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# The week that was

**Blow-by-blow account of the days after February First**

**F**ebruary First, 10AM. King Gyanendra's 28-minute royal proclamation is broadcast to the nation.

The king read through a teleprompter in a special studio inside the Narayanhiti Royal Palace. The set included the national flag, the royal standard and a backdrop of the royal seal, there were three 'jump cuts'.

The monarch criticised political parties for misusing their parliamentary privilege, lambasted the Maoists for their criminality and terrorism, sacked Sher Bahadur Deuba (without naming him) for having been incapable (once again), and announced he was taking over the chairmanship of a new council of ministers for a period of up to three years.

Even before the broadcast had finished, telephone lines to and within Nepal and the mobile network went dead. The airport was closed and international flights diverted. The army's signals corps shut down satellite links at ISPs and radio stations.

The royal proclamation was followed by an announcement from the home ministry declaring a state of emergency and the suspension of the freedom of speech, assembly, the right to property, information and against preventive detention.

Before, during and after the address, political leaders, student leaders and activists of political parties were rounded up. Many of the seniormost were under house arrest. Deuba was kept in his official residence at Baluwatar, Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhab Kumar Nepal respectively at their homes in

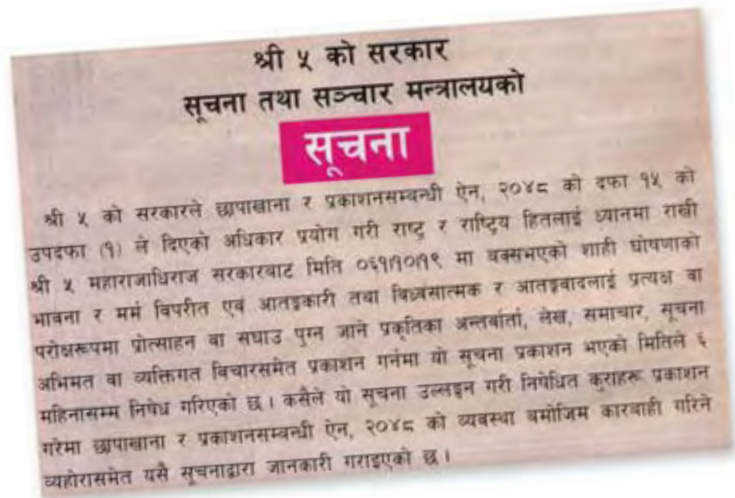
Maharajganj and Koteswor.

Some welcomed King Gyanendra's move, hoping this might help bring the raging Maoist war to a finish. Flag-waving motorcycle rallies went around the capital on Thursday in support of the royal move. There were also fears for democratic values, but the few students who defied a ban on rallies on Tuesday were quickly dispersed.

The situation outside Kathmandu Valley is difficult to gauge because of the communication blackout. A three-day Maoist banda fizzled out in the capital.

Except China, international response was negative. India, Britain and the United States and the United Nations conveyed concern about the impact on parliamentary democracy. On Wednesday, King Gyanendra announced a 10-member cabinet that he is to chair. They include four former office bearers from the Panchayat era. Three of the ministers were powerful administrators during the pre-1990 partyless Panchayat system.

On Thursday the government announced a ban for six months on articles, interviews, news, notices and opinions against the 'letter and spirit' of the royal



proclamation and providing 'direct and indirect support' to terrorism and 'destruction'. Those who went against the stricture would be subject to action.

The newly appointed ministers gave interviews to the state-run media. Home Minister Dan Bahadur Shahi told Radio Nepal the government would soon urge the Maoists to come for talks. "The rebels have always said they wanted to hold talks with the king, now that the king is chief executive, they should have no problems coming for negotiations," he said.

On Thursday, daily papers carried advertisements from some business houses and individuals welcoming the royal move. ●

## Notice in Gorkhapatra on 3 February from His Majesty's Government Ministry of Information and Communication

Invoking Sub Clause 1 of Clause 15 of His Majesty's Print and Publication Act, 2048, and considering the nation and national interest, His Majesty's Government has banned for six months any interview, article, news, notice, view or personal opinion that goes against the letter and spirit of the Royal Proclamation on 1 Feb 2005 and that directly or indirectly supports destruction and terrorism. In line with the arrangement in the Print and Publication Act 2048, action will be taken against anyone violating this notice.



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KIRAN PANDAY

**ROYAL SUPPORT:** The Armed Police Force drive away street cattle at Bhadrakali on Thursday to allow a rally organised by the Deshbhakta Sangh in support of the royal decision.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**BYE-BYE:** Ministers of the sacked Deuba government drive out of the gates of Baluwatar to their quarters after being dismissed on February First.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**EVENING AFTER:** A pedestrian reads Nepali language tabloids for sale on the sidewalk at Bagbajar on Tuesday evening soon after the royal address.



