but eludes every opportunity at referring to alternatives and purposely avoids any reference to the immediate past. Lal champions a brand of legitimacy that can only come from the ballot—a virtual impossibility considering the present security situation in Nepal. But does the inability to democratically endow legitimation necessarily imply that the Nepali state remains without a constitutionally mandated

LETTERS

BARRACHARYA
After reading the troubling story about Puma Raj Bajracharya (I do sue the US government’, #203) I figured that although unfortunately I can’t help him with legal matters, I can assure him that as a Nepali American, I will make sure I go to the polls and vote for John Kerry in November with Bajracharya’s name in mind.

S Thapa, email

JOYRIDE
Re: ‘Kunda Dixit’s ‘Journey’ (#204). This is to let your esteemed readers know that the $15 million approved by the World Bank Executive Board for the Poverty Alleviation Fund is yet to be formalized by signing of the Agreement between the World Bank and the HMG, Nepal. Hence, it is not true that the Fund is ‘lying idle’ as stated. The Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) is ready to launch its programs. PAF Secretariat, Chakupat

BAD FUEL
Reading Mumta Bajracharya’s ‘Killer kils’ (#201) was surprised that she, like many other previous writers on this issue has sidelined the main cause of pollution from brick kilns. Many studies and surveys conducted on the brick industry by NESS, GTZ, ENPHO, DANIDA, CEN, have revealed that the primary cause of pollution and health hazards are from high sulphur coal. Most of the brick kilns use coal that contains over 5 percent sulfur. This is sulfur which produces sulfur dioxide and causes the most damage. It not only has bad effect on the health of the workers and surrounding population, but also damages the metallic chimneys of the kilns so they don’t last more than six months. Once there is leakage in the chimneys no matter how high the chimney is, you have oxides of sulfur and nitrogen in and around the kilns. Of course, you can introduce new technologies, but to reduce the oxides you have to burn fuels with less sulfur or capture the acidic oxides during combustion. In this context we did conduct some research which gave very good results. More than 80% of the sulfur dioxide could be captured by desulfurizing agents in the coal during combustion. The standards and specification of the fuels used should be stated and monitored and the emissions standards should also be adopted. The question of top soil loss is another major issue. But without clay, you can’t make bricks. The only way you can get around this problem is to use alternative building blocks: stone or concrete blocks. New technologies will not solve the problems of the brick industry, and short-term measures could create other unforeseen problems.

Ramesh Singh, email

MARKET DRIVE
Re: Ashutosh Tiwari’s Strictly Business column, ‘Imagine no free market’, #203). I am not sure what Tiwari means by ‘market-friendly mechanisms’. I don’t want goods and services provided to us. I am assuming he is referring to markets that provide economic variables such as the basic demand and supply are not available in Nepal, specially with poor infrastructure and political instability. When economic variables and indicators are not recorded, the government should determine how or what we want goods and services provided to us. Whether it is fuel, or an airline or a VASAT provider, most of the businesses in Nepal are forced to act on the market, rather than with economic indicators.

D Mahat, Baltimore, USA

KOSI
In trying to be balanced in his coverage of the renewed Indian interest in building the Kosi dam,
government to run it? Isn’t this alternative precisely what the 1990 People’s Movement was designed to eradicate?

More alarming is Lal’s subtle suggestion that vigilantism will reign supreme over due process and the established laws of the land. To insinuate that Girija Prasad Koirala’s ‘negotiations’ may prove to be the solution to Nepal’s ailments is a bold proposal indeed.

Perhaps Koirala’s efforts would have appeared more genuine had he focused on negotiations prior to Deuba’s re-instatement. And on whose mandated legitimism is Koirala offering a column that provides him de facto legitimism?

If a debate on legitimism is the goal, perhaps the right thing to do would be to first create a level playing field by critically examining the legitimism of every past elected official (or for that matter, any member of civil society). Deuba may not be a ‘legitimate’ representative of the people (according to Lal’s definition), but as the last democratically elected premier he is the closest thing Nepal has. The very criticism of Deuba that Lal offers, is what makes him the right man for the job. Getting Deuba out of office a second time will not be as easy, and therein lies the fallacy of Lal’s position: Deuba’s sponsorship includes his party, his constituency and the broader alliance. Provided the democratic environment is brought back on track, Deuba’s subservience to the king is limited to the king’s stature as a constitutional figurehead. For all intents and purposes, Deuba, by consent of his political alliance (which in turn represents the people), has the necessary legitimacy to govern the country.

Depta Shah is a graduate student of international affairs in New York.

Naxals in Naxal

Peace in Nepal will remain elusive until we overhaul our political economy

Hyderabad—When regimes change, frequent fier accessoires change too. Since Chandrababu Naidu was defeated in the Andhra Pradesh elections two months ago, laptop bags on planes have been replaced by briefcases of career bureaucrats.

At the NITR International Airport, nerds in jeans nattering in Americanese into Nokians are replaced by a sedate crowd of dhoti-clad middle-aged men speaking Telugu.

Outside the terminal building, beggars have staged a campback. Cyberabad has driven them out of sight. Now, they knock at the car windows demanding their dues.

The vagaries of nature, however, remain the same. In a week when forecasters had predicted daily thunderstorms, not a drop of rain fell on the Deccan. The tar of recently widened roads has started melting. Naidu was too busy turning his capital into a Silicon plateau to invest resources in renovating storage reservoirs that have traditionally insured farmers against drought.

During the Naidu regime, subsidies such as tax holidays, public investment in infrastructure to facilitate private enterprise and loans from public banks on demand were reserved for the rich, while the poor were expected to fend for themselves in the free market. The tyranny of the market drove many cotton farmers to commit suicide.

Others embraced Maoism. UNDP warns against five kinds of economic growth that fuel discontentment in society. Jobless growth has no meaning for the poor. Ruthless growth increases social inequality. Voiceless growth denies the right of dissent. Futureless growth causes the deterioration of commons. And rootless growth causes alienation among the deprived, leading to social upheavals.

Naidu looked to the US for inspiration, not the UN. So, for Andhara Pradesh’s digitally deprived and marginalised, the swanky Banjara Hills in Hyderabad is another country. Earlier this year, Maoist insurgents from the CPI-ML tried to assassinate Naidu with a landmine. The Chief Minister survived, and his successor negotiated a ceasefire with the naxal. (Lower case ‘n’ stands for India’s Maoists, while upper case ‘N’ is just outside the palace walls in Kathmandu.) The truce still holds, and there has been no loss of life since 15 May.

Despite the fact that in Nepal have a Unified Marxist-Leninist finance minister, the budget to be made public on Friday will, in all likelihood, set the same tone for the Nepali economy that had led to the growth of violent insurgency in the country. Which means it will reflect the interests of the Washington Consensus and not the United Nations or Amnesty International.

In Andhara Pradesh, the People’s Union for Civil Liberties was successful in convincing the government that political economy and the armed insurgency were closely linked. Hence the ceasefire, though fragile, still holds and the government prepares the ground for meaningful talks with the naxals.

In Nepal, the dilemma is a lack of peace activists

Navin Singh Khadka seems to have missed out a couple of vital points that make this mammoth project a folly (‘A high dam on the Kosi’, #203). Let me enumerate:

a. A 100 sq km reservoir will put Nepal’s most fertile valleys permanently under water.

b. The Kosi-High Dam and the Sun Kosi Diversion are incompatable, building one will make the other worthless.

c. The Indians are digging navigation on the Kosi as a lobbyist, but dredging a river with that kind of sediment load will make it make barge-pulling impractical.

d. A high dam on the Kosi will not reduce the danger of floods in Bihar, since many of the big floods in recent years have been on Chure and Bhiro Madhwas rivers, not the Himalayan ones, as we have seen this week.

No doubt, a compromise is possible, but will it happen given the track record of India-Nepal cooperation on the Kosi?

Lok Raj Aryal, Kathmandu

DANKE

This is to thank you for posting your news and analysis on www.nepaltimes.com. As a medical student in Germany, the Nepali Times is the first site that I visit to gather a comprehensive perspective on what is happening in Nepal. Thank you.

Birat Niraula, Berlin

Correction

In an alternative current (p. 8 #204), the installed capacity of the Khandhari small hydro project should have been 2.5 kílwatt. ‘In the secret success of Nepali soap’ (p. 7 #204) the photo caption was inadvertently dropped. It should have read: ‘Sambhu Lama of Farm House Herbal lends a hand in his handmade soap assembly line’.  Editor

Pancasonic Ideas for life.
A
fter its well-publicised sweep into the Maoist heartland in the Rukumkot area, the Nepalese army has returned to its barracks. This was the first major incursion of its kind into what the Maoists consider their base area.

The soldiers didn’t see much action, and Rukum’s CDO, Chet Prasad Upreet, said this proves there is no Maoist stronghold in his district. Major MB Mahara in Misrikot agrees: “The Maoists did not even try to stop us. Whatever they may say, they don’t have any control.”

The locals know better. Three weeks after the army ended its operation, the rebels are back in Rukumkot. “We knew the army was coming,” Deepak, a Maoist district committee member, tells us. “We hid in the jungle for a couple of days while the soldiers searched the houses. When they left, we came back.”

The army’s operation was bigger than anything seen in these hills before. It was well-equipped and had air support. It would have been difficult for the Maoists to stop them, so the guerrillas simply decided they wouldn’t battle on the army’s terms. The only thing that really seems to have changed in these rugged mountains is the local view of the army. The security forces have a poor reputation in Rukum. Many villagers remember the atrocities committed by police during the 1998 Kilo Sierra 2 operation, which led to a big increase in local support for the Maoists. The same locals now say the army has “improved”. One farmer said: “The soldiers asked in question, but did not harm us this time. Instead, they gave us medicine.”

