It is an indication of just how seriously the world now takes the brutality of Nepal’s conflict that someone like Louise Arbour was here this week.

The former Canadian supreme court justice is a name associated with genocides in Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia. She specialises in bringing war criminals to justice through international tribunals like she did the massacre perpetrators from Rwanda as well as Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic.

Her presence in Nepal should have sent a chill down the spine of every commander and political or rebel leader under whose watch human rights atrocities are being committed. More than 32,000 Nepalis have lost their lives in the last nine years: most of them are unarmed civilians, butchered, disappeared, killed after arbitrary arrests and torture.

This week in Kathmandu, Arbour was outspoken in her criticism of state security and the Maoists and warned them that they would be held to account. “In every part of the world, political and military leaders who thought themselves immune from persecution are now answering before the law for the gross human rights abuses they perpetrated,” Arbour said.

Nepal has signed more than a dozen international treaties and instruments that would allow the UN to get Nepali human rights violators into international courts. “They are more than enough for the UN Security Council to set up tribunals for Nepali perpetrators,” Sher Bahadur KC of the Nepal Bar Association and international lawyer told us. “And Arbour was here to assess the human rights situation under that UN provision.”

Arbour met King Gyanendra, Prime Minister Deuba, COAS Pyar Jung Thapa conveying her concern that there have been very few serious investigations and convictions of human rights abuses. “The army was also given the message that human rights violations at home would affect the future of its UN peacekeeping operations abroad.

Arour also met human rights activists and relatives of the disappeared. But her harshest words were for the Maoists who she warned shouldn’t think they exist in a legal vacuum. She told us: “I would like to warn the leaders of the insurgency not to misread developments in the wider world nor to believe that they can operate outside of the law.” She said she was most concerned about the abductions of children, forced displacement of families, murders and extortion by the rebels. But even while Arbour was still in Nepal, Maoists went ahead with the abduction of 500 students and teachers in Dadeldhura and 750 in Sankhuwasabha for their indoctrination programs.

A UN team on involuntary disappearances was in Nepal last month and is scheduled to present its report in the run-up to a hearing on Nepal scheduled for March. Arbour’s office in Geneva will be looking at progress till then.
In the crossfire

Tula Ram Pandey has long stopped having any illusions that journalists should not get involved in their stories.

As a reporter in the remote district of Kailali, he was nearly killed in a recent firefight between an army patrol and the Maoists. He has been threatened by both sides, found himself evacuating sick children to hospitals and has even mediated between the state and the Maoists to rescue abducted politicians.

“Tula Ram was lucky,” said 30-year-old Tula Ram, “You can’t just say I’m a journalist, that’s not my job.” Last year, Pandey played the role of a go-between to obtain the release of the UML’s Kailali MP who had been abducted by the Maoists. Neither the Maoists nor the army would trust anyone else.

But that trust is sometimes mixed with suspicion. Every day is a high-wire act for Tula Ram as he tries to stick to professional journalism while keeping the army, the administration and the rebels at arm’s length.

The whole-timers were killed, but Tula Ram was lucky that a ricocheting bullet just grazed his leg.

Army officers have threatened to bury him on the spot if he didn’t stop filing human rights stories, while a notorious Maoist militia chief warned he would be terminated if his articles weren’t more positive. Tula Ram Pandey is the Kailali correspondent for the Nepali national daily, Kantipur, and has grown used to the dangers. His more immediate worry is the technical difficulty of filing stories: there is only one phone line in the whole district and it is on the CDO’s desk. Friendly helicopter pilots are Tula Ram’s (and his district’s) lifeline to the rest of the country.

Despite everything, he is still positive about the future. “I am an incurable optimist,” he says, smiling, “If I wasn’t I wouldn’t have married last month. You have to believe that someday this madness will end.”

— Kunda Dixit
Hold the club right and let it rip

Neglecting this basic key technique will lead golfers into all sorts of trouble, almost always resulting in an improper swing to compensate for weaknesses in the grip. Unfortunately most amateurs and almost all beginners don’t pay enough attention to this and just indulge themselves in whacking more and more golf balls on the range with an incorrect grip. Instead of practice sessions being fun and constructive, they end up ingraining an incorrect swing that takes much harder work to undo. To tip it off, even after realising that it is detrimental to one’s improvement, once an incorrect grip has started to feel comfortable, it’s something that’s not easy to change. Golf textbooks identify three basic different ways of gripping the golf club.

- The Vardon (or overlap) grip
- The interlocking grip
- The baseball grip

The Vardon or overlap grip: A vast majority of tournament professionals use the grip invented by Harry Vardon, known as the overlapping or ‘Vardon Grip’. Here, the small finger of the right hand rests in the slot between the index and middle finger of left hand. Some find this awkward and prefer letting the little finger rest on the index finger itself. In both cases though, the ring finger of right hand should rest closely against the left index finger.

The interlocking grip: Many players prefer the interlocking grip as it offers a secure feeling of control over the club. This grip is formed by locking the left index finger and right small finger.

The baseball grip: Similar to gripping a baseball or cricket bat, here there is no linkage between the index and little fingers even though both hands should be very close to each other.

No matter which style you use, there are a few basics that need to be followed. First place your left hand on your club ensuring that without moving your head you can see two knuckles. This set up is for a normal grip as opposed to a strong or weak one. The V shape created by the left index finger and thumb should point to your chin.

Next, place your right hand on the grip ensuring the V created by the right index finger and thumb point to the right shoulder. To cross check, unfold your hands and see if they are parallel to each other. If they are, then you probably got the grip right.

Players usually adjust their grip in relation to their physical strength. Weaker people may opt for a stronger grip; one where you should see three or more knuckles of the left hand while holding the club. Conversely, for physically stronger people a weaker grip may be ideal, where only one knuckle is seen while holding the club.

The bottom line is that both hands should be parallel to each other when unfolded. The interlocking grip is recommended for players with small hands as it offers a secure feeling of control on the grip. The overlapping grip is best for stronger people and the baseball grip is sometimes for those who have long or uneven finger lengths.

At the end of it all, it’s best to have your grip checked by your golf coach. The secret to sustaining flight and soaring in the air currents above Phewa Lake.

Circling and climbing to 2,000 m in a thermal with 43 other pilots requires great skill and concentration. The idea is to ride rising currents of warm air called thermals until they stop and then glide out to the next rising current. These thermals are the secret to sustaining flight and paradisers need to be extremely adept at harnessing them.

Flying competition is often fast, furious and aggressive. Pilots race each other around a set course, the first to successfully complete it is the winner. According to topography and climate, Pokhara valley is ideal for such a competition. This year it played host to pilots of exceptional skill. The class of the field was world standard and this showed in the speed of the race and the manner in which the pilots were able to execute their tasks.

Adam Hill is the Director of Sunrise Paragliding and a competitor in the event. 061-521174 www.nepal-paragliding.com sunrise@nepal-paragliding.com

Pokhara sky race

The annual Nepal Paragliding Championship was a flying success

Day one: Clear blue sky, cumulus clouds popping off the high mountains and an uninterrupted view of the peaks. An ambitious task of 40 km was set. Starting from Sarangkot, the competitors raced 10 km down the ridge to Naundada and then another 10 km back to Sarangkot before heading due north towards Annapurna IV and back south to Lakeside. The promising conditions deteriorated as clouds enveloped the mountains and created strong valley winds. These winds blew the thermals out and put a lot of the competitors on the ground early. In the turbulent conditions one pilot from France suffered a collapsed wing and had to throw his reserve parachute, landing safely. Only four pilots made the final turn point, with only Jamie Messenger completing the task. Jean Michael from France came second and Ajay Kumar of India, third.

Day two: Another good day with early cumulus development. The race committee decided to set a shorter race that would allow more competitors to finish. So a 20 km ridge run with four turnpoints was set. A congested start saw all the gliders struggling for the best lift, with cloudbase 1,000 m above the takeoff, we were able to spread out and fly with little interference. Although you race against other pilots in paragliding competitions, in reality you compete against yourself. If you fly at someone else’s pace and worry about where they are going and why, it becomes hard to find your own rhythm, you lose focus and land early. With good conditions the race pilot’s main priority is to decide when he should leave the thermal he is climbing in and move on to the next. Today’s task was won and lost on just such a decision with me taking the low route and sneaking in five seconds ahead of Jamie Messenger, Debu Chaudhary and Ajay Kumar of India.

Day three: Though it had rained the night before, the day dawned clear. A short task was called as we had the closing ceremony that afternoon. Apparently, state ministers don’t like to be kept waiting! A 23 km race was set around Phewa lake. Gliders have a wide speed range from 27-65 km/h. By flying fast you lose height, the skill is in balancing speed and height. Jamie Messenger dominated the field. Debu Chaudhary arrived second and Rajesh Bajrani from Nepal finished third.