USHA TITIKCHU

**TUNED OFF:** A soldiers on duty at Radio Sagarmatha at Bakhundole on Wednesday.

# White ribbons

**B**arbara Adams came to Nepal 43 years ago and is more Nepali than many of us. She remembers a time when Nepal was regarded as a peace-loving

country and has watched as the conflict devoured the land she loves. "Nepalis are wonderful people who love people, I know that even the Maoists want peace. All Nepali citizens must do whatever they can to bring peace and that's just what I'm doing," she says.

As a naturalised Nepali of American origin and a newspaper columnist for *Jana Astha*,

Barbara had many sleepless nights tossing and turning, thinking about more

concrete ways to be a peace activist. She came up with the idea of the white ribbon campaign which aims to create awareness among the people and the government about the immediate need for peace. It also works as a lobbying device.

During the World Buddhist Summit 2004, Barbara went to Lumbini to distribute white ribbons to participants and when King Gyanendra arrived, a sea of white ribbons greeted him. It is not just a symbol of peace but also the colour of mourning in Nepal. It was one of the reasons why she chose white as the colour for the campaign: it promotes peace, remembers and respects everyone who died during the past nine years of violence.

Barbara's initiative has received many positive responses spanning from the CAN festival where people asked her if they could help by volunteering to villages near Hetauda where the people were more than willing to support and applauded her efforts. A self-funded project, Barbara encourages people to go out and wear white in memory of the people who are dying every day.

"It doesn't have to be specific, any white cloth will do to show your support for peace and solidarity," she says. She maintains that it would help if people didn't just wear it for a few days but wore it all the time. "It may not bring peace, but it will certainly prove that they don't want war." ●

Aarti Basnyat

KIRAN PANDAY

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## HARIYO BAN NEPAL KO DHAN

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely. The role of trees is to introduce oxygen into the atmosphere and to ingest the carbon dioxide that human and mechanical activity spews into our enclosed airspace so prone to inversion. They provide shade to the pedestrian, a demographic category which today is highly neglected by our increasingly motorised urban populace. Tree-lined boulevards and parks are the mark of any civilised society and the colour of leaves and bark have associations in the human mind with the very evolution of the species. Take away the trees from our sight and senses and our very existence suffers.

Trees reach down to the grassroots and hold the soil together, they reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The sun and the trees, together with the supportive action of water, soil and air, make possible photosynthesis, the driving mechanism of life on earth. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets seems to have been hasty.

True, Kathmandu's poplars and eucalyptus are imports and that they do not have the strength of indigenous varieties. But the fact is that they have provided cover and beauty for a long time now. They have become our own, like so many other exotic species that dot the landscape. It is said that these imports are vulnerable to strong winds due to loose root structures but our analysis shows that the maligned arbours have not been guilty of destruction to the extent that they have to be done away with. All in all, the trees should not have been axed. Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back greenery?



MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Give the king a chance

## Desperate times call for desperate measures

Like most Nepalis, this is a period of immense confusion for me, following King Gyanendra's decision to dismiss the government and assume sweeping powers on Tuesday. With the country now largely cut off from the outside world, I am unable to call home or read Nepali newspapers on the Internet.

### GUEST COLUMN Ranjit Rauniyar

It is easy to decry the overthrow of an elected government and express concern about the suspension of civil liberties. I, like all Nepalis, will be watching closely to see how

King Gyanendra wields the sweeping powers he has assumed. But I hope the rest of the world, before rushing to instant judgments, will pause to consider how far Nepal had gone down the path towards becoming a failed state, before the king resorted to such desperate measures.

At least 11,000 Nepalis have been killed since the Maoist rebels launched their reign of terror in 1996, with more than 2,000 dying since last October alone. Hundreds more have been kidnapped by the rebels, for indoctrination as part of their ideological war. Others have been caught in the crossfire between the Maoists and the Royal Nepali Army. The economy has ground to a halt. Highways,

needed to transport essential goods and medicines, have become combat zones. Tourism, formerly a vital source of revenue, has all but dried up. Not surprisingly, businesses are reluctant to make any fresh investments.

Like its predecessors (there have been 14 governments in as many years), the government that King Gyanendra dismissed has only added to the country's woes. Schools continue to be closed with alarming regularity, political hooliganism continues to be dressed up under the banner of democratic protests in which the safety and security of ordinary citizens and businesses are seriously compromised. Rarely does a day go by without reading about a strike being called by either the Maoists or the political parties. Businesses are placed under duress to make donations to both the Maoists and political parties. The promised general elections were never held and any hope of negotiating a truce with the rebels evaporated after they insisted on dealing directly with the king and refused to talk to prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

All this has left ordinary Nepalis yearning for a return to law and order, and a functioning economy. What we want, above all, is to be able to send our children to school again and readily purchase sugar, rice and oil in local shops. Whether we're ruled by a democracy or a monarchy is a secondary consideration. That's why, at least for now, I'm prepared to give King

## LETTERS

### NEPALI TIMES

*Nepali Times* has achieved the holy grail of brand loyalty, judging from my own experience as a reader and subscriber since the first issues. Aside from a few published editorial letters, I have nothing whatsoever to do with publication, yet with each issue, through my continued familiarity with the *Nepali Times* contributors, I too feel as if I am a member of the paper and do not fail to take serious note of the advertisers. Similarly, when I hear a BBC report filed from Florida or Haiti or India by Daniel Lak, I immediately think, "Ah, Daniel, haamro manche!" Daniel Lak is as significant a part of *Nepali Times* as the editors' and readers' contributions or even those overseas Nepali scholar contributors, who may have spent less time in Nepal in the last five to 10 years than Lak. Or how about the frequent pieces by Joseph Stiglitz, etc? The idea (in letter by Mahendra Moktan in #232) that a regular *Nepali Times* contributor must reside in Nepal or be ethnic Nepali may be racist or even chauvinist but it certainly is absurd!