In village between Misrikot and Rukumkot, we come across a farmer who remembered a police operation three years ago. “When we heard they were coming, so we all ran away in the middle of the night”, he recalls. “Of those who stayed behind, nine were arrested and later killed. Three were cousins of mine, and they were not Maoists. Fortunately, this time things were different.”

But the locals are worried that the Maoists will accuse them of giving information to the soldiers. So far, it looks like there haven’t been any repercussions. The Battle of Rukum, as some dubbed it, ended with no bloodshed. Rebels gathered each other by raising the lai salam, petty criminals are punished by the “people’s courts”, and the Maoists decide whether a development organisation can work in their area or not.

The Maoists are confident enough to give educated people surprised freedom in voicing criticism. In the presence of Maoist cadres, Kangrej Purma Bahadur Shah tells us the rebels are right that chance is needed in Rukum. “But they are wrong in their approach. It used to be peaceful here, we had a choice. Now we have to obey their orders,” Purma Bahadur says.

The main group of village is that they are forced to feed Maoists or take part in indoctrination. A 15-year-old boy recently returned from a two-week mission in Birgunj. “They took one person from every household. I had to work on the farms of Maoist martyrs, attend a sports tournament and listen to a political program.” It was difficult because my family also needed my help at home,” he says.

Ranendra Dhungana, chairman, Rajendra Bahadur Shah in Misrikot, admits he is forced to donate rice, corn and money to the rebels in his home village because his family still lives. The only government presence outside the district headquarters are health workers, teachers and postalmen. All pay a five percent tax on their government salaries to the “janaskar”. The schools will soon have to follow the Maoist curriculum, and teacher Lila Pun says next month he has to attend a twelve-week training program that some of his colleagues have already attended.

In Balikot, the Maoists have redistributed land that previously belonged to former MP Dhrubha Bikram Shah to six Dalit families. “I am grateful to the Maoists,” says a 15-year-old Dalit boy. “Before they came, I was not allowed to do puja, I could not drink the same water as high caste people and I had to sit in the back of the class.

No more.”}

In Rukumkot, three weeks after the army operation, the Maoists are back in their stronghold in midwestern Nepal

RUKUMKOT

The Anglo-Saxon disease

Nepal should be more like Europe, and less like America or Mao’s China.

Productivity in most European countries is higher than in America or Britain. Companies are profitable, exports are doing well, all the usual measures are being met. So why, oh why, does it have to be changed?

The answer lies in a look at the evolution of the western market economy. Economists talk about two broadly defined types of capitalism—Anglo-Saxon and European. The first is how the Americans and the post-Thatcher British do business. Robust pro-enterprise policies, deregulation, minimal government intervention and a market-friendly background and minimal environmental protection.

On the democratic side of Cold War Europe, faced with Soviet Communism and powerful left-wing and Maoist forces in their own countries, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the rest evolved what’s known as a “social market economy”.

This meant building up private companies, giving them government favours in exchange for workers’ rights and encouraging a mixed approach to the market. A little left, a little right. It worked wonderfully. Some of us think it had as much to do with defending Moscow as Ronald Reagan’s defence budgets and bellicose rhetoric. Perhaps more.

However, in the current post-cold war era, we are gripped by globalised free market fundamentalism. Social markets are a threat to the fundus, so they must go. Capital manipulators attack countries that don’t follow austere Anglo-Saxon ways. What they’re doing is dumping on the European worker. What they say they’re doing is building a sustainable system.

None of this is happening with any debate whatsoever, save among obviously interested parties like public service unions and right-wing think tanks funded by investment banks. Not to mention, the World Bank, IMF, the US treasury department and, for a time, Church and had to carry food, help cook, sleep in the jungle during the day and walk all night. Thousands of Maoists and porters assembled in Bhurpatan in preparation for the attack. Half were women. After the battle, he had to carry a wounded Maoist for two days without food or sleep, while a dozen or so carried the rest. He chose them. “I was very tired, hungry and very scared,” the boy recalls. “The smell of rotting bodies was awful. I still have nightmares.”

No one we spoke to in Rukum confirmed minors have been recruited into the Maoist militia, and all say no children were used in the Beni attack, although some of the porters were as young as 14. However, students sometimes have to wear Maoist uniforms to make them get used to the idea that one day they will become soldiers in the ‘janasakar’.

The boy tells us: “They say they fight for the people, but I don’t want to be a member of their janasaka. I am a student, and want to become a teacher. I want peace, and I want a chance to pass SSL this year.”

The Anglo-Saxon disease

Nepal should be more like Europe, and less like America or Mao’s China.
A delicate balancing act and a daily struggle to feed his family

KISHORE NEPAL in MUGU

As the helicopter from Nepalgunj unloaded sacks of rice at Mugu’s Talch airfield earlier this month, a ragged bunch of porters rushed forward even before the rotors had stopped. They earned money transporting the sacks to the district headquarters in Gamgadhi, a two-hour walk away.

One of the porters wasn’t interested in the sacks. He came over to us and offered to carry our camera equipment. Dhan Singh Biswokarma used to be a blacksmith in Dhurum village and had a prosperous business crafting gold ornaments. But with the insurgency, anyone with any gold in those remote mountains of western Nepal either sold it or took it down to Nepalgunj and Lucknow.

So, Dan Singh travelled to India, where he portered at pilgrimage sites to earn money. He then got stuck in Nepal when the Maoists started preventing villagers from going across the border, so he now works as an airport porter in Talch to support his wife and four children. “Luckily, my elder daughter eloped, that is good. She is happy, and I am relieved of a great burden. I hope my younger daughter follows her example,” he says.

He sees that we notice his unkempt look and dirty clothes. “Don’t worry, sa b,” he tells us, “my clothes are dirty because if I wash them they’ll fall apart. They are the only clothes I have.” Since he is such a good talker, we hire Dan Singh more as a guide than a porter.

He takes us to Rara. There are no tourists, but there is a lodge near the army camp guarding the national park. It is incongruous to see guns bristling amidst the breathtaking beauty of the shimmering lake perched over the Mugu Karnali valley with the great mountains beyond.

The rice porters have lumbered off to Gamgadhi, each carrying a 44 kg sack. The rice is supposedly for the local people of this chronically hungry region, but in the district headquarters we hear stories of the rice finding its way to the local market where it is distilled into rakshi. The CDO knows about this, but can’t do much. Last month, he sent 30 sacks of rice to a village running out of food, but the Maoists looted it along the way.

Gamgadhi has become a refuge camp for DVC secretaries. They live in rented rooms, calculating the budget allocations for villages they can’t go to. With the fiscal year closing, there are a lot of fictitious projects that have suddenly been ‘finished’, and the DDC accountant is busy writing out cheques.

Recently, however, the Maoists warned the secretaries to behave themselves, and apparently the reports have suddenly become much more accurate.

The ex-MLA of the area, Chandra Bahadur Shahi, says Gamgadhi has become a government garrison. The Maoists destroyed the suspension bridges across the Karnali, and seven Mugu YDCs are now cut off.

In Gamgadhi itself a siege mentality prevails. The civil servants fear for their lives, the security forces have orders to protect themselves and their weapons first. Every morning, a procession of senior civil servants, police and soldiers walks down from the heavily guarded barricade where they spend the night. They stay in their offices from ten to five, while the soldiers and police laze around the bhuttis drinking and talking boisterously. After, they all troop off again to the army base to spend the night. In the bazaar official curfew hours are from seven till five the next morning, but there isn’t a single soldier to enforce it.

Mugu’s only airfield at Talch took 25 years to complete and went into operation recently. Two months ago, the Maoists bombed its small tower building and the air traffic controller now sits at a desk with a portable radio set to guide the once-a-week chartered flights from Nepalgunj.

Dhan Singh’s son is attending school, but the teachers are absent half the time. The schools are being forced by the Maoists to adopt their revolutionary calendar with a holiday on Mao Zedong’s birthday. Seventy five percent of the schools in Mugu already follow it. “I have decided to pull my son out,” Dhan Singh says. “I don’t want him to go to school to learn to fight. I want him to learn to read and write.”

We ask Dhan Singh whether the Maoists are good or bad. “I can’t say. They are against discrimination and told us not to call ourselves kamsis anymore, they stopped gambling and alcoholism and are encouraging cooperative farming,” he says carefully, weighing each word, “but at the same time they are killing people, disturbing schools and extorting money from us. How can I say whether they are good or bad? I am only telling you what I have seen.”

From left: Mugu’s only airfield at Talch was completed recently, but the Maoists immediately destroyed the tower building (centre). Talch’s air traffic controller sits at his desk waiting for a flight from Nepalgunj.

Dhan Singh Biswokarma’s world

From left: Mugu’s only airfield at Talch was completed recently, but the Maoists immediately destroyed the tower building (centre). Talch’s air traffic controller sits at his desk waiting for a flight from Nepalgunj.
Going underground

Kathmandu’s groundwater is contaminated and getting worse

NARESH NEWAR

The monsoon is a time that nature gives Kathmandu another chance. The rising waters wash away the garbage piled up on the banks of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. The unrebukable stench of a river-turned-sewer temporarily disappears. And the rains seep down into the ground, recharging the valley’s dangerously receding water table.

Because of the recent exodus from the countryside, Kathmandu Valley’s population is now beyond its carrying capacity. This limit to growth is now evident in that most vital ingredient necessary for human life: water.