In the afternoon the pilots headed up for a second flight, this time for an acrobatic display over the lake. A variety of thrilling manoeuvres later, they had the option of landing on a raft situated 100 m offshore or a spot landing with an egg in the middle. In the end of the day there were three very scrambled eggs and many wet pilots. The crowd that thronged the shores of Phewa lake cheered wildly as more and more pilots missed the raft landing and splashed into the lake. Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Prakash Sharan Mahat, handed out the prizes to (pictured, from right) Jamie Messenger (UK), who came in first, Debu Chaudhary (India), second and Ajay Kumar (India). There were only eight pilots from Nepal completing in the event, Sunrise Paragliders hopes to train more Nepalis for future events but in the meantime if you want to ride with the wind, just head for Pokhara.
surprising sanctuary in Nepal. It is hard to explain the Bob Marley craze in Nepal but no one can deny that the raja of reggae with his rasta locks has found a certain resonance in here.

Legend has it that Bob Marley visited Nepal in the 1970s and went up to Mustang. Today, just below the temple of the eternal flame in Muktinath is his shrine, the Bob Marley Restaurant, where he is said to have rested. Late at night, the sound of ‘No Woman No Cry’ emanating from the restaurant and disco echoes in the craggy mountains below Thorung La. In the remotest corners of Nepal, trekking porters who don’t even speak English hum Marley’s tunes. Taxis, rickshaws and corner shops in Kathmandu and long-distance buses are resplendent in the Rastafarian colours of green, gold and red. Marley’s Rasta stickers are readily available and ubiquitous defiantly showing off the cannabis leaves and waving the Ethiopian tricolour.

The Bob Marley stickers are printed in Bob Marley’s contribution to the world of music is immense. He furthered a religion, promoted peace and sang for the people. He brought Jamaica to the world and the world to Jamaica and most importantly he brought reggae to Nepal. And one of the strangest sights while trekking in Nepal is to come across the Bob Marley restaurant and lodge at Muktinath (pictured). Here, birds of a feather (reggae fans, Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims) flock together to pay homage to the eternal flame that comes out of the ground and the eternal music of Bob Marley.

Marley died of cancer at the age of 36 in 1981. The people of Jamaica gave him an official funeral, and his body was laid to rest in a mausoleum. On his 60th birthday, his remains are to be exhumed and re-buried in Ethiopia, the spiritual home of Rastafarianism.
Arbour’s advice

By UN standards, the gathering was held on Monday in Kathmandu by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, as blunt as they come. She warned both the rebels and the army that they would ultimately be held to account for human rights violations. She urged both sides: ‘You stand for democracy. The international community has repeatedly sent unambiguous signals that he desist from the temptation to go it alone. By now, it must be clear even to him that the musical chair game of Article 127 can’t go on. The king therefore needs a face-saving way out, and the only one we see for him is to join hands with a rejuvenated political process. For the parties it means recognising the crisis and coming together in a national government to address the deep-seated problems with the potly.

The Maoists used to have time on their hands: as the country’s economic downturn began they sometimes just needed to bite their time as frustrations grew. Not any more. The revolution is in serious danger of devouring itself. There are signs of deepening rifts. Despair and resistance are spreading. To bring things back on track, assert themselves and even to provide a strong bargaining position in future negotiations, the dominant parties will want to mark the sixth anniversary of the start of the war next month with some big bangs.

Out of Nepal’s 25 million people, there are probably only some 150,000 legal exiles, hawks on both sides, by boys who benefit from this conflict. The rest don’t want to have anything to do with this war. The trouble is that this overarching peace constituency is not organisations representing the third party. The people can only be led down by the people they elected, by a palace that is supposed to care, and by revolutionaries who have brought nothing but ruin.

On the contrary, the only way to give the people back their voice is to allow them to speak through their representatives. The parliamentary parties may have squandered democracy, but it is they who have lost the most. They are morally and psychologically, in the past nine years. Whether it is to restore parliament, reform the constitution, have elections, engage the Maoists in negotiations, bringing the parties back into the picture is the least-cost option. Despite their sins only elections, engage the Maoists in negotiations, bringing the parties back into the picture is the least-cost option. Despite their sins only elections, engage the Maoists in negotiations, bringing the parties back into the picture is the least-cost option.
Stirring the pole pot

Just to show he is doing something, Deuba needs to keep churning out talk of elections

K ing Gyamendra’s October Fourth decision and those which have followed are sacrilegious to ordinary royalist advisers. We don’t know for certain who they are, but it’s almost certain that neither premier Sher Bahadur Debdu nor his cabinet colleagues belong to that group.

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal

Deuba knows where his orders come from. So he can’t announce, defer or cancel parliamentary elections on his own. He has to wait for the appropriate light before pretending he has made up his mind. In the interim, he need not do anything. Nothing is going to happen. So, once in a while, he stirs the pot. Pot. Like everyone else in the kingdom, though, he knows the absurdity of it all.

Despite his reputation, Deuba is neither naive nor inept. He is a survivor and perfectly aware of the price of confrontation. He refused to move out of the palace even while challenging the palace even while he was out in the boondocks in Bhusunkhanta last time he got the sack.

King Gyamendra had dismissed him by pinning the “incompetent” label on his lapel. There were many in Kathmandu’s diplomatic circles then who gave him the king the benefit of doubt. They expected his king, with help from the military, would quickly clear up the Maoist mess and hand power back to people’s representatives. It has been two years and they are still waiting.

King Gyamendra has repeatedly said he is for constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, but he hasn’t given up his publicly declared intention that he also wants to be a “constructive” (a politically correct synonym of ‘active’) monarch. Elections now will be an exercise in acquiring legitimacy for that active role rather than one that the constitution allows. Since the political parties operating in the streets will be reluctant to commit hara kiri by agreeing to polls, polls will end up alienating the parties from the monarchy even further. King Gyamendra is in need of taking political risks, but this one isn’t real either.

The Royal Nepali Army has been fighting Maoists from direct front, challenging the palace even while he was out in the boonocks in Bhusunkhanta last time he got the sack.

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While Deuba and the Maoists have all followed the script, there’s no script coming from the Nehru-Gandhi family. The Maoists are a threat, but we don’t know what they’ll do. Time is running out. The conflict is already bound. A conflict that is waged by people in a country that has suffered so much from such conflicts. It’s not a country that has suffered so much from such conflicts. Nepal follows India’s example.

Deuba’s mandate is to have a foolproof plan to end, immediately, the conflict. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass. He has a fresh crop of cabinet ministers to embarrass.

Nepal needs to show he is doing something, Deuba needs to keep churning out talk of elections.
Despite bands and blockades, a white revolution raises the income of dairy farmers and improves nutrition

MALLIKA ARYAL in DHADING

Achkarya is part of Nepal’s white revolution, the dramatic spread of dairy farming across the midhills and the tarai that has raised the income of farmers and improved nutrition levels. Districts surrounding Kathmandu Valley (Dhading, Sindhupalchok and Kathre) and even Chitwan and Nawalparasi have taken maximum advantage of the growing urban demand. “Where there is nothing else, milk is the best way to get a few hundred rupees,” explains Hari Prasad Gajurel in Thakre. Most farmers who bring their milk to be sold here have given up growing crops to become full-time dairy farmers. There is no formal technical training required and most farmers already have cattle at home and just need to scale up. The return on investment is good during normal times. Indeed, if it wasn’t for the insurgency and political instability, farmers like Gajurel would have been quite prosperous now. But frequent blockades and bandas have crippled Dhading’s dairy and vegetable farmers. Here and in Chitwan, farmers recently got together and dumped thousands of litres of milk on the highways and rivers to protest the road closures. But the message hasn’t gone across to the Marxists or political parties who believe in creating maximum disruption by blocking highways. There has also been a glut in the dairy market because of oversupply and this has forced “milk holidays”—days when Kathmandu based dairies do not buy milk from farmers. These are usually announced in advance and farmers have learnt to live with them. But local chilling units and production of value-added dairy products would have allowed farmers to be less affected by oversupply and highway disruptions. “I lost Rs 5,000 during the last blockade,” says Bishnu Acharya. He and other farmers walked down to Dhankhship carrying milk in dokos on their backs only to find out that there was a banda and no one was at the collection centre. Bishnu carried the milk all the way back to his village but many of his friends just poured it into the Trisuli.

Himala Rajbhandary, the owner of the private Nepal Dairy in Kathmandu predicts that at the rate milk production is increasing, Nepal is only five years away from a big milk boom. “But for that to happen, a stable political environment is a prerequisite,” Rajbhandary told us. Nepal Dairy gets milk from Prithbipur, Pratapnagar, Dhanikhel and Punchkhal in the east and prides itself in never having to declare a milk holiday. “This is because we have diversified,” explains Rajbhandary, “our products include ice cream, mozzarella, pizzas and bakery items, in addition to raspali and lalmohans.”
The state run Dairy Development Corporation has also diversified its product base by investing in milk products like yoghurt. There are now 180 private dairy companies all over the country and in Kathmandu alone, many are planning to invest in new equipment. In the past few years, private companies have set up units to turn surplus milk into canned condensed milk in Bhaktapur and Hetauda and are exploring export markets. Almost as destructive as bandas is the import of cheap and dubious milk powder

Move Kathmandu away from Kathmandu

Nepal should consider joining an exclusive club of nations. It may be the way to jump start the long stalled process of national development. How about this for company: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Tanzania, Nigeria, Pakistan and the United States? What do they all have in common? Each has taken the decision to move their capital city away from the seat of government away from the largest metropolitan and into the hinterland, building a new town from scratch. The soaring arches of Canberra, the ultra modern precincts of Brasilia, Ottawa’s glittering landmarks against a forest backdrop, Dodoma in the shadow of Mt Kilimanjaro, Abuja in the central plains, Islamabad’s broad boulevards and the ultimate imperial city, Washington DC.