Lozang Trinlae, Namche Bajar

● Daniel Lak's lamentation in 'Looking at Nepal from New Delhi' (#231) is tragically hilarious. His article is just another example of how disgraceful he can be when he writes on Nepal issues. But it gives solace to note that India, which has been naked in its posture, needs foreigners to defend its designs on Nepal. Well, this policy may fool many white sympathisers and lovers of Nepal but not those India-exploited Nepalis who have lived with issues like the Bhutani refugees in Jhapa, the Mahakali Paradox, Koshi, Gandaki and Karnali, the Kalapani and the India-fed Maoists to take just a few examples. Nepalis who have become second-class citizens in their own country due to Indian hegemonic and expansionist designs do not need Daniel Lak to tell them whether they should take India as a friend or foe. All he needs is to stop looking at Nepal from the Indian window and remind himself that his knowledge about India-Nepal relations is too feeble. India is a political unit that has assumed a monstrous character Nepal will always have to confront in order to live peacefully within its international borders.

Dibya B Gurung, New York

● The letter titled 'RNA' (#232) deserves serious attention. As a reader and concerned Nepali, I have reservations regarding your decision to publish a letter authored by samudaya.org. Aside from the mention of Sadip Bahadur Shah's name, the letter lacks any direct relation to Shah's piece. Although samudaya.org raises several relevant issues, the treatment of Shah's article as a platform to launch an attack on the RNA, severely weakens what otherwise has the potential to be a powerful critique. The claim that terms such as 'democracy' and 'liberalism' are being cheapened by the likes of Shah is a bold statement. First, samudaya.org should realise that ubiquitous definitions do not exist for either democracy or liberalism. Both phenomena are measured in relative terms, using arbitrary scales. Case-in-point, samudaya's definition of these terms appear a lot more radically left-wing than what the majority of Nepali society is prepared to accept. And, regardless of whether or not I truly subscribe to this claim, I am able to propose it, using samudaya's rigid logic—"my way or the high way". It is rather patronising that samudaya.org

should first cry foul play at Shah's supposedly dogmatic tone, then impose its own definitions on the rest of us. These tactics are old, hypocritical. I am also disappointed that samudaya.org

wrote under a website pseudonym. After all, I expect that an individual by the name of Shah exists but can a face be attached to samudaya? Why the need for secrecy? Shah has published his own opinions using his own name,



DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA



Gyanendra the benefit of the doubt. Desperate times call for desperate measures and those who criticise the king’s actions should remember how close Nepal had come to the edge of the precipice. I really wish to believe he has acted in this way not out of any desire to accumulate power, but in order to rescue his country. In doing so, he has taken a grave risk, both with his own reputation and that of the monarchy. The latter is a reputation that has already been weakened by the massacre of most of the royal family by one of their number in 2001, which led to King Gyanendra’s accession to the throne.

Whether he has correctly calculated the risks and rewards in taking such drastic action may take time some time to become clear. What we have in Nepal today can be likened to a circus run amok, where all the clowns are putting on their own acts without any concern for the show as a whole. Now the king has chosen to take over as circus master, the responsibility will rest on his shoulders to bring the performance together in what may be the last chance to save Nepal from complete ruin. Ultimately King Gyanendra knows the situation facing his country and the monarchy better than anyone else and in this dangerous game of political brinkmanship between Nepal’s monarch, politicians and Maoist rebels, I have only one piece of advice. The king has taken on sweeping powers and in exercising them, he must always remember that every action he takes should put the interests of his people first. ●

Ranjit Rauniyar is an MBA student from Nepal at the Wharton School in the United States. This piece appeared in the 3 February issue of the *Asian Wall Street Journal*.

Two years after October Fourth, the Royal Address of February First came as naturally as winter follows autumn. Other than the most foolhardy UML politicians nobody was really taken by surprise. In a good part of the speech the king renewed his commitment to multi-party democracy. For well over a week, the ouster of Sher Bahadur Deuba and his cabinet had been a foregone conclusion—it was a matter of when rather than if

**MAKING HEADLINES:** A sampling of front pages of Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, the Bangkok *Nation*, editorial from the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Asahi Shimbun* in Tokyo.



# A brave new world

## Just as well we’re not going for elections anytime soon

or how he and his government would be shown the door. So he suffered the ignominy of being sacked all over again. With his second dismissal, Deuba has the dubious distinction of being the only head-of-government in the world to have been sacked