The water carried by the mains from the state-owned Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) is woefully inadequate in meeting urban demand. In the dry season its pumps only meet 60 percent of the total 200 million litres per day that the valley needs. It is a luxury to have pipes that actually carry water, and many residents have attached pumps at the Water England Centre, the oldest lab in the county. But in the past 15 years, only 2,000 people have had their water tested, and they were mostly hotels and factories, he adds. Getting tested doesn’t solve the problem. If nitrates are found, they are difficult to remove.

As groundwater extraction grows, water organisations in the Valley are trying to spread awareness among residents about economical use of water. Only 2 percent of the water supply is used for drinking and cooking. The remainder is mainly for cleaning and hygienic purposes. The problem lies with the rich and middle class households, where water is wasted on washing machines, toilet flushing, watering gardens and washing cars. A study by the Centre for Integrated Urban Development on household water use found that rich households with less than five members use more water than eight members of a poor family.

“There needs to be a change in the social attitudes in every household to help prevent the excessive use of water,” says Amaya from the NGO Forum, who has just started “value-based water use education” to raise awareness among Kathmandu Valley residents. Since April, Amaya and his team from the NGO Forum have been busy visiting neighbourhoods, both rich and poor, to talk about economic use of water. But it is an uphill battle to get people to not think only of themselves. Says Amaya: “It is sad, people know how important water is, yet they waste it.”
Sisters on a long march

Sarita and Laxmi carry doko's instead of school bags

BIBI FUNERAL in NAMCHE BAZAR

The warm, wet monsoon mists move up the valley. High above the din of the frothing Dudhi Kosi the sun is rising from behind Sagarmatha. Through a gap in the clouds, sunlight illuminates the mountains in a golden glow. The pine forests glitter with last night’s rain.

The few trekkers still in Khumbu this season soak in the beauty from the balcony of their lodge. On the trail below, Sarita and Laximi Rai have no time to admire the view. They adjust straps on their doksos on their backs before heaving 45 kg loads on their backs for the long steep climb up to Namche Bazaar.

Seventeen-year-old Sarita and her cousin Laxmi, 15, are still wearing their school uniforms. If their flimsy shirts and slippers are not enough to ward off the rain and cold on their long march from Jiri over the 3,500 m Lamjura Pass.

We cross the Timsing La, the road to the village after Maoists threatened to recruit students from schools. Last week, they were carrying 45 kg sacks of rice to Namche to earn money as porters.

Sarita and Laxmi were students in grades ten and nine at a local government high school in Jibukilling last year. When there were rumours that the Maoists were recruiting students for militia training, most better off families sent their children off to Phaplu, Kathmandu or Pokhara. But Sarita and Laxmi’s families couldn’t afford to send them anywhere, and because of the drop in treks along the Jiri trail, couldn’t take care of them either.

“Instead of just staying at home, we thought it would be better to earn some money as porters,” says Sarita. Laxmi says she hasn’t seen her family for six months. She misses her mother very much. Maoist posters stuck on the trailside boulders and walls of houses exhort every family to send one person to join the ‘people’s war’. The threat has emptied the villages, and there are hardly any young people left east and south of Phaplu. Some young boys and girls who stayed behind have been forced marched for Maoist indoctrination and training.

Even government officials and the security forces are restricted to Salleri and the airfield in Phaplu. Members of local bodies have received death threats and have all resigned. There is a large contingent of armed police near Lulco guarding the airfield, but the sight of the heavily armed men in uniform, ironically, bring feelings of insecurity.

Manoh Gurung, 27, was an English teacher at the school in Jibukilling and taught Sarita and Laxmi. Today, he runs a small teashop in Nameche. He had to quit his job because of Maoist threats and fled his village before the security forces arrived. “We people living in the countryside are trapped between the army and the Maoists,” says Gurung. “There is a lot of terror.”

The sun is now blazing down from the deep blue sky, and Sarita and Laxmi have almost reached Namche. Tomorrow is Saturday, the weekly marketplace. They have to sell off the rice and get back to Jiri in time to hand another load for next Saturday. I ask them if they like their job, and regret the question as soon as the words come out.

“Don’t like it. This is not our work, the loads are heavy,” says Sarita. She is worried about the future. They want to go home and complete their studies.

Journalists are supposed to know things, so Sarita asked a bit hesitantly: “How long will this war last?” I couldn’t have an answer. That evening on the BBC, Nepali Service the prime minister said he has ruled out a ceasefire with the Maoists for the time being.

First train in Birgani on Friday

The Birgani container port will receive its first goods train with the arrival of a train from Kolkata port, four years behind schedule.

The port was completed in 2000 with World Bank aid and is being managed by the Container Corporation of India and will facilitate better transit from Kolkata and Haldia of goods bound to and from Nepal.

The train that left Kolkata Dock on Monday will be the first Indian train to cross national boundaries when it arrives in Birgani on 16 July, covering the 762 km in three days. Consul general of Nepal in Kolkata Yuba Rai Bhusal, who flagged off the train, told The Statesman newspaper: “Traders in Nepal used to complain of that it was difficult to transport containers from Indian ports. This mode of transport will solve that problem and it will be cost effective too.” The train is carrying wheat and soy beans for the World Food Program’s activities in Nepal.

India’s private Sahara Air is to begin daily Kathmandu-Dehli flights on 21 July with Boeing 737-800 aircraft. This will bring to four daily flights between the two capitals, the other flights are operated by Royal Nepal Airlines, Indian Airlines and Jet Airways. Sahara is also looking at connecting Kathmandu to Kolkata, Mumbai and even Lucknow.

Royal Nepal Airlines is back to full fleet strength of two Boeing 737-700s, and expects its severely-disrupted schedules to get back to normal. Nepal’s flag carrier also hopes to order two brand new Boeing 737-800s directly from the manufacturer, and is currently doing a detailed profitability study. Managing Director Mohan Khati told us: “We will use the planes for our shorter Indian routes, and deploy the 737’s on the longer Hong Kong, Bangkok, Dubai and Singapore flights.”

An ICAO-supported study of the airline’s assets are also underway, and the final report is expected in three months. The ICAO team is expected to recommend that Royal Nepal Airlines be partially privatised by selling 45 percent of its shares to a reputed international carrier, 45 percent to be retained by the government and 10 percent to be sold to the airline’s staff.

Meanwhile, Cosmic Air is expected to be the first Nepal private domestic carrier to operate jets and start international flights by end-August. The airline is adding two second-hand Fokker 100 jets and begin operations to Delhi and Doha. Cosmic, which operates a fleet of Dorniers and SAAB 340 turboprops on domestic routes also wants to fly Kathmandu-Bhairawa-Lucknow.

Nepal’s opening sky

Nepal’s aviation sector is set to see a boom in the coming months as another Indian private airline begins operations to Kathmandu and Nepal airlines add aircraft.
Coalition partners are worried grants will fall into Maoist hands

Some international agencies that have been monitoring the budget preparation suspect Adhikari’s community participation scheme is a ruse for political patronage. “It looks like a political gimmick,” said one official. “It remains to be seen if these programs will end up merely as duplication of other similar programs in the budget.” Others are worried the money will allow Maoists to take the credit for development, or worse, subside their war.

Shankar Sharma of the National Planning Commission says Adhikari’s plans need not necessarily involve Maoists. “The idea is to use the help of facilitators and mobilisers, just like some donors are already doing in Maoist-affect areas,” he says. The Quick Impact Program of the World Food Program and the German aid agency GTZ both use local ‘facilitators’ to ensure that food aid reaches the most vulnerable. To ensure that his plan trickle down to the grassroots, Adhikari also wants to reintroduce ideas he had mooted in his previous tenure as finance minister during the nine-month UML rule in 1994, including the ‘Afino gram afai banen’ package, under which a lumpsum will be distributed directly to the VDCs.

Political leaders from parties not in the coalition have already questioned the legality of such programs. “This is a government that has been appointed to hold elections, how can it introduce new programs and policies?” asks former Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahar of the Girija NC. “Till recently, Minister Adhikari used to criticise the budgets that were presented through ordinance, and now he is doing the same.”

Adhikari’s immediate predecessor, Prakash Chandra Lohani of the RPP, also slams the plan. “The budget is prepared by people who have no mandate to do the job,” he says. “About five people have been allowed to work on the budget just because they are close to the parties in power.”

The finance minister insists he wants to make a groundbreaking “peace budget” but the danger is that his original goals may be overwhelmed by new government policies. But finance ministry officials say one basic feature of Friday’s budget will remain unchanged: its broad categorisation under new headings of ‘recurrent’ and ‘capital’ expenditure. Until last year, Nepal’s budget had always been presented under the headings of ‘regular’ and ‘development’ expenditure.

Officials say the change should help check duplication of expenditure headings. “In past budgets, we have seen allocations made for the same expenses under both the regular and development headings, often several times,” says pre-UML economist Dilli Raj Khanal, who has been helping Adhikari with the paperwork. “We will be able to save more than Rs. 5 billion in the next two years.” (See interview, p9)

Under the new budget framework, recurrent expenditure will include overheads and money spent for debt servicing, whereas investments will come under capital expenditure. Khanal and officials at the finance ministry believe that the total budget figure this year will go up compared to last year’s Rs. 102 billion plus mark.