None of these placs existed, save perhaps Dodoma as a small village, before the move. Acharya’s milk and milk from hundreds of other farmers in Dhading ends up at the Dairy Development Corporation’s plant in Balaju for distribution in Kathmandu. Acharya’s is one of the many reasons for such a move—most likely a desire to get the seat of political power away from the money culture of the big city, from New York, Sydney, Dar Es Salaam, Lagos etc. But also a genuine feeling that the government could better serve the people if it existed among them. And yes, not a bit of land speculation and builder cartel profiteering.

The justifications in Nepal for such a move are many. No one who has studied this country can deny that alienation and distance from a foreign capital is rampant, and has been for centuries. The brave attempts at devolution in the 1990s were popular and effective. Now the only de facto decentralisation of power is practiced by the Marxists.

There’s also a hugely compelling environmental argument. The gorgeous and valuable Kathmandu Valley is being smothered by urban sprawl. Declining water tables, poisonous air and disappearing arable land all portend a cumulative catastrophe that will affect millions of people. So many attempts to stave off or mitigate this disaster have failed amid the political entropy in Kathmandu.

So where to build this new city, this Prithipur or Jamupr or Pratapnagar or whatever? The East of Nepal is the most functional part so arguably it doesn’t necessarily need the development that would come with a massive public works project. The Far West is too distant from the rest, however poor and underdeveloped. The hills are too rugged, the tarai too hot and too valuable as agricultural land. Pokhara or its surroundings would just end up as another Kathmandu, an aloof feudal city. The Kathmandu Valley could be reorganised as a super municipality and surging tourism. Nepal’s new capital city, young, dynamic, democratic and dedicated to developing the country would be the envy of the region and the world. It’s worth a debate at least.

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of milk and money

from abroad. The production of milk is not uniform: there is a surplus during the winter months and a summer deficit. To plug the gap, the government allows the import of powdered condensed milk from Denmark, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand. Farmers and dairy owners say these imports are of questionable quality and dampen domestic dairy production.

The Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) was formed in 1969 and as Kathmandu became urbanised, demand for processed milk soared. Another plant capable of processing 5,000 litres an hour was set up in 1978 in Basu. Two more plants were built in Hetauda and Pokhara with Danish assistance.

Veterinarian Hemanta Rajbhandary oversees the DDC’s expansion during those heady days. But he understood that the government would never be able to meet Kathmandu’s growing demand for milk and dairy products. In fact, by the early 1980s, Nepal had a milk deficit.

Rajbhandary dreamt of starting his own dairy and remembers calling a gathering of his friends in 1981 to finance the launch of a private dairy. “Each person promised to loan me Rs 10,000,” Rajbhandary recalls. “This wasn’t enough to cover the cost, so he built a small shed in his garden and started producing yogurt. That was where Nepal Dairy was born.”

Today Nepal Dairy employs 200 people directly in its Khumaltar plant and has seven outlets in Kathmandu, Hetauda, Biratnagar and Pokhara. Nepal Dairy does not penalise farmers with milk by imports but boys all oversupply and has made product diversification and value addition its twin mantras. It has followed this up with professional marketing, investing in the attractive ‘ND’ logo and branding milk in bars and dairy outlets. ND has also branched out into products that make extensive use of milk with bakery products. Nepali sweets and cheese.

Marketing processing benefits not just the company but also the farmer who sells milk to the dairy,” Rajbhandary says. But Nepal’s ‘Milk Man’ feels he still has a long way to go. “I must keep diversifying, if people are not eating ND’s pizza because there is a scarcity of milk in the market, I’m quite prepared to venture into napkin production as well,” he says half-jokingly.

The drains in Panauti because the roads are blocked,” says Dingsha Raj Khamb, a dairy farmer in Kapaha. The Dairy Development Corporation has a powdered milk plant in Biratnagar that produces 700,000 litres of powdered milk every year and this is used to tide over the lean periods. But project manager Gopal Krishna Thapa says a daily annual demand is for 4,000 tons and this shortfall is being filled by import.

Dairy expert Tek Bahadur Thapa doesn’t agree. “Nepal has become a dumping ground for cheap milk powder,” he says, blaming the mess on the absence of product monitoring and lax law enforcement. Domestic powdered and canned condensed milk could be a way for Nepali dairy diversities and add value to surplus milk but a powdered milk plant can cost anywhere up to Rs 60 million. DDC supplies 130,000 litres of milk every day to Kathmandu during flush time, buying it from farmers on the Valley’s outskirts and surrounding districts. Even though it is state run, DDC faces competition from private dairies by investing in dairy products. But it is also affected by landless and blockades and loses up to Rs 3 million for every day of closure.

Tek Bahadur Thapa agrees that political stability is imperative for the survival of Nepal’s dairy industry. “The milk boom has yet to come,” Thapa says. “But due to instability, farmers have started leaving the dairy business because they can’t depend on milk sales to meet daily needs.”

What is most worrying is that the dramatic growth and development of Nepal’s dairy industry has happened despite political instability. It is clear that if the situation normalised, Nepal would be a major dairy producer meeting not just domestic demand but also a potential export-oriented industry.

Nepal’s first milk processing plant was built in Lainchaur 40 years ago with help from New Zealand and the UN. Until then, even in Kathmandu, people kept cows at home and had no reason to buy processed milk.

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What is most worrying is that the dramatic growth and development of Nepal’s dairy industry has happened despite political instability. It is clear that if the situation normalised, Nepal would be a major dairy producer meeting not just domestic demand but also a potential export-oriented industry.

Nepal’s first milk processing plant was built in Lainchaur 40 years ago with help from New Zealand and the UN. Until then, even in Kathmandu, people kept cows at home and had no reason to buy processed milk.

The Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) was formed in 1969 and as Kathmandu became urbanised, demand for processed milk soared. Another plant capable of processing 5,000 litres an hour was set up in 1978 in Basu. Two more plants were built in Hetauda and Pokhara with Danish assistance.

Veterinarian Hemanta Rajbhandary oversees the DDC’s expansion during those heady days. But he understood that the government would never be able to meet Kathmandu’s growing demand for milk and dairy products. In fact, by the early 1980s, Nepal had a milk deficit.

Rajbhandary dreamt of starting his own dairy and remembers calling a gathering of his friends in 1981 to finance the launch of a private dairy. “Each person promised to loan me Rs 10,000,” Rajbhandary recalls. “This wasn’t enough to cover the cost, so he built a small shed in his garden and started producing yogurt. That was where Nepal Dairy was born.”

Today Nepal Dairy employs 200 people directly in its Khumaltar plant and has seven outlets in Kathmandu, Hetauda, Biratnagar and Pokhara. Nepal Dairy does not penalise farmers with milk by imports but boys all oversupply and has made product diversification and value addition its twin mantras. It has followed this up with professional marketing, investing in the attractive ‘ND’ logo and branding milk in bars and dairy outlets. ND has also branched out into products that make extensive use of milk with bakery products. Nepali sweets and cheese.

Marketing processing benefits not just the company but also the farmer who sells milk to the dairy,” Rajbhandary says. But Nepal’s ‘Milk Man’ feels he still has a long way to go. “I must keep diversifying, if people are not eating ND’s pizza because there is a scarcity of milk in the market, I’m quite prepared to venture into napkin production as well,” he says half-jokingly.
Liberty and society

If this was a democracy, we should be worried about the choice of governor, the fuel price hike and the VAT increase, but it isn’t.

A s the country grapples with an intensifying insurgency, three issues in recent weeks have stolen the headlines away from the conflict: appointment of the Nepal Rastra Bank governor, the rise in the prices of petroleum products, and the increase in VAT to 13 percent. This gives the impression that the situation in the rest of the country is normal, as politicians indulge in their usual shenanigans to ridicule democracy.

Debates in the Nepali media revolve around the politically-correct rhetoric of leftists in social democratic garb: ‘the poor are ignorant and need planning by the government’, ‘the government has to think strategically’, ‘the state must intervene because of the free market system’. The irony here is that it is the government that did it. The argument that the money is needed to keep the subsidies going was inexcusable, especially because it was not even an elected government.

The tyranny of individualism, but the irony here is that it is the government that did it. The argument that the money is needed to keep the subsidies going was inexcusable, especially because it was not even an elected government. In 1983, a group of volunteer engineers decided that diverting water from Khar Khola was the best option, but it was 14 km away and there was no money.