Despite the rise, money should not be a big problem for the government since its resource source is on the rise and donors have committed to stand by it as long as it does not miss out on the mantra of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

During the current fiscal year, total revenue generation till mid-June was nearly Rs. 52 billion, up by almost 1.4 percent from 2002-03. The biggest component in the revenue was tax collection—almost Rs. 42 billion. The non-tax part also increased by about 10 percent. VAT collection grew by 6.6 percent compared to last year but, notably, the growth in the import segment of VAT dropped to one percent from last year’s increase of 22.3 percent. “This was because of the devaluation of the US dollar and the slump in the import business,” explains VAT Department Director General, Narendra Krishna Thareja.

With bodies like the Poverty Alleviation Fund and the poverty monitoring section at the NFC, the government expects donors to live up to their commitments made at the Nepal Development Forum last April. The government had asked for $560 million annual assistance for the poverty reduction program, to which the World Bank, Vice President Pradif C.Patel had said, “As long as the program is implemented, money is not a problem.”

The International Monetary Fund has suggested that the government should focus even more on increasing revenue and prioritisation of expenditures. Says the fund’s Nepal director, Sunilwinder Singh: “We believe that there must be control on domestic borrowing.”
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Creativity at City Awards
The 2061 City Awards a gala event, held at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Sunday evening and broadcast live by four television channels. Members of the ad and media industries were there in full force, plus company representatives and celebrities. The Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal (AAAN), which organizes the annual event, had increased the number of categories this year to 10. The awards included Best Jingle (for Jagadamba Cement by Advertising Avenue), Best Copy Writer (Advertising Avenue’s Abhayas Paday) and Best Campaign (Civil Homes, by ME Nepal). Prisma Advertising won the Best Ad Agency award. Other awards went to Jems for Best Design and Pradhan for Best Jingle Maker.

Friends in high places
Most brand ambassadors are credited for creating a buzz about the products they endorse, but not many carry the word as far as Namgya Sherpa, customer and brand ambassador of Kumari Bank. Sherpa scaled Mt Everest without oxygen on 16 May, and Kumari Bank took him on board as the bank’s newest brand ambassador.

Lessons from America
A training seminar on ‘Navigating Export Requirements in a Global Market’ was held in Kathmandu from 13-14 July. Sponsored by the US A

NEW PRODUCTS
SMART SHOPPING: Emann Nepal has launched Best Buy, a monthly consumer shopping catalogue that includes special promotions, offers and market information. Thirty thousand free copies will be distributed, and the catalogue is also available online at www.bestbuy nepal.com

Economist Dilli Raj Khanal is a close adviser to Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari, who is announcing the new budget on Friday. He told Nepal Times how this budget would be different from those in the past.

A banking sector official said that the budget provides an opportunity to make changes in the sector’s operation and to improve its structure. The government has announced a 7% investment in the banking sector in the budget.

THINKING SMALL
Banks and the new budget need to help, and use, small businesses

Nepali Times: How is this budget going to be different?
Dilli Raj Khanal: The basis for the budget is the Common Minimum Program agreed to by the four parties in the government. It talks about strengthening democracy, solving the Maoist problem, providing immediate relief to people, beginning reconstruction and making moves for social, political and economic changes. The budget will reflect these guidelines.

Is defence expenditure going up?
This year, we could not spend a major chunk of the development budget even though the allocation itself had been slashed. Development work in rural areas has been significantly hampered. The precondition to development spending is therefore bringing the rebels in for peace talks and ensuring rule of law and security. But there has to be a cap on security expenses. There are many unproductive expenses because of duplication under several heads. If we save on those fronts, we can increase the scale of development expenditure.

Does that mean less money for security?
Going by what the finance minister has been saying, I think it will go down.

How much do you think we can save by checking the duplication you mentioned?
The savings will be significant. The finance minister will perhaps present the budget in the format of recurrent and capital expenditure. The format will check the duplication of expenses and that will help us save around Rs 5 billion in the next two to three years.

Will the format of the budget be different as well?
Normally, the regular budget is discussed at the Finance Ministry and the development budget at the National Planning Commission. Many headings under regular budget get repeated in the development budget. The old budget system does not check these duplications. The new scientific system will alert us about these and allow us to reduce unproductive spending.

Why not use the headings ‘regular’ and ‘development’ expenditure?
In many countries they don’t divide the budget as regular and development. Expenses like overheads and interests are kept under capital expenditure. Under capital expenditure, we allocate money to, for instance, buying land, machinery, equipment and construction expenses. These expenses help in the accumulation of the country’s capital and increase productivity. These expenses also include the salaries of teachers, engineers and doctors because they are taken as investment in human resources.

The finance minister has said this will be a ‘peace budget’. What does that mean?
There is talk of strengthening the peace secretariat, which has been established at the prime minister’s office. The process will need big budgetary support. The fact that the budget will be aimed at initiating a peace process will establish that this government is for solving the Maoist problem.

How about relief and rehabilitation?
We will need the help of community-based organisations to reach people in rural areas. This will also be an effective confidence-building measure for peace talks with the Maoists.

What is the response of other parties in government to these plans?
They have no problems with it. The budget is being prepared keeping in mind the common spirit of all the parties in the government.

Will the total budget amount be greater than last year?
Given inflation, the increased amount for debt servicing and the thrust of the Common Minimum Program of the coalition government, the figure will probably go up.
There is support from all sides during the 4th Bagmati River Festival—but is it enough?

SRADDHA BASNYAT

Years of stench or low water, our Bagmati Khola is loved. The annual Bagmati River Festival is an honest, if fleeting, testament of Valley dwellers’ affection for the sacred waterway. True, many abuse and neglect the Bagmati over the greater part of the year. But even if it’s just for the duration of the festival, people celebrate the source of the Kathmandu Valley’s civilisation.

The 4th Bagmati River Festival will continue the now well-established annual tradition of bringing together environmentalists, school children, tourism industry members and concerned citizens. Kayaks and rafts will drift down from the headwaters at Sundarajal to Sankhuwal, lead as usual by founder and president of the Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT), Megh Ale. However, organisers from NRCT, along with Sustainable Tourism Network (STN), have a lot more planned than just the usual day-long rafting trip to generate care and concern for the once mighty river.

This year, the festival started on 5 June, World Environment Day, which will from now mark the beginning of the yearly festival. Since then, groups including the Women Environment Group, Nawa Aayam Yuva Club, Friends Club Kupondole and Himalmedia have co-organised seven clean-up campaigns starting from the Tilganga Eye Hospital area down to the Maternity Hospital in Thapathali, with a concentrated three-session clean up below the Bagmati Bridge. Nepal Tourism Board is promoting the events, and various local business houses have provided refreshments and equipment.

Difficult and often unpleasant as the task may be, there are plenty of people committed enough to the Bagmati’s welfare to show up. NRCT co-ordinator Rabin Bastola says that during the 5 June cleanup, 170 participants had officially signed up but another 30 or 40 simply joined in. For those who missed out, campaigns will continue every Saturday until the end of the festival on 21 August.

Getting up close and personal while cleaning up the river banks might not be everyone’s cup of tea, so on Saturday 17 July organised are holding a heritage walk starting at Teka, going through Thapathali and ending up in Sankhuwal. Understanding how the Bagmati’s waters have nurtured entire cultures and religions is an important part of convincing people to aid the river. Stagnant and pungent with waste, the river is more than a reflection of our inattention for the environment. It is also a sign of our blatant disrespect for history and our ancestors.

Travel consultant Sharad Shrestha, who will be leading Saturday’s heritage walk, says, “Our civilisation started from the Bagmati, so the river is part of our religious and cultural heritage. We perform important rituals, ranging from initiation to death rites, at the river. There are monuments and settlements here so old that no one has records for them.”

Sites like Chintamani Ghat are said to be thousands of years old. The common belief is that those cremated there will attain enlightenment after death. Kalmochan Ghat, on the other hand, includes several important temples to Bishnu and Ram. “The story goes that the path was built by Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana after the Kot Massacre to show penance for his sins,” explains Shrestha.

The ancient architecture, exquisite carvings and peaceful surroundings aren’t worth much though, if the river isn’t cleaned up. Right now, in the wet season, the walk is bearable but Shrestha can’t imagine taking tourists on a stroll during the dry months when the Bagmati turns into an open sewer.

The NRCT’s activities for the festival include a live music concert, various races (rafting, kayaking, running), tree plantation, a composting workshop, a research presentation by TU’s Central Department of Environmental Science and an eight-day kayaking workshop for school students and others interested.

The trust is also managing an anti-plastic campaign. Plastic bags are a major source of pollution along the riverbanks, so NRCT is trying to get Valley residents to stop using them. “We are targeting supermarkets by providing an alternative cloth bag,” explains Bastola. The Women Environment Group has agreed to make the bags, which will be sold at minimum cost at grocery stores. If customers return the bag, they’ll be given a 5 percent discount on their grocery bill.

Under Binita Adhikari’s charge, Lion’s Club is hosting a women’s cycle rally, the first of its kind. “The hope is to give the festival continuity so we realise this is everyone’s river,” says Adhikari, who is spending whatever free time she gets from counselling rape victims to organise the rally. Riders wearing festival t-shirts, courtesy Himalmedia, will hop on their environmentally-friendly bikes, lent by Himalayan Mountain Bike, From Dawn till Desk and others, at the Sanchaya Kosh building in Thamel at 8AM on 18 July and head out to Chobar along the river bank, finishing at Balaju. Fifty riders are expected and men are welcome.

For more information: 4435207

Kiran Basnyat
A Bagmati park

The plan for a park along the Bagmati is still just a plan

If you’ve noticed unexpected tinges of green along the Bagmati river lately, then you have the UN Park Development Committee, which has made a cleaner and greener Bagmati its mission, to thank.

The committee put together a master plan in 1996, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, with an approved budget of Rs 350 million and five years to complete the project. Eight years later, with only Rs 50 million released from the Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning, the committee is just starting work. It aims to enclose the stretch of former flood plain from Jwagal to Kupendole, but so far only about a kilometer of compound wall has been put up. But for the team at the Babar Mahal office, even this is a great achievement.

“The land was being encroached on illegally. No one can claim the riverbank as private property, we have saved land worth over Rs 5 billion,” boasts section officer Sagar Bajal. Executive director at the project office, Ramesh Jang Rayamajhi, is a bit more cautious, admitting there are still some misunderstandings over the land, but says he has approached the squatters hoping that they’ll understand. “I’ve told them we realise they want to grow their food there, but appealed to them that if they hand over the land, it’ll benefit everyone,” he says.

The park master plan includes designs for a children’s park, squash and tennis courts, bike trail, a mini Nepal with traditional villages, parking facilities, two suspension bridges and more.

Recently, Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), concerned that the birds’ habitat was being destroyed, requested the park office for some land to plant fruiting and flowering trees. Rayamajhi happily welcomed BCN on the condition that they also put in a bike trail and the children’s park. The Rotary Club of Triurur has agreed to clean up and maintain the area under the Bagmati Bridge on the Kathmandu side.

Not everyone agrees with the plan for a park. Bagmati conservationist Bhu Ram Baiya says, “The Bagmati basin river system needs protection to flow along the traditional route. You can’t construct it by building parks. One day the river will take its revenge.”

One of the Bagmati’s many other afflictions include the uncontrolled removal of sand for construction. Over the years, sand removal has caused the river to scour a canyon in Thapathali where it used to flow along its entire width. “Has anyone ever thought the river might need more space to flow?” Baiya asks. On average, the Bagmati has a large flood once in every five years, but Baiya says this isn’t the real worry. A bigger concern is the one that comes around every 50 years.

Despite all this, the park project is upbeat. The park is an ambitious plan that has been riddled with many challenges, admits Rayamajhi. But for now he’s focussing efforts on creating a greenbelt and is confident that as more of the budget is handed over the project will develop.

(Swadhit Bahadur)
Six years after they began expanding their organisation to include the eastern tarai, Maoist rebels claim that they have been successful in establishing a class struggle in the area. The commissar of the 7th brigade D-company, ‘Himal’, who is in charge of the Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts, says that the eastern hilly region has become the base area for the rebels and that the tarai area is already their people’s base area. Despite his claims, so far the rebels have been unsuccessful in all of their big attacks in the eastern tarai, but do have several minor offensives to their credit.

Over the last year, the rebels have mobilised armed guerrillas in eastern tarai, where they claim to have seven brigades, two battalions, three companies and several platoons and sections. They say their guerrillas can travel freely to all the villages in Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari, carrying SMGs, AK 47s, SLRs, .303 rifles, home-made pistols, rifles and socket bombs. Almost two months ago, the rebels held a press conference in a village just five km from Jhapa’s district headquarters of Bhadrapur. They were armed with guns and other weapons while addressing the press.

A large part of the rebels’ success in strengthening their tarai base has been due to help received from ethnic fronts such as Sonthaal, Tharu, Dhimal, Chaudhary and Dalit. As a result, the Tharuwan Himal, large numbers of Maoist recruits are coming from local tarai base has been due to help received from ethnic fronts.

Pistols and socket bombs. Guerillas in eastern tarai, where they claim to have seven posts in bases deserted by the police. According to the army is also building up. There are new unified command and uses a mobile phone

A large part of the rebels’ success in strengthening their

regional to foil their offensives.”

Malcolm Fraser 4th Prime Minister of Australia}

Under the D-company, Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari each have direct command of their own guerrillas and militia. In urban areas, there are special task forces of between 10 and 15 members who lay ambushes, set off explosions, kidnap people and loot arms and money from the banks. Experience in the west and the eastern mountains has made these rebels such experts in hit-and-run tactics that the security forces in the tarai are having a tough time trying to control them. However, the rebel platoon commander of the 18th brigade, Rajan, was killed in Draran when a time bomb he had made went off prematurely.

Maoist political commissar Himmat lives in a village hut and uses a mobile phone (picture) to direct military activities.

“When lighting in the mountains, we use the topography to our advantage. In the plains like this, we have to use the density of the people,” he says.

Aware of the rebel developments in the eastern region, the army is also building up. There are new unified command posts in bases deserted by the police. According to the eastern headquarters of the army in Itahari, there are already 17 such posts in the eastern tarai. Soldiers regularly patrol all the urban areas and nearby villages. “The Maoist can do nothing in the tarai,” says brigade commander Ananta Bahadur Thebe. “At a time when they are losing ground even in the mountains, they shouldn’t even dream of making major attacks in the tarai because we have enough back up in the region to foil their offensives.”

**Mobile troops**

Desbanthar, 12 July

Nepal Telecom had to stop this week’s sales of prepaid mobile phone sim cards long before it reached the sales target. The company had aimed at distributing 60,000 sim cards, but had to stop after just 30,000 reached the public because the Royal Nepal Army decided to equip its officers with mobile phones instead of walky-talkies, and demanded 20,000 sim cards. A source in the army said mobile phones are now preferred because many of the walky-talkies soldiers were given have either been taken by the rebels or are not functioning well. Army officials have also been complaining that the rebels often intercept their walky-talkie communication.

**Farm subsidy**

Annapurna Post, 10 July

The recently announced Indian budget has allocated a significant grant for agriculture, and this has prompted Nepali agricultural experts to campaign for similar allotments in our upcoming budget as well. The argument is that Indian subsidies will make their products cheaper, causing them to flood the Nepali market. “The government must start doing its homework,” says agricultural scientist Deb Bhaktida Shukla. “Even if the government is unable to provide a grant as large as the Indian government did, there must be some provisions.”

A senior scientist of Nepal Agriculture Research Council agrees that cost is a major factor in why Nepali agricultural products have not been able to compete with Indian ones. “The upcoming budget should allocate at least one percent of the total sum for agricultural research,” he says. “The past investment in researching maize and wheat has yielded around 40 percent returns.”

Agriculture experts say the government should focus on equipping the agriculture sector and the establishment of an agriculture gene bank. Currently, Nepal has stored seeds of over 2,000 species of rice in overseas gene banks. Agriculture contributes 40 percent of Nepal’s GDP and Nepal’s rice production has grown by a record 8 percent in this fiscal year. But this figure could have been higher if there had been adequate investment in the agriculture sector.

**Banning Deuba**

Desbanthar, 12 July

There was a time when K.P. Bhattachariya wholeheartedly supported his protégé, Sher Bahadur Deuba. “I will be Deuba is,” and that will be in the Nepal Congress,” he used to say to garner support for Deuba, who led the splinter faction from the Nepal Congress almost two years ago. Those were the days when Bhattachariya used to equate ‘Deuba’ with ‘Nepal Congress’. Not any more. Now Bhattachariya is so angry with Deuba that he has even banned the prime minister from his residence at Bhaisepati. According to his personal aide, Amit Kapali, who seems quite eager to talk about it, the reason for Bhattachariya’s ire is that Deuba failed to accommodate his men in the ministers’ council. Deuba is said to have promised Bhattachariya that at least Narayan Khadka would be on board, but failed to deliver.

**Brothers in arms**

Desbanthar, 12 July

The rebel platoon commander of the 7th brigade D-company, ‘Himal’, who is in charge of the Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari districts, says that the eastern hilly region has become the base area for the rebels and that the tarai area is already their people’s base area. Despite his claims, so far the rebels have been unsuccessful in all of their big attacks in the eastern tarai, but do have several minor offensives to their credit.

Eyeing the east

Dambarka Krishna Shrestha in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 June-15 July

An internal feud resulted in Maoist militants in Doti killing at least 1/4 of their own comrades earlier this month. They had a disagreement over an abducted person with one faction demanding his release, and others vehemently opposed to the idea. As the argument intensified, two militants struggled over a hand grenade, which exploded and killed both instantly. Thinking security forces were attacking them, other militants opened fire, killing their own comrades including an area commander and several female rebels.

**Briefcase: Budget**

Kathmandu, 15 July

An internal feud resulted in Maoist militants in Doti killing at least 1/4 of their own comrades earlier this month. They had a disagreement over an abducted person with one faction demanding his release, and others vehemently opposed to the idea. As the argument intensified, two militants struggled over a hand grenade, which exploded and killed both instantly. Thinking security forces were attacking them, other militants opened fire, killing their own comrades including an area commander and several female rebels.

**Mothers kill Maoists**

Kathmandu, 15 July

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forces, so having relatives facing each other in battle is inevitable.

“When I met my brother, we both cried thinking about how we grew up together but still were not able to convince each other to quit,” recalls a policeman.

While some have no choice but to follow the orders to kill, there are those who do not have the heart to do so. A few days ago, a Maoist militant ‘abducted’ his policeman cousin and protected him so he would not get killed during a planned Maoist attack.