Things became much easier after Dhulikhel was declared a municipality in 1987. The German aid group, GTZ stepped in with part of the money, and local businessmen put up the rest. A water user’s committee was set up, and at the headworks villagers provided land for free.

After the project was completed in 1991 (pic: above), more than 230 households had private taps at their doorsteps. Within a year, the user’s committee raised Rs 400,000 from each household paying Rs 35 per month for up to 10,000 litres of water. This was more expensive than Kathmandu, where people paid only Rs 15 per month in 1992, but in Dhulikhel the water was reliable and clean.

“This was our dream project, and because it was initiated and run by the people there was no chance it would fail,” ex-mayor Shrestha tells us in an interview (see box). Last year, the user’s committee

What Dhulikhel

At a time when parts of Kathmandu haven’t had water flowing out of the pipes for years, the people of Dhulikhel have what the capital’s citizens can only dream of: 24-hour water supply from the mains.

Sixty-year-old Namu Maya Shrestha is relaxed, she no longer has to wake up at the crack of dawn to wait with her gargo at the public tap. “We are lucky,” says Namu Maya recalling the days when Dhulikhel had no water and dysentry and typhoid were common. The water shortage drove many out of Dhulikhel, and some settled in nearby Banepa.

When Dhulikhel was made the district headquarters of Khusire in 1962, the population soared and the water situation got worse. As the Panchayat government was not taking any initiative to improve the water supply system, Dhulikhel took the matter into their own hands. In 1983, a group of volunteer engineers decided that diverting water from Khar Khola was the best option, but it was 14 km away and there was no money.

A wave pushed him into the water. Suddenly, the water was recording like a low tide fast forward. “It was as if we could see the bottom of the Indian Ocean, and the lifeguard started blowing his whistle to get us to clear the beach,” recalls Shashid, “but we were having too much fun to care much attention.”

From being waving and pointing.

It was only then that Shashid noticed the approaching wall of water on the horizon. “At first I was oblivious to the danger as the waves came up,” he recalls, “but I just kept coming higher up to my hips.”

A wave pushed him into some rocks, he screamed for his help was the first. “I was pushed back by the wave and watched in horror as my husband and daughter were engulfed. Aishwarya was screaming and my husband caught hold of her and passed him on to a man higher up the rock.”

For some reason, Shashid didn’t think of climbing up himself and started looking for his floating shoes. Just then a larger and stronger wave pushed him onto the rocks nearly smashing his hand on them. “I looked back and saw there was an even higher wave coming, and that is when I scrambled up,” says Shashid, “I climbed in panic and finally got to the top just then a giant wave as high as the palm tree smashed onto the shore.”

At the top, Shashid saw his wife and daughter hugging each other, they had given up on him being alive. The three of them held hands and ran for dear life. Later, they found out the next few waves were twice as high as the last one that nearly washed Shashid away.

Floating shoes were badly bruised and Aishwarya had deep cuts on her side. The three found a taxi to take them back to the hotel and along the way some corpsers and wounded people waiting for ambulances. The three went to the resort of Langkawi the next day but Milain and Aishwarya refused to go anywhere near the sea again.

Dr Bholu Nath Chalse is a liberal economist.
The Shahi family arriving at Penang airport on 26 December. Milan’s picture (right) of Susheel and Aishwarya on the beach minutes before the tsunami struck.

NARESH NEWAR #232NATION 28 JANUARY - 3 FEBRUARY 2005

Perfect town

The people of Dhulikhel elected Bed Prasad Shrestha mayor three times and they have never regretted it. Though no longer in office, the Dhulikhelis still call him Mayor Sa’b in appreciation of his honesty and openness. The mayor’s popularity has nothing to do with his domineering charm or close affinity with the local community. He is modest and soft-spoken and least interested in party politics. But when he plans something, he gets it done—efficiently, honestly and quickly. That is why even though he is no longer mayor, he is still the de facto town chief.

“I dream of making Dhulikhel the perfect town,” says Bed Prasad as he waves at the scenic panorama of town and the mountains beyond from the roof of his municipality. Most people go to Dhulikhel to look at the mountain vistas, few notice a lush forest comes right to the town’s edge, the vegetation not just giving the town a pleasing ambience but also protecting its water supply. It is largely during Bed Prasad’s tenure that the Dhulikhel municipality earned a reputation for being Nepal’s most dynamic municipality. And it is proof of just what one accountable and dedicated person can achieve in Nepal. Dhulikhel has the best university, an international standard hospital and an efficient water supply system built and managed by the local community.

“Kathmandu can learn a lot from Dhulikhel,” says Shiva Parajuli, engineer at the town’s water users committee. The project has made such an impact that the Maoists want to copy it in their many camps. “If the rest of the country was as successful as Dhulikhel, big institutions wouldn’t have to rely on the government to bring development into their home towns,” says Shiva Bhattachari, administrator at the Dhulikhel municipality. “Kathmandu can learn a lot from Dhulikhel.”

But for now, visitors from Kathmandu can only marvel at the abundant water that Dhulikhelis have, and there is no need to pump it to roof tanks. Says local resident Nilkantha Makaju, with visible pride: “No matter how big your house, there is enough water for everyone all the time.”

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Milan and Aishwarya are now back in Nepal, slowly coming out of the shock. Susheel has gone back to his school in Brunei. He told us over the telephone this week: “Watching the news reminds me just how lucky we were.” Although their camera was damaged by the tsunami, they retrieved the last pictures from the memory card.

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committee generated revenue worth of Rs 3.6 million from 1,000 consumers, hospitals, schools, police stations and government offices. Dhulikhel’s water supply project have become a model of community water supply. Experts from Nepal and abroad have come here to see how it is done.

The water project has become such an inspiration for the local community that they are thinking of investing in a larger network. “If the rest of the country was thinking in such an attitude, we would have a bright future for agriculture,” says Milan and Aishwarya.

“Without the water, these two big institutions wouldn’t have come here,” says Ramyervor Parajuli, engineer at the town’s water users committee. The project has made such an impact that the Maoists want Dhulikhel to help locals in Bhumidara set up a similar project there.

“What we have shown is that the people don’t always have to rely on the government to bring development into their home towns,” says Shiva Bhattachari, administrator at the Dhulikhel municipality. “Kathmandu can learn a lot from Dhulikhel.”

But for now, visitors from Kathmandu can only marvel at the abundant water that Dhulikhelis have, and there is no need to pump it to roof tanks. Says local resident Nilkantha Makaju, with visible pride: “No matter how big your house, there is enough water for everyone all the time.”

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The Shahi family arriving at Penang airport on 26 December. Milan’s picture (right) of Susheel and Aishwarya on the beach minutes before the tsunami struck.

They spent a subdued new year’s at their hotel watching the tsunami coverage on the news channels. Milan and Aishwarya are now back in Nepal, slowly coming out of the shock. Susheel has gone back to his school in Brunei. He told us over the telephone this week: “Watching the news reminds me just how lucky we were.” Although their camera was damaged by the tsunami, they retrieved the last pictures from the memory card.

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The Shahi family arriving at Penang airport on 26 December. Milan’s picture (right) of Susheel and Aishwarya on the beach minutes before the tsunami struck.
Cheaper power at night

Differential pricing for off-peak hours and seasons is the only way to go for now

| Naveen Singh Khadka |

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is under pressure from experts and now the government to sell millions of units of electricity it allows to go waste every year for a reduced price. Ironically, this is happening at a time when the NEA has been going for declared and undeclared load shedding because of one of the turbines of Kali Gandaki. A project has off and on remained out of order.

Although there has been a big increase in generation capacity in the past five years, 60 percent of the power comes from hydro power plants and most of them are ‘run of the river’ schemes and not reservoirs. This means their power capacity depends on the flow of the river, and there is excess power during the monsoon months when demand is lowest. As a result, up to one billion units of electricity are wasted as ‘spill’ every year. With an installed capacity of 610 MegaWatts, the NEA system generates more than 2,500 GigaWatts hour (GWh) of energy a year. One fourth of it is wasted as spill and NEA is under pressure to do something about it.

One option is to have differential tariffs for time of day and time of year: power is cheaper at night-time hours or during the monsoon months. “We are working out the rates for the sale of the spill power,” Minister of State for Water Resources Thakur Prasad Sharma told us on Tuesday. “The idea is to provide relief to the people at time when they have been bearing the brunt of the fuel price hike.”

The idea is not new. Successive governments have tried to use the wasted monsoon power by seasonal tariffs and other innovations. But differential pricing has so far been implemented only for the industrial sector. Nearly half the power in the country is used by the domestic and commercial segments and seasonal pricing has not been offered even to the industrial sector.

“We are trying to introduce both seasonal and time of day tariffs,” Minister Sharma said. “A consultant has been hired and these will be announced within next week.”

Working out the tariffs is one thing but experts say implementing them is something else altogether. Reason: it needs a formal nod from the Tariff Fixation Commission. In the past, the NEA and the Commission have locked horns over turf and tariff. When the Lokendra Bahadur Chand government leaned on NEA to introduce seasonal pricing two years ago, the tariff commission rejected the idea.

“The tariff commission is so autonomous that it is unanswerable to man or beast,” said Chand’s Water Resources Minister, Dipak Gyawali who pushed it. “It should be responsible for making sure a new tariff is announced and implemented each fiscal year.”

But a commission official said the recommendation was rejected because “differential pricing was proposed only for consumers using more than 150 units of power. That would not have been fair to poorer consumers who use less energy,” said the official. “Also, there is no infrastructure for the recommended pricing.”

Gyawali argues that rebates were offered for lower slab consumers who would pay bills on time. “Innovations on pricing cannot be implemented at once, they can be done phase wise.”

The commission says it is ready to talk to the NEA on new pricing to sell the spill energy. Minister Sharma doesn’t think there will be a problem this time. “We have sounded them out, everything looks positive,” he said. The Price Fixation Commission was set up 16 years ago as an independent body to regulate pricing mechanisms of the NEA. But in most cases the prices have been raised by the government or the NEA, under pressure from multilateral donors.

When the World Bank was in negotiation with the government over the aborted Arun III project in the early 1990s, the power tariff was raised by around 300 percent. When it provided a loan for the NEA’s rural electrification project a few years ago, the Asian Development Bank got the NEA to jack up tariff by 60 percent. At the time, the banks blamed the government for not adjusting tariff with inflation for populist reasons.

Past electricity tariff hikes have, except for the time of day mechanism for industries, been flat increases. Energy experts are glad the government is finally considering differential tariffs so the monsoon spill is not wasted. But they say the government also needs to introduce power in such a way that there is less pressure during peak hours to reduce the need for load shedding. “For that the price of power during peak hours in the dry season has to be made expensive,” suggest experts.

Energy expert Ratna Sansur Shrestha, “demand can be controlled by pricing.”

But since differential pricing for domestic and commercial consumers still doesn’t exist, the NEA has been forced this week to restart load shedding because one of the 144 Mega Watt turbines at Kali Gandaki tanked out. As the demand-supply gap grows, experts predict that power cuts will be chronic at least till 2008 because of delays in the Middle Marsyangdi. (See: Long dark winters ahead, #229) The situation is already fragile: peak load will touch 360 MegaWatts this year, while the installed capacity is just 610 MegaWatts.

NEA forecasts a nine percent increase in peak load this year, 7.8 percent next year and almost nine percent in 2007. But supply has been stagnant and no major capacity has been added since the 144 MegaWatt Kali Gandaki went into operation two years ago. The construction of the 70 MegaWatt Middle Marsyangdi was supposed to be finished this month but is already two years behind schedule. New plans like the West Seti and Upper Karnali are not even in the design stage.
**Business excellence awards**

The selection process has begun for the second TOP 10 Business Excellence Awards organised by the boss magazine scheduled this year for March. The awards celebrate great performance in the workplace, recognise outstanding leadership, innovation, perseverance, creativity, teamwork and integrity through 10 core categories. The independent, all encompassing business awards honour companies of all types and sizes and the people behind them. A board of advisers and a panel of experts, which include some of the most eminent names in Nepal’s business arena, leading executives and academicians, oversee the program. A new category, Social Entrepreneur has been introduced this year for people in the social sector, either individually or through their organisation.

**Broader horizons**

New Horizons Nepal is launching a Globally Certified IT Program (GCIT) to create professionals with a set of specific IT skills that are marketable anywhere in the world. GCIT consists of three streams: Databases, Networking and Programming. Participants completing the program will have at least two global certificates directly from companies like Microsoft, Oracle, Red Hat and CompTIA.

**Aid Boeing 747**

Martinair’s first Boeing 747 freighter took off early in the morning on 12 January for Sri Lanka loaded with 110 tons of aid supplies. A second Boeing 747 cargo aircraft departed for Colombo carrying aid supplies that weekend. Supplies are channelled through WHO, the Red Cross and the Sri Lankan government to disaster-stricken areas in Asia via Amsterdam. Italy is sending 35 tons of chemical toilets and water tanks, the Netherlands, 65 tons of medicines and bandages, and Germany and Sweden, 10 tons of medicines and blankets.

**NEW PRODUCTS**

**Cold Dream:** Dabur has unveiled Anmol Fairness Cold Cream in 25g and 80g packs, priced at Rs 24 and Rs 56 respectively. Fragrant, easy to apply and non-greasy, Dabur Anmol Fairness Cold Cream combines the qualities of a cold cream and a fairness cream. Its principal ingredients are almonds and saffron.

ONE ON ONE: Chaudhary Group has launched a new offer with Big Mimi Instant Noodles. Under this new scheme, the coupons collected can entitle the consumer anywhere from Rs 1 to Rs 111,111.

**Six blind men – ...and the elephant**

The best way to keep one’s profession going in Nepal in these times of economic decline, it seems, is to create panic and talk down on everything. Whether it is predicting that the conflict will rage on for another decade, or there will be an earthquake soon, the rupee is headed for devaluation, or the sky will fall.

**ECONOMIC SENSE**

Artha Beed

In Nepal, Chicken Little is alive and kicking ass. Economists have started predicting the fall of the Nepali Rupee vis-a-vis the Indian Rupee thereby bringing inflationary trends in the Nepali economy. Economists should behave as economists, not doomsday soothsayers. And the Nepali Times should stop quoting them (See: ‘Coming soon’, #231).

This Beed has actually being arguing the opposite. In a column three years ago in this space (‘Free the Nepali rupee’, #59) I had challenged why the exchange rate should just be 1.3 and not 1.6. Since no donor money was thrown in for this study, it did not get any responses. Economic analysts in Nepal are either academics who have outgrown their utility or consultants who are tired of writing ‘cut and paste’ reports. Unfortunately, no corporate house or the plethora of business associations has economists who analyse issues as critical as the exchange rate. We have associations of junket-savvy economists who are happier to play ceremonial roles at workshops and provide sound bytes to television. The exchange rate between India and Nepal is driven by pure politics and not economics. How else can one explain no revision of the exchange rate since 1 February 1990? In the past 11 years, the compositions of imports and exports have changed and this should definitely have affected the currency. Third country exports of carpets, garments and pashmina booming and busted, the exchange rate did not budge.

Gold imports, a major currency ticket item, declined but it made no impact. Hard currency requirements have increased multifold thereby increasing the foreign exchange reserves of the country. This should have resulted in the Nepali currency upwards not downwards. The argument that the Nepali rupee is over-valued against the dollar as this paper reported does not carry any impact. Hard currency requirements have increased multifold. The rupee has gained ground, the Chinese yuan gaining importance with a stronger economy, the Indian rupee sliding on strong ambitions, the fixed exchange regime with India and the modulus on fixing the parity needs constant analysis.

The parity between India and Nepal exchange rate was established in 1960 to stem fluctuations of market prices in Nepal as the basket of the poor comprised mostly of items imported from India. We really need to revisit the rationale and establish timely justifications on the parity and surely give it 1.6 a second look.

So, once again: 1.3, 1.4, 1.5. Rather than play Russian roulette with the parity, we should engage in meaningful research. Definitely an upward revaluation means greater purchasing power, a stronger currency and surely higher GDP.

http://www.arthabeed.com
Bob Marley would have turned 60 on Thursday, 6 February. But a generation after his death, he has left a living legacy not just around the world but here in Nepal as well.

Marley’s music from three decades ago remains as timeless and universal as it was when this obscure Jamaican singer first burst upon the world music scene. Robert Nesta Marley has been called ‘The first Third World Superstar’, the ‘Rasta Prophet’. Everyone who was a teenager then remembers the brilliantly original and evocative revolutionary music Marley gave the world. He was and remains one of the most charismatic performers ever to have graced the music industry with his distinctive blend of Jamaican reggae and Rastafarian spirit.

In a musical career that took off in the 1960s Bob Marley was named ambassador for peace and awarded Jamaica’s Order of Merit. His hit songs include, ‘Exodus’, ‘One Love’, ‘Buffalo Soldier’, ‘I shot the Sheriff’ and ‘No Woman No Cry’. His music has spanned the globe and has found a home in Bangkok and distributed by dealers in Marhu Tole, Ganesh Thana to local shops. A small sticker costs only Rs 5 and the bigger ones go for Rs 10. It seems no rickshaw or taxi driver in town can resist the bright colours with the black silhouette of Bob Marley—even if they don’t know who he is.

At nightfall these days, the streets of Thamel are alive with Marley songs and his beat blares out into the streets. Hippie relics and wannabes roam with dread locked hair and Rasta Style caps bopping to the rhythm of Marley’s music. Bob Marley memorabilia is everywhere and one can just imagine what it will be like next week during his 60th birth anniversary. Shops specialise in Rasta hats, T-shirts carrying cannabis leaves against a backdrop of the Rastafarian tricolour are selling like rolled weeds.