Royal shenanigans

Jamaistha, 14 July

It is nothing new for Crown Prince Paras to fire a few shots and go wild in discos, but it had seemed he’d given it a break, until last Friday on King Gyanendra’s birthday. Everyone was taken by surprise when the prince got a call around 1:30 AM and immediately sped off. Close friends and royal cousins were waiting for him at Everest Hotel’s Galaxy Disco. Sarthik Larry, son of Everest Hotel’s owner, also arrived and asked everyone except the royal guests to leave. Soon after, Princess Himani showed up and tried to persuade the Crown Prince to return to Narayanbithi Palace, and then all hell broke loose. Prince Paras opened fire. His bodyguards, friends and cousins all fled for their lives. Even Princess Himani was unable to control him. Kumar Gorkhi, husband of late Princess Shruti tried in vain to restrain him, but had to retreat via the back door and hide in a nursing home near the hotel. Neighbours heard the shots, but there was no sign of security forces in the area. The police were given strict instructions not to interfere.

Finally, Princess Himani succeeded in calming down her husband, but the effect was temporary. In a rage, Prince Paras drove towards Club Dynast in Durbar Marg, where he mercilessly beat up the disco bouncer. After reaching his family residence, Normal Nivas, he started a quarrel with his family. All the royal princes and princesses were then transported to the Narayanbithi Palace, and the prince left the city and sped towards Pokhara with two of his ADGc and two brothers-in-law.

Sexual revolution

Bhojraj Bhatt in Thawang

Nepal, 11 July

Maoist commandments make life difficult even for the rebels, especially when it comes to love and marriage. Militants are required to get party approval to choose lovers, and can only marry once their love is officially sanctioned. But even after marriage, privacy is scarce. Spending time alone is frowned upon, and when they speak, it has to be with ‘respectful’ and not ‘frivolous’ language. The problem becomes worse when they are separated and posted in remote regions because they hardly ever get permission to visit each other. “I long to meet my wife, but we have to follow party rules,” says ‘Gaurab’, a midwestern regional Maoist member. Both militant and non-combatant Maoists have been ordered to use birth control.

But despite restrictions, the Maoist party is actually more lenient than what they were before. New Swastikas were once prohibited from visiting their homes and introducing their partners to their families. This rule changed when many widowed Maoist women were rejected by their in-laws, with parents of killed rebels refusing to accept a bride they had never met.

Party members are not allowed to marry anyone outside the party on the grounds that non-Maoist wives are not strong enough to endure the hardships of the struggle, and can’t help the party on or off the battlefield. This raises interesting questions about how the Maoists fulfill their sexual desires. “Many have been able to suppress it as they always put their principles first,” says Losi, a ‘people’s doctor’.

Infidelity is a rank issue, as rebels usually look for a partner who is at the same level within the party. Often, members who have been promoted betray their ‘junior’ partners by having affairs with their new equals. There are many cases of this, but there is some justice for the betrayed, as cheaters are punished if partners file cases at the ‘people’s courts’.

“I thought the comrades had dignity, but I don’t believe that anymore,” says Jagriti, a female militant whose boyfriend betrayed her for another rebel girl. After her complaint to the party, her ex-boyfriend was sentenced to hard labour.
**Ready to roar again**

Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tiger rebels get edgy as the peace process falters, and the first suicide bomb in three years goes off in Colombo.

AMANTHA PERERA in KILINOCHI

It is difficult to imagine the Kumudini Ramalingam of today as a female Tamil Tiger cadre, but four years ago she lost a leg in fighting with government troops near the sprawling Sri Lankan Army complex at Elephant Pass. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) overran the place in 2000 and have held it ever since.

The LTTE kept a force in it, and when Ramalingam died 10 years ago she was rising to the rank of captain before her injury. Today she uses an artificial leg, is married and works at the Victory Humanitarian Foundation for Women, which helps women get back to civilian life. “I prefer peace, it is better,” said Ramalingam from Tiger-controlled Kilinochchi.

The two-year ceasefire between the Tigers and the Colombo government has improved civilian life in Sri Lanka, especially in Tiger-held areas. The government lifted a goods embargo, easing both civilian and commercial traffic.

A new vehicle service being built in Kilinochchi is symbolic of the changes that peace has ushered in. Donors and non-governmental agencies have increased work in the areas. Two weeks ago, the World Bank announced a loan of $64.7 million to develop agriculture in the north-east. The Tigers have also made use of the ceasefire to develop and strengthen its civilian administrative structure.

However, rising tension and the lack of goodwill between the two governments led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Tigers have strained the Norwegian-brokered peace process.

Since coming to power in April, the new United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) government has been plagued by a lack of a parliamentary majority and a cohesive policy, which have thwarted attempts to get talks stalled since April 2005 recommenced. Kumaratunga’s UPFA narrowly defeated former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s United National Party, but lacks a majority in parliament.

Last week, Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim met with both Kumaratunga and the Tiger leadership separately to break the deadlock, but left without any deal. In fact, during talks, LTTE political wing leader SP Tamilselvan conveyed a toughened stance.

Demanding that their proposals for an interim administration be implemented, the Tigers also requested the government to refrain from aiding renegade former eastern commander Vinayagamoththu Murugan alias Colonel Karuna, who defected to government-controlled areas in April. Accusing Karuna of backing murder and mayhem in Batticaloa in the east, the LTTE negotiator warned that future talks would now depend on Colombo. “If this situation is allowed to continue, it will jeopardise the ceasefire agreement and the entire peace process,” the official Tiger website quoted Tamilselvan as telling the Norwegians.

The Sri Lankan government rejected allegations of helping Karuna, saying elements within the army had aided Karuna without the knowledge of the government. While Kumaratunga said in a national address last month that she was willing to accommodate interim administration talks if the government—‘the People’s Liberation Front’—has rejected it outright, reiterating their demands that negotiations tackle the interim administration and a final solution simultaneously.

“If you allow the process to drag on, all gains would be nullified,” said Tamil National Alliance MP, MR Edirisinghe, warning that patience was running thin among the Tigers. Even before last week’s meeting, the Tigers had been complaining of a lack of a clear policy on the part of the new government.

The impasse led the London-based Tamil Guardian, which is close to the Tiger thinking, to warn last week that the ceasefire was unraveling. “We cannot recall a time when the prospects for peace have been lower,” it said in its editorial. And this is a fear shared by many observers in Colombo.

The tension is heightened even more due to the fact that despite the ceasefire, both sides are well armed and continue to recruit. The Tigers have been conducting interviews for new police recruits during the past two weeks while the Sri Lankan Army also called for applicants for its commando units.

“We are preparing for peace, but staying ready for war,” said the head of LTTE’s female political wing.

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**Whistleblowers**

Insiders at the World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) who want to blow the whistle on corruption or other forms of mismanagement are insufficiently protected against retaliation, says “Challenging the Culture of Secrecy,” a report by the 27-year-old Government Accountability Project (GAP).

While the World Bank is rated as the most protective of the four MDBs studied, it still has a long way to go in devising procedures that will encourage potential informants to offer information without worrying about losing their jobs or other retaliatory measures. The heads of other banks—the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)—the EBRD was rated worst at protecting informants.

“Our study demonstrates that none of the banks have reliably safe channels for whistleblowers to make a difference against corruption,” said GAP Legal Director Tom Devine. “The bottom line for now is that GAP cannot responsibly recommend that whistleblowers work with the bank policies for raising their complaints.” But he also stressed that all of the banks appeared committed to providing protection to the whistleblowers in the interests of maintaining transparency and improving their operations.

Recently, whistleblower protection and other efforts to promote transparency and discourage corruption have become a major concern in both developing countries and wealthy nations. The US Congress has enacted whistleblower protection laws to encourage federal employees to report fraud or other mismanagement without worrying about retaliation or harassment. Whistleblower protection provisions have also become standard in international anti-corruption conventions and treaties, such as those recently adopted by the United Nations, the Organisation of American States and the Council of Europe.

In January, Congress passed a new law that requires the US Treasury—which represents Washington on the governing boards of the MDBs—to use its influence there to establish new anti-corruption and transparency guidelines, including complaint systems consistent with US and international law, by June 2005. GAP has been working with Treasury on developing benchmarks for progress. At a hearing on anti-corruption efforts by the MDBs in May, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, changed that the World Bank itself had lost corruption about 100 billion dollars—a figure the bank strongly rejected—that had been slated for development since 1946, or nearly 20 percent of its total lending portfolio.

According to GAP, one way to fight corruption is to encourage staff to denounce it, and that can only be done if they are confident they will not suffer retaliation from their superiors or any other harm as a result of coming forward. To assess the effectiveness of whistleblower protections, GAP developed a checklist of 24 variables divided into five different categories. Based on that score, the report lists the governments, actual procedures and other information obtained by GAP, each bank was then assessed a score for each variable and category, with 100 as a perfect score.

The categories included “scope
Guatemala’s grim memories
A South America nation has already been where Iraq is today

BEATRIZ MANZ

Latin Americans were overwhelmingly—in many countries over 90 percent—opposed to the US invasion in Iraq. This is no surprise in a region that has experienced its share of American interference.

Fifty years ago, on 27 June 1954, the CIA orchestrated its first coup in Latin America. Dubbed ‘Operation Success’ it fulfilled its mandate in overthrowing the government of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, a moderate reformer.

In the midst of an intensifying cold war, the democratically elected Arbenz was perceived to be influenced by communists. As if to prove the point, he began enacting a serious land reform. This act threatened the unused land of United Fruit, a company with strong ties to members of the Eisenhower administration—most prominent among them Alan Dulles, director of the CIA, and his brother John Foster Dulles, the secretary of state.

Once Arbenz was ousted, Vice President Richard Nixon announced to the world that Guatemala would serve as a model of US-style democracy and freedom for the rest of Latin America. Instead, the country entered a nightmare that would only deepen in the decades that followed.