During Marley’s days, Thamel was the boondocks. The place to be was Freak Street of Basantapur. (Freak Street was the kundalini of hippiedom, where the world’s youth congregated in search of peace and eternal happiness. Many attained their private nirvanas with the assistance of mind-altering substances that was freely available on Freak Street.

It wouldn’t be surprising if Marley was there too. Maybe he came to trace his Rastafarian roots? A recent Nepali visitor to the Bob Marley Memorial Museum in Kingston, Jamaica, Jan Chhetri, said, “I love his music and the development of our music. As a music lover, I am here.”

The influence of dreadlocked, ganja-smoking sadhus or wandering ascetics, well-known figures in Hindu society, had on the Rastafarian is little known. But there is a link. The Hindu sadhu and the devout Rastafarian both have long unkempt hair, ash-smeared bodies, very little clothing and the trademark chalice pipe, making it difficult to distinguish who’s who. The sight of bands of sadhus living in Rasta-style camps and smoking marijuana from a formally-blessed communal chalice pipe is common place. A good place to watch them in action is at Pashupati during Shivaratri on 8 March.

Bob Marley is not dead, he’s just not here with me or you. ANoop Pandey

“I love the development of our music, that’s what I really dig about the whole thing. How we’ve tried to develop, you know? It grows. That’s why every day people come forward with new songs. Music goes on forever.”

Bob Marley, August 1979

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Let's have a referendum

Former royal-nominated MP Dipta Prakash Shah in Desanther, 23 January

Evaluating the circumstances of my resignation, it now appears that I was pushed out because the king wanted to make way for a new constitution. I was made to resign as a member of the Upper House because I stated all this in public and also because the palace was out to get me. The result is that the royal palace and well-known opportunists instigated the king to take over. Normally, people make moves on the basis of advice for people around them and that is what the king seems to have done. It is not that the king is unaware that democracy is necessary. In fact, he has been retiring his commitment on constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. The problem is his actions conflict with his words. His moves point to a direction very different from his speeches. Abuse of the king’s authority by the palace coterie is not new. Unfortunately, Nepal’s history is riddled with such incidents. Patriots such as Bhim Malla were hanged and others were banished. Times have changed, but patriots and democrats in our society are still tarnished and dishonoured. People need to know who the people around the king are and who influence him to take wrong decisions and that includes foreign powers like India and the United States. They are working in their own national interest and could be encouraging the power centres. They also stage events to show their capabilities. The Delhi treaty was signed just when the 1950 revolution was about to be successful. India knew that if the revolutionaries came to power, the people would be all powerful and India’s interests would not be fulfilled if the people’s voice became decisive. India realised that if the Nepali Congress revolution succeeded, the Nepali people would not become decisive. If the revolution succeeded, the Nepali people would not become decisive.

The Maoist insurrection began, the king was of the opinion that development would be a big setback for democratic practice in the country. That is why the palace was quiet about the movement at first. Later, when the Maoists grew to be a threat to the country, the palace thought it was the right time to take over. October Fourth was the day he has now become a liability for the king. What is done can’t be undone. The king wants elections to be held because he believes that the polls will help him get a new parliament. This will not be an election of the people’s representatives. Free and fair polls can’t take place while war and violence rage. In short, only those approved by the security personnel will be elected and you can only imagine the kind of changes in the constitution that will then take place. Everyone who is for elections now are those who think they can win and bring those changes in the constitution. The only way out is to let the people decide. Let the people decide which is the way out. Let there be referendum and let Nepalis decide whether the way out should be through an amendment in the constitution or a constituent assembly.

Keepers of peace

Rajdhani, 22 January

The government has requested the United Nations to continue recruiting Nepali security force personnel for peacekeeping missions. The Foreign Ministry recently wrote a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stating, “The government is committed to improve the human rights situation in the country.” They requested the commission not to suspend the peacekeeping quotas allocated for the Royal Nepali Army. The Commission has prepared a report to be presented at its annual general meeting in March stating that the Royal Nepali Army has been violating the human rights of its own citizens and therefore it can be concluded that it has not been able to respect human rights in the international peacekeeping missions. If the report is passed Nepal could be debarred from UN peacekeeping forces.

The UN commission had sought the government’s reaction to the report a month ago. “In its response the government said that in the name of violation of human rights, the RNA, which has earned fame for establishing peace in the international field, should not be pulled out of the peacekeeping forces,” said a highly placed government source said. Before sending the reaction, the Foreign Ministry consulted with the defence and home ministries and the Human Rights Protection Centre at the Prime Minister’s Office. The Royal Nepali Army has been a part of the UN international peacekeeping force since 1997. Around 45,000 Nepali soldiers have served in UN missions and 3,000 RNA personnel go to different parts of the world for UN peacekeeping every year. Indian officials had hinted in media reports in December that the RNA’s involvement over the peacekeeping missions was hampering its counter insurgency operations at home.

Doctor who

Annapurna Post, 20 January

A sad reality in Nepal is that some doctors are more inclined to thrive on profit making. This is evident in Lumbini Hospital where all the doctors have reportedly spent their time working in nursing homes absent from their duties. It is the same case in Seti Hospital where many poor Nepalis wait for doctors to treat them. In Dhamgadi’s Seti Hospital, only seven out of 19 doctors are available while the rest are busy serving the elite. Our health system is growing poorer due to cases such as these where doctors who are available are not being used as they are most needed.

Doctors are unwilling to serve in remote areas. After all, more money can be made in the cities. There are many vacant posts for doctors in rural-based hospitals but few apply. The situation has grown so desperate that in some hospitals, nurses fill in for doctors. Even in the cities, the state run hospitals are in bad shape. Many of these doctors do not treat their patients well in government hospitals, forcing them to go to private clinics. The poor cannot afford these treatments. They are made to pay for medicines that are available for free in government hospitals and health centres. There is always a code of ethics for every profession and it is the doctor’s responsibility to ensure that the code is not violated. Citizens cannot depend on the government to speak for them but also must bear their responsibility and raise their voices against such professionals. Perhaps the best way to have doctors applying in rural areas is by providing them with more incentives and other benefits than those based in the cities.

Journo attacked

Krishna Shahi in Rajdhani, 23 January

DALEKH—The security forces and the Maoists in Dalekh are competing to intimidate, threaten and pamper journalists so as to fetch favourable coverage. Four years ago, the Maoists had established their people’s government in Naumule after attacking the Area Police Office and killing 32 policemen. Since then, they had threatened to “clean out” journalists who dared write against them. Their threats were not taken seriously until they proved this by killing radio journalist Dekendra Thapa last year. The Office. The Royal Nepal Army has threatened to cut off their hands and legs. But the security forces are also harassing both journalists and human rights workers accusing them of being pro-Maoist. Many journalists have been forced to resign and forced by the Maoists to write positive stories about them. “If you write anything to defame our party, you will end up like little Dekendra,” the Maoists have warned. They then warn the security forces are also hurling missiles against those who write positive things about the rebels.” You must write the exact instruction from your god. And if you go to villages without our permission, you will be victims of crossfire,” the army tells us. Journalists in the district are tired of threats and as of now, have decided to boycott news media as united front 

Bloody incident

Kantipur, 26 January

Nothing is as it seems in Kathmandu anymore. There was blood flowing out on the sidewalk from under the shutter of a coffee shop in Durbar Marg on Tuesday night. The police came promptly to catch it and cordoned off the area, but the following day, there was no sign that the murder had been committed here. There was blood everywhere, shattered glass inside the café and eye-witnesses said four people had rushed off in a taxi taking a bleeding man with them. The police searched all night for the owner of the

Ball and the chain: Violence, instability, extortion

Hill: VAT Increase

Sunday, 27 January

“IF ever meet my son, I will ask him to end the violence and start a peaceful campaign.”

Maoist supremo Prachanda’s father Muktam Bahadur in Desanther, 23 January. He has not seen his son since the people’s war began.
Kiran Panday was gushing out. The restaurant gashed his feet and blood started shattering the glass panel. A shard into the trousers of the cook, who night, a mouse had somehow got into the trousers of the cook, who night. It turns out that, the previous Karki, who was all bandaged up. returning with the cook, Ganesh saw the owner of the restaurant the morning, the police on duty the restaurant, Sushil Shrestha of Ramechhap and his brother. In Ninety days by security forces who arrested him on suspicion of being a Maoist in mid-November 2003. He was on his way to Kathmandu when they stopped him. He was severely tortured during detention and has not yet recuperated. He was taken to Ethni Zonal Hospital in the valley in serious condition. “Doctors discharged me saying they were not able to treat me. They say some watery substance has collected in my chest,” he says. “The army men blindfolded me and took me away. They forced me inside a cave near the Keshabganj Barrack. I spent 90 days there before being finally released.”

 Forced recruits

Nepal Samacharpatra, 18 January

The Maoists in Achham and Doti districts have been campaigning to force many youths to accept portfolios in the village people’s government. Their campaign was most active last dasain and tihar. Since then a large number of the youth have left their villages to settle in India. “Many who want to live have left their homes. We are still here because we are ready to face death,” says a young man in Chaukhute on the borders of Doti and Achham. Only a handful of young men like him remain, the rest are only elderly citizens, women and children. “We could die any minute, whether in the hands of the rebels or the security forces,” says the youth. The situation grew worse when young men who had returned home to celebrate festivals with their families were forcefully nominated as candidates for the village people’s government elections. Their worst fear was that they would be easy targets for the army who could arrest and torture them without realising they had been forced to join. One student of Patal VDC, Doti studying at Kailali Multiple Campus was forcefully appointed as Maoist village chief. He fled the village and vowed never to return. As soon as the security force finds new Maoist committees in the villages, the search for new members starts.

 Displaced

Nepal Samacharpatra, 22 January

TKUNIA, INDIA—Hundreds of Nepalis from various districts of the Karnali zone reach this Indian city everyday in search of safety and refuge. As the Maoists intensify their activities, they find no option but to leave their villages. “Everyday, we see around two to three hundred new Nepali faces here,” said Dinesh Baidya, a trader. “Most of them are from Karnali.” Unlike Nepalis migrating to India through Mahendranagar of Kanchanpur and Nepalganj of Banke, the records of those reaching Tikunia city in India via Sati Bajar in Kalikot are not recorded. More and more people use the Sati Bajar passage because there are no security hassles. “We hoped it would be peaceful again,” said Dhame Lohar of Kalikot district. “That both the security forces and the rebels have grown more brutal by the day, we have no choice but to leave.” Jad Darji, also from Kalikot said more than 150 villagers including himself had vacated his village at once and reached Tikunia. “I can imagine how many may have migrated from other villages and districts of Karnali,” he said. Only male members of the family used to leave for India, now the number of women and children is equally high among migrants. Entire families are known to have migrated, some women carrying infants. Eleven-year-old Ram Lohar of Kalikot district arrived in Tikunia with his parents. “My parents and I were afraid that the Maoists would take away even children my age,” he said. Many Nepalis are stranded at the Tikunia railway station. “We spent all our money on transportation, so we decided to stay here for a few days,” said Prem Bahadur Rawal from Jumla. “But there are so many Nepalis here already and it is hard finding a job.” Even children are seen working as porters with their parents to earn their livelihood at the Tikunia railway station. “We are determined not to go back to be killed in crossfire,” said Prem Bahadur Shashi of Kalikot.
Lessons from the tsunami

Though the world came together after the tsunami, it still ignores disasters waiting to happen.

There are many lessons that emerge from the tsunami that brought such devastation and loss of life to Asia. It demonstrated the importance of globalisation, as television brought vivid pictures of the destruction to homes around the world.

Indeed, it is at times like this that the world truly does seem like a global village.

After effects

The tsunami is the latest reminder of how our world has become a much more interconnected place. The tsunami’s impact was felt around the world, with countries from North America to Asia contributing aid and support.

Cutting hunger in half

BANDA ACEH: Before and after in two satellite pictures.

Central banks dump the dollar

WASHINGTON—Central banks around the world are getting rid of the US dollar in favour of the European currency, the euro, in a bid to stem losses from the declining greenback, an international survey says. More than two-thirds of central banks have increased their exposure to the euro in the past two years, mainly at the expense of the dollar. Reports find over half the central banks surveyed now regard the dollar as the world’s most vulnerable currency.

India shifts geopolitical cards

BANGKOK—Within a month of the tsunami battering 12 countries across south and southeast Asia together with east Africa, India has made a new policy of ‘strategic pluralism’ in the Indian Ocean region. No one captures this emerging climate better than the reception extended to India, itself a victim of the 26 December tsunami, from Sri Lanka to the Maldives. An Indian naval rescue operation, given a royal farewell as it left the port town of Trincomalee in northeast Sri Lanka after completing its mission of mercy. Elsewhere across the South Asian region, a similar story was being enacted to thank the large contingent of Indian military and naval personnel who began arriving in Sri Lankan shores after the tsunami struck—the day before Christmas—as part of New Delhi’s ‘Operation Rainbow’.

India’s tsunami assistance rendered to its immediate neighbors is a major coup for India. It is a clear signal of rising Indian influence in the region and a recognition of India’s geopolitical importance. The Indian Navy, in particular, has emerged as a major player in the region, with its operations in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

Central banks cut their dollar exposure

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BANDA ACEH: Before and after in two satellite pictures.
There is a shocking tendency for the media to be more interested in the failure of elections in Iran than in its success. The story is that the doomsayers apparently see it, is in the death threats and those自习 is not unprecedented in the boycott of the Sunni minority which happily represented the Shia majority for decades under Saddam Hussain.

Regardless of one’s view of the US-UK attack on Iraq—and I speak as one sceptical about it at best—surely one should wish the elections on Sunday to be a success. And I don’t mean just those seeking to disrupt and undermine them.

People will risk their lives going to the polls in areas of Iraq that withstand and some part of the media—in other countries as well as in ours—have already written off these efforts as worthless, the elections as fatally flawed. What blinkered arrogance.

Who needs Alas Musum al-Zarqawi to shoot down a nascent democracy when they have some of Britain’s best-loved and respected voice? Perhaps thousands will be killed voting. Perhaps turnout will shrink to levels which render the result illegitimate. At that point, then, discuss the validity of the result. But not before the poll has even ended.

One hundred and eleven parties standing in the first election in half a century in a country of 25 million people of whom more than 80 percent of the electorate say they want to vote. And indeed will be voting and exercising in democracy. Iraqis are not voting at the barrel of an American gun or under the heel of a British soldier.

The main Sunni political party, the Islamic Party, said yesterday that it will participate in drafting the country’s constitution and might even accept some appointments in government, even though it boycotted the polls. Now surely that is grounds for optimism about the future of the country?

Blamed by the arrogance of the snarling at democratic efforts in Iraq, I find myself making efforts to define a purpose for a third Labour term here seriously. Some vote policies are emerging to engage the poorest members of society, the hopeless ones who grow relatively poorer year by year as the rich grow richer. Iraq’s election isn’t just about

**SAARC’s Southasia and ours**

The summit in Dhaka is an opportunity to see southern Asia differently

economic strength. Within India’s up much of Southasia in ways legacy of ‘India’ pre-1947. India gives all of Southasia its distinctiveness of peninsular each other. While the very presence of India in Southasia, a fifth of Earth’s population. more than 1.4 billion people, a states, while the latter speaks of membership of seven nation members. Whereas ASEAN or the European Union have countries of roughly comparable size and weight. Southern Asia presents a different picture altogether. In considering the limits of what SAARC can do as constituted or the way it must evolve, one may simply look at the variation in population size, land area, economic power and global reach of its largest and smallest members. (India: 1.1 billion population, land area of 3.2 million sq km. Maldives: 3.3 million sq km.)

**Excerpts from India’s expatriate, J.B. have everything from the Changhang high plateau to the Sundarbans mangroves, Indian Ocean atolls to the Himalayan rindland, the Thar Desert to tropical rainforests. Given such an all encompassing presence of India in Southasia, there is no way for the state-centric SAARC not to be impacted at every turn by this behemoth.**

India’s overpowering situation is a reality confronting all its neighbours and this fact alone should help propel supplementary visions of Southasian regionalism other than SAARC’s. While the regional organisation has us considering a Southasia of seven nation states and seven capitals, while it is in fact other approaches with which to view this space. We can envision it as more than the seven countries, as a larger region with grey edges and

must have access to Amristar and Siliguri to Bhoprop. Southasian initiatives of the future will be the kind that promote links between Sindh and Gujarat/Rajasthan. Punjab state and Punjab province, Meghalaya and Sylhet. Those hang up on technicalities will term such initiatives bilateral, but it is the cumulative buildup of such linkages that will help complete the regional jigsaw that is Southasia. (Another time, I will try to defend my preference and proposal for the one-word spelling of ‘Southasia’.)

Without doing violence to sacrosanct nation state sovereignty, it should also be possible to promote a version of regionalism that includes states, provinces and sub-regions as participant entities of a broadly-defined Southasia. In this sense, a truly federal India or Pakistan would be the best contributions to the goal of Southasian regionalism. Such would be the shape of Southasia of the future, which would require nothing less than rescuing our unified past from the vivisection that that has occurred. In the meantime, with hopes for the future, we will make do with an a-historical SAARC.
The divine flute

Hari Prasad Chaurasia's father was a serious wrestler and wanted desperately for his young son to follow in his footsteps. Not wanting to spend the rest of his life throwing people over the boy instead grew up to become one of the world’s most acclaimed flautists.

"It was difficult but fascinating," says the maestro about his choice. The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu and the Indian Council on Cultural Relations are bringing Chaurasia to Nepal to celebrate India's 56th Republic Day and he will perform on his divine flutes at the BICC on 1 February.