What happened in Guatemala was a triumph of ideology over reality. With each succeeding military government more violent than the last, a pledge of anti-communism was all that was needed to ensure continued US support. The military and business elite was given carte blanche to rule in increasingly authoritarian ways. Gross human rights abuses were minimized or ignored—particularly in the 1980s when repression escalated into wholesale slaughter and torture. President Ronald Reagan dismissed criticism of General Rios Montt, a coup leader and arguably the worst of a bloody lot of military rulers, as “a bum rap.”

The UN commission documenting the violence in Guatemala concluded in 1999 that a genocide had taken place. The numbers are difficult to comprehend. The military committed more than 600 massacres, 200,000 Guatemalans—predominantly Mayan peasants—were murdered, 600 Mayan villages destroyed and 1.5 million people displaced. Tens of thousands of Guatemalan refugees fled to Mexico and hundreds of thousands have gone to the US. This is no showcase for freedom and democracy.

In the 1990s, with the end of the cold war, the US refocused its attention away from Central America. Peace accords were reached—an achievement in which the United Nations and European countries played a crucial role. With that the internal war formally came to an end.

In a reversal of what might now be called the Powell doctrine (“if you break it, you own it”), the US, which was willing to pay for the destruction of Guatemala, now refuses to cover the cost of rebuilding it. Instead, Guatemalans in the US are bankingroll their country’s reconstruction. In 2003 Guatemala received over $2 billion from the US, but it was not from the US government. The money came from the meager earnings of Guatemalan laboring in the US.

The Bush administration did sign a Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in May, but many Guatemalan civic and religious leaders are concerned that the interests of ordinary Central Americans are being left out of the debate. In a letter to Congress, Alvaro Ramizini, Bishop of the Guatemalan Diocese of San Marcos and president of the Council of Central American Bishops, wrote that CAFTA as drafted “will create greater inequalities between rich and poor in Central America.”

A Guatemalan peasant in a remote village near the Mexican border told me recently, “The US is culpable for creating hell in this country and supported the military that burned down our village and massacred our people. And now? It is in Iraq. We know what that is like." The fallout from an intervention five decades ago still shapes perceptions today.

Beatriz Manz is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Courage, Terror and Hope.

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 All of the banks lost points as a result of policies they have in common, including enforcing bans on communication by staff with external parties concerning information that may be deemed “detrimental” to the banks themselves. Also, even if they have established mechanisms to hear complaints by the supposed beneficiaries of their projects, none provides protection against retaliation by their own governments. The banks also lost points for failing to provide truly independent forums for hearing claims by whistleblowers.

 The report noted the institutions are embracing whistleblower protection as an effective management tool but still falling short of what is required. “Ultimately, the banks’ current policies may well have the effect of suppressing efforts to bring wrongdoing to light”, said Greg Watchman, GPA’s executive director. “Unless these policies are significantly strengthened, witnesses to corruption will remain silent.”

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 not safe

 of coverage,” which awards a total of 46 points when a bank extends protection to any relevant witness, such as bank staff, or other interested party, such as proposed beneficiaries of bank projects, against harassment or retaliation. There were 12 points allocated for procedures that ensured whistleblowers were given full rights of appeal to an independent body that was free from possible conflicts of interest, and another category had a total of eight possible points for the standards of proof the whistleblower had to meet to win a case of harassment or retaliation.

 The fourth category—reliability for whistleblowers who win their claims of retaliation—held a total of 20 points, and finally, there were 16 points for whether or not the institutional channels for whistleblowers had actually proven effective at fighting corruption or other abuses of power.

 Altogether, the World Bank scored highest with 60 points out of 100, followed by the ADB with 50, the IDB with 49 and the EBRD with 45.
Nepal’s ninth five year plan (1997-2002) aimed to provide electricity to 20 per cent of all households. Imagine the surprise when the 2001 Census showed that 9.4 per cent of families claimed they already had electricity.

Even the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) had until then thought it provided electricity connections to 18 per cent of the population. When the new figures came out, the NEA proudly accepted that it could be serving 32 per cent of the population and the remaining seven per cent was getting lights from village micro-hydro and solar PV.

An explanation for how the NEA has been unwittingly providing electricity to many more customers than its Annual Reports even today continue to suggest was put forward by the research group Community Development Awareness Centre (CADEC) earlier this year as part of its report Renewable Energy Data of Nepal 2003 (with access-to-electricity data).

CADEC has tried to explain the difference between what NEA considers connected households and the number of families that have access to electricity. NEA counts the number of energy meters it has installed in houses and multiplies that by the average national family size of 5.6 individuals to calculate the percentage of the population it has reached. The Census on the other hand went door to door and asked if the family had access to electricity.

So how come those that were not connected (did not have a meter installed) as per NEA’s records have access to electricity? CADEC demonstrates that there are many families that share meters. This happens most commonly in urban areas where families rent rooms from landlords. The single NEA connection in reality serves many families. In rural areas as in urban slums it is also common to see a number of houses running a wire from the neighbour’s house and paying a monthly fee for light bulb.

Then there are many illegal connections in which people hook on to the nearby distribution lines for which they do not pay the utility. For all these reasons more people than in the official NEA records actually have electricity in their homes. The records for decentralised energy supply are relatively easier to decipher than NEA’s statistics. CADEC has computed that Micro-hydropon and solar home systems are providing electricity to a relatively small number of households, 1.9 from micro-hydro and one percent the population respectively at present. But both sectors are growing rapidly and can be expected to play an increasingly important role.

One thing the new numbers do is make Nepal’s electricity coverage now comparable to other countries in South Asia. It is still lower than India (46 percent), Pakistan (55 percent), Sri Lanka (62 percent) and Maldives (62 percent), but slightly above the coverage in Bangladesh (38 percent) and Bhutan (55 percent). The fact that almost 60 percent of Nepali families have access to electricity for lighting and other worthy purposes like income generation, tv and radio is a major accomplishment, even if it is inadvertent.

As a first step, the 20 per cent figure needs to be revised in the popular press and corrected in NEA and government reports and UN documents. A second number that needs revision is that it is not five but rather 30 percent of the rural population that has access to electricity. This more accurate understanding of electricity access has important implications for planners and policy makers. It indicates, for example, that many more Nepalis are watching television that was previously thought! Another lesson is that NEA needs to make it easier for people to have access to legal connections by making meters less expensive and connection procedures less cumbersome. A recent NEA initiative that could significantly reduce ‘hooking’ and could also enforce the one-house-one-meter rule is the execution of its 2003 Community Electrification Distribution Bye Laws.

These new regulations encourage organised rural communities, cooperatives, and NGOs to purchase energy from the NEA in bulk and distribute to their members. Early experience in 18 communities that have taken over their own distribution systems has shown dramatic reduction in pillage of electricity.

Clearly, electricity is a high priority for Nepalis particularly to rural communities not connected to the national grid or have not been able to build their own micro-hydropower systems or purchase solar home systems. The government’s promise to provide 80 percent subsidy for communities themselves to build new systems or expand existing networks has further energised local communities. Over 200 groups have applied to take over or construct and manage their own electricity distribution systems. Once this energy is unleashed, and if it is properly managed, the tenth five year plan (2002-07) target of access to the grid to 45 percent of the population and the 15-year goal of getting grid electricity to 63 percent of all Nepalis, are both likely to be exceeded.

GRID LOCK: This house in a village in Baglung housing a cable distributor is not connected to the grid, but has electricity.
Tour de France
The home favourite bags the 10th Stage on Bastille Day

ST FLOUR, France—After 14 years in the peloton, 12 Tours de France, one doping suspension and seven mountain stage wins, Richard Virenque has seen both the dark and the bright side of cycling.

Now, after his dominating 10th stage victory over the hills of central France yesterday, the popular rider said he might start thinking about retirement. “I can go in peace now,” the 34-year-old Frenchman said.

“The day I feel that I’m on the way down, I will stop. I don’t want to ride a year too many. “We’ll discuss it at the end of the Tour but as long as the flame is there, I think I should continue. I don’t know exactly when but I will have to make a decision soon.”

Virenque, who finished second overall in 1997 before being kicked off the Tour in the doping scandal of 1998, has won a stage in almost all the Tours he has attacked early on in the 237-km stage from Limoges, the longest in this year’s Tour. The determined Frenchman, rated the best climber of his generation alongside Italian Marco Pantani, remained in the lead for more than 200-km but later admitted he was starting to feel his age.

“I was really exhausted towards the end,” said Virenque. “The final bit was very hard. I’m dead. I might pay for it tomorrow but the main thing was to make an impression in this Tour.”

Last year, the most popular but also the most controversial rider in France had taken the yellow jersey on Bastille Day but he insisted his move this time had not been premeditated.

“For me, it’s Bastille Day every day on the Tour,” said Virenque. “What I had decided was to go hunting for points in the King of the Mountains classification. “I had crossed that stage in the book because it looked a decisive stage for the polka dot jersey. It was important not to miss it.”

While Armstrong is out for a record sixth Tour victory, Virenque also has a record in his sights — wearing the polka dot jersey across the finish line on the Champs Elysees for the seventh time.

The Frenchman has been crowned best climber in the Tour six times, joining the two best climbers in history — Belgium’s Lucien Van Impe and Spain’s Federico Bahamontes.

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Choices, choices
What type of club should golfers look for?

Every now and then golfers ask me, “How can I hit the ball a few yards longer? Maybe I should get this new technology driver? One of my friends has just bought it and he says, he’s been hitting it 20 yards longer. My putts are not dropping in at all. What should I do? The shape of that putter looks so comfortable, maybe I should get that one.”

With questions like these common among club golfers, there is some basic knowledge. I will share with you about what to look for before buying new clubs.

Undoubtedly, every golfer always desires to hit the ball those few yards longer and sink more 10 foot putts, and to use new equipment to improve. Millions of golfers around the world switch their clubs hoping it will help their game. Sometimes this happens so often that, funny as it sounds, they change equipment almost every month. This happens even in a poor country like ours, though comparatively less often than golfers from elsewhere. Sometimes I even wonder if they are really looking for more distance, or if it has become a fashion statement.

Good players who change their clubs take advantage of new advances in material and technology. However, manufacturers often take advantage of club golfers, giving products with no major difference a new look and name, which in my opinion is often just a gimmick.

What should you look for when you buy your next club? I don’t have to mention that a good swing produces distance and accuracy, therefore making a good swings more important than the club. Always try to improve your game by improving your swing. However, if there is nothing to change in the present swing, the key to getting optimum benefit for distance is on having the right shaft in your club.

What does having the right shaft mean? Each golfer’s ability to swing the club is different. Some swing the club faster, some at a medium speed and others quite slow. The same shaft isn’t going to work for everybody. A person who is strong and has a fast swing needs a stiffer shaft. On the other hand, if someone has a slow swing and they are little weaker, they require a senior flex graphite shaft. As for choosing the right putter, the most comfortable ones are usually face balanced.

These are some of the basics to consider when you look at new clubs, but it would also be worth your while to consult your nearest golf professional for help in choosing the right products for you.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Head Golf Professional at Gokarna Forest Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

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Lychee Martinis at Kilroy’s, Thamel. Rs 150 per

4 th  Bagmati River Festival The Gift of Sight
artists. 5.30 PM on 18 July at the NAFA Hall, Naxal. All proceeds go to the Eye

paintings by various artists at Park Gallery, Lazimpat and Pulchowk, until 24 July. 10AM-6PM, closed Saturdays.

The Gift of Sight paintings by various artists. 5:30 PM on 18 July at the NAFA Hall, Naval. All proceeds go to the Eye Donation Fund.

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

Monsoon Collection 2004 Paintings by various artists at Park Gallery, Lazimpat and Pulchowk, until 24 July. 10AM-6PM, closed Saturdays.

Constitutions and Constitutionality in Nepal discussions on 16 July, 2-5PM at Hotel Himalaya, Pulchowk

Summer in Shivapuri, the much-anticipated third move of the Harry Potter series has hit Kathmandu and is already marking its magic.

Following the life of boy wizard Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe), Azkaban introduces a host of new characters including Sirius Black/Gary Oldman), a notorious wizard criminal who has escaped from prison, and new professors Lupin (David Thewlis) and Trelawney (Emma Thompson). With new director Alfonso Cuaron at the helm, this is touted as the best in the series so far, and through enjoyable for those who’ve watched the earlier movies and reads the books, also stands alone for those on their first Potter encounter.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The continuous rain over the past week has done wonders for Kathmandu’s air. The PM10 concentrations of fine dust particles at all measuring stations in the Valley, even in places usually choked with vehicles and pollutants like Patan, were well within the national standards of 10 micrograms per cubic meter. In fact, on 8 July the PM10 level in Patan Sadak was only 27 micrograms per cubic meter—about 10 percent of what the pollution level was a week earlier. So go out and breathe.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Bird watching and a presentation on nature at Park Village Hotel, Budhanilkanta. 4454705

Festival of Jazz at Hotel Shangri-la, Thamel.

Jatra Friday Nites discussions Constitutions and Constitutionalism in Nepal

12:15, 3:15, 6:15

Bookings open

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Hazardous >425

Ok 61 to 120

Good < 60

PUTALISADAK    PATAN H          THAMEL   KIRTIPUR        BHAKTAPUR  MATSYAGAUN

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Walking on air

BIG BANG: A 65-year-old woman was killed when Maoists set off a bomb at the Nepal Telecom office in Jawalakhel on Thursday morning. Several were injured, including people in this bus parked outside the building.

MAKING PLANS: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Suya Nath Upadhyaya of the CIAA release directives for various government departments on Wednesday at Pulchowk.

BHANU RALLY: School children at Darbur High School participate in a rally for Bhanu Jayanti on Tuesday.

KNOCKING AT DOORS: Purna Maya Shrestha submits a petition at the Chinese Embassy in Baluwatar on Tuesday, requesting that her husband Bidwai Kumar Shrestha, held on a drug charge in China, not be executed. The embassy has passed the petition on to Beijing.

MEDIA MODELS: At the 2nd AAN City Advertising Awards, held at Sotheby Crowne Plaza on Sunday evening, models pose in costumes representing various media houses.

"If you need is determination and you can achieve anything," says Sarina Gurung, who made an unconventional career choice to become the only female helicopter pilot in Nepal. In four years, Sarina has already notched up over 1,000 flights and is now used to the reaction she gets as she lands her chopper on remote hillsides. "Hey, it's a woman," villagers say as she climbs out of the cockpit, and they rush to touch her to see if she is for real.

Sarina laughs at this, and hopes she breaks traditional stereotypes about women by just being there to do what she does. As a girl in Solukhumbu and daughter of an ex-British Gurkha, Sarina never imagined she'd ever be a pilot. After finishing high school, she remembers ruling out the usual career options: doctor, engineer, nurse. "When I decided to be a pilot, I thought about the idea, made a plan and worked on it," says Sarina. She enrolled at a Russian aviation school in Odessa right after graduation. After getting her flying license, she returned to Nepal and got a job with Simrik Air.

"It's a choice Sarina is glad she made, and Nepal is one of the most challenging areas of the world to fly a helicopter in. "Thanks to flying, I've really learnt a lot about Nepal, its geography and biodiversity," she says. By now, she has landed her huge Mi-17 helicopter in 500 places spread over Nepal's 75 districts.

Sarina plans to continue flying high, but refuses to limit herself to just being a pilot. "Sometimes, it gets monotonous going from Point A to Point B," she says. But as an aerobics instructor and bungy jumper as well, Sarina has no time being bored. Now she wants to try paragliding as well. On top of all this, she's making a foray into film, having just completed a six-month video project on Rai culture which will be released soon.

Sarina is happy that she is not yet a celebrity. "People really don't know that I exist," she says, pointing out that her name was not mentioned when a national newspaper ran a list of all the female pilots in Nepal. She ribs us: "You guys need to do more homework." (Naresh Newar)
Ten things I like about Nepal

Every country has its pros and cons, tell me one country that doesn’t. On some days it feels like our cons outweigh our pros, but such days are rare. That is why I get impatient with people who are always whining on about this great country of ours and needlessly hurting her feelings. One of the most uplifting things about being a Nepali in this day and age is that we know it is a kingdom with great potential. Potentially, we have the potential to be great, and that’s what counts.

That is why it helps sometimes, for future reference, to draw up our own individual lists of what we like and dislike about Nepal, and as a sort of guide to remind ourselves of the little blessings that we take for granted every day. Here is my list over which I claim no intellectual property rights, so you can lift entire chunks of it and pass it off as yours. Here are the ten things I like about Nepal:

1. We smile through all our troubles, no matter how hard the times we always see the glass as half full because we know that things are going to get much worse and we may as well enjoy it while things are relatively better.
2. Nepal posted a 4.6% growth rate in the last fiscal year, everything grew: the deficit, the concentration of particles below ten microns at Putul Sadak, the number of days the country shut down, and according to a news item this week in the national dailies “the illegal flesh trade mushroomed”. Or was it “the illegal mushroom trade was fleshed out”. Whatever. Either way there was a 4.6% growth.
3. We have lots of holidays.
4. Free weight loss clinics for politicians. Former ministers protesting regression can now burn off excess fat by taking part in relay hunger strikes. We know it is hard not to eat for three hours, but hey, no pain no gain.
5. In a welcome development for gun enthusiasts, Kathmandu’s discos are in the process of being converted into shooting ranges. Bouncers will give you a body search to check if you haven’t inadvertently left your firearm at home. Residents of Chundevi living downrange are henceforth required to wear bullet-proof vests, helmets and anti-bacterial socks during the wee hours.
6. Mud baths. Only in the most expensive spas in the world would you pay an arm and a leg to get yourself covered from nose to toe in therapeutic volcanic mud to give your skin that younger, healthier tone. In Kathmandu, during the monsoon, mud slinging is free. All you have to do is walk along Krishna Galli and wait for buses to rumble over the puddles. Kathmandu’s roads may have potholes, but they are paved with good intentions.
7. We never do today what can be done the day after tomorrow.
8. Eight down, two to go.
9. Um… running out of things I like about Nepal.
10. Oh, yes, Nepal Telecom’s mobile phone system has some of the lowest prices in the world, my bill for last month was zero. The reason: I couldn’t actually make any calls because the network was always busy.

Kunda Dixit

UNDER MY HAT

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BRAND INSIGHT 2004

Retaining Customers? Enhancing Brand Value?

This workshop will offer tips and ideas on:

- Conducting competitive threats and dealing with brand cluster
- Creating points of differentiation on targeting markets and services with trends or moving into premium or value areas to create margins.

Very useful for:

Organizations’ leaders/managers involved in shaping the image of international customers of the organization.

Ajay Gupta, National Director presentation for this event is from Executive Vice President of Accenture and former COO and is author of Strategic Insight, IT and innovation in 25 major areas of experience, including: networking, innovations, and brand identity.

KNOWLEDGE: 

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For more information, appointments and related service, please contact:
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