Born in Allahabad in 1938 Hari Prasad Chaurasia learned classical vocals at 15 from the noted musician Pandit Rajaram. He might have continued with singing had he not chanced to hear Pandit Bhushan play the flute. So spellbound was young Hari that he immediately began learning to play the wind instrument under his tutelage for eight years. A prodigy of sorts, Hari Prasad quickly mastered the flute and joined the All India Radio while still a teenager. Chaurasia flourished as a musician as his notes gained a new depth and expression. In Chaurasia's hand, the flute transformed into a magical instrument expressing the finer nuances of Indian classical music. The life of virtuoso followed, and he was playing all concerts in India and abroad. He collaborated with many musicians, most famously with John McLaughlin, Jan Garbarek and a couple of fusion jazz albums.

Chaurasia's stint in Bollywood also received widespread acclaim for the music he wrote with Shiv Kumar Sharma in fusion jazz albums. Most famously with John McLaughlin, Jan Garbarek and a couple of concerts in India and abroad. He collaborated with many musicians, most famously with John McLaughlin, Jan Garbarek and a couple of fusion jazz albums. Chaurasia's musical repertoire extends beyond North Indian art music to Indian folk, Indian popular and western music. Equally impressive was his varied classical music to Indian folk, Indian popular and western music. Though he gained recognition and support as a fusion musician, he remained true to his roots and has never lost his love for the classical form.

The Sunny Jain Collective is joining the bandwagon to visit Kathmandu as it puts itself on the jazz map. Navin from our very own Cultural Relations is bringing Chaurasia to Nepal to celebrate India's 56th Republic Day and he will perform on his divine flutes at the BICC on 1 February.

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**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**

- Reflection of Nature II Pressed dry floral Oshibana art by Patibra Shrresha at Park Gallery, Lajulpant. Till 28 January. 4419393
- Life through the Lens Photographs by Kenroy Shrasta at Indigo Gallery. Till 31 January. 4419399. indigo@wlink.com.np
- Kirkir Up Dust Photographs of Australian contemporary indigenous cultural festivals at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Till 31 January. 4218048

**EVENTS**

- Shahid Dibas, 29 January
- Tsunami Relief Fundraising dinner on 28 January, 6PM onwards for Rs 1,200 at Ankit, Karptesh 2252722
- Crazy Golf For Corporates at Sciacote Crowns Plaza on 29 January, 10.30AM to 3PM. 4228359
- Sitcom Cine Club at the Alliance Francaise on 30 January. 4371623
- Sunny Side Up Jazz picnic with the McTwisters on 30 January at La Sion Restaurant, Pulchok. 10AM to 6PM. Mr. Francis Pulchok 3033748
- Kathmandu Choral Rehearsals from 31 January, 7.10PM at The British School. Jhumkalet 5334737
- Birdwatching at Taudaha Luka on 2 February, 6.30AM onwards of gentlemen by Friends of the Bagmati. 4419790-790
- Adventure High Documentary on cyclists from Mongolia to Nepal at Lajulpant Gallery Cafe on 3 February, 7PM onwards. 4426543
- Sanbirsha Mela Every Saturday at the Dharahara Bakery Cafe, 12AM-5PM. 5521231
- The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley Tuesdays at Hotel Vija. 4271545

**MUSIC**

- Motown Nite with Soul Train on 29 January at Four Season Restaurant, Thamel, 7PM-10PM. Rs 100, 4711707
- Full Circle Live on 28 January at Mekh, Pulchok, 7.30 PM. 5028703
- Good Time Blues Band at Rum Doodle every Friday, 25 percent off from 6PM to 7PM on 28 January. 4701208, 4701107, rum.doodle@ghojalalya.com
- Marigata Night at Fusion; The Bar at Devrika’s Hotel on 28 January with Azhara & the Steel. Rs 799. 4479488
- Jazz it up New York style with Sunny Jain Collective on 28 January at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangri-La. 7PM onwards for Rs 999. 4412999
- Ghichay Subhchu Rinpoche’s debut album Dhamra Dzhaam release on 30 January at Manwaya Gumba, Swayambhu, 2:30PM.
- Classical music, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Ito. 4271545
- Jatra Saturday night with Locza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- Happening live jazz in town every Sunday night at Jazz Bar, Lajulpant. Every Wednesday and Saturday. 4.75 PM onwards.

**FOOD**

- Grand Dosa Festival at The Calis, Hyatt, 6.30PM, Till 30 January. 4491234
- Barbecue Dinner Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5528183
- Seasons Special Lunchroom at Hotel Shangri-La for Rs 400. 4412999
- Delicacies Pastis and snacks at Roadhouse Cafe, Jawalakhel. 3521753
- Sizzling Weekend Treat with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soileiere Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Genuine Thai cuisine at Namda. 5521231
- Delicious barbecue dinner Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5528180
- Café Bahal New and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4706322
- Splash Spring BBQ Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Lajulpant.
- Devrika’s Thai Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- The Tharu Kitchen at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

Good news is in the air. Believe it or not, Kathmandu’s air quality improved this week. After a couple of weeks of extremely high levels of pollution, the concentration of dangerous particles below 10 microns in Kathmandu was down by 22 percent last week. We must track the rains for reducing the street-level dust. Although PM10 in urban areas are still higher than national standards, in Bhaktapur and Kirtipur the levels were healthy on most days.

**NEPALI WEATHER**

- Putalisadak    Patan H         Thamel           Kirtipur        Bhaktapur  Matsyagaun
- What for?
- KATHMANDU VALLEY
- National Park. steve@escape2nepal.com
- Dwarika’s Thali
- Delicious barbecue dinner
- Two-night-three-day package at Club Himalaya. 4411706
- By MAUSAM BEED

**WHAT FOR?**

To raise funds for Radio Sagarmatha building on Feb 27, 2005

Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists ( NEFEJ), 4261991, nefej@mos.com.np

**FIVE BEDROOMS, STUDY, LIVING, DINING, THREE BATHROOMS, IMMENSE GARDEN, LARGE ROOF TERRACE, GARAGE. NEAR UNIVERSITY, EXCOs. EXCEPTIONALLY PEACEFUL CENTRAL LOCATION. 5529809, 9841234999.
Everest forever

I don’t know about you, but we’ve been getting sleepless nights about this Chinese expedition that is arriving here next month to determine if Mt Everest has indeed shrunk. On a matter as serious as this, the whole nation should be getting sleepless nights. Wake up, yes, you there in the driver’s seat.

What if the Chinese discover that due to plate tectonics, the mountain has moved south and Tengboche is actually in Tibet? What if they find Mt Everest isn’t the highest mountain in the world anymore? How can we hold our head high again among the community of nations? Imagine the ignominy and shame. What will all those proud owners of Mt Everest Restaurant and Bar (credo: ‘Get High Here’), Everest Bank (‘Our Interest Rates Are Highest’), Everest Hotel (‘Nepal’s top Hotel’), Everest Nursing Home (‘Don’t You Ever Rest?’), Everest Insurance (‘Life Insurance for Mountaineers, Too!’), Mt Everest Momo Shop (‘Dumplings Without Oxygen’), Everest Corrugated Zinc Sheets (‘The Roof of the World’), Everest Rubber Flipflops (‘Be the First To Summit in Chappals’), Mt Everest Yarsagumba Capsules (‘Size Matters’) do? Somehow, K2 Momo Shop just doesn’t have the same zing.

Sir Edmund Hillary will be in the horns of a dilemma: to return his knighthood or not. And imagine the promo brochures NTB has printed, we’ll have to scrap them all and print new ones with the slogans: ‘The Land of Everest, We Were Great Once’.

It is an unthinkable, nightmareish scenario. And what I want to know is why His Majesty’s government had to be such a smart ass and grant the Chinese permission to make a discovery that would be potentially disastrous for our national morale. As if we didn’t have enough problems already.

It is therefore in our national interest to safeguard our territorial integrity and vertical sovereignty to pre-empt this expedition and ensure that Qomalungma (which in Tibetan means ‘Goddess Mother of the Earth’) and Sagarmatha (which in Nepali means ‘The Pointy One Behind the White One with the Flat Top That Is Third from Right If You Are Looking Counter-clockwise’) remains the tallest one in the world.

There are several steps that Nepal’s Bureau of Standards and Metrology can start taking right away if we can get them to wake up:

1. Every expedition climbing Mt Everest from this season onwards must ensure that team members who reach the top all carry at least 10 kg of rocks to deposit at the summit. At this rate, we can restore three metres to Mt Everest in just a few years.

2. All Cleanup Expeditions that used to bring the trash back from the South Col and dump it on the banks of the Bagmati at Balkhu, will henceforth be required to take it on to the summit and deposit it there instead. If this happens, my calculation is that by 2008, Mt Everest’s altitude will have crossed 9,000 metres above sea level.

3. Tectonic plates are like a see-saw, you press one side down and the other side goes up. So, if we can move all 25 million Nepalis to the vicinity of Jaleswor, we can make the entire country tilt, thus pushing Mt Everest up considerably.

4. Bribe the Chinese Height Fixing Committee.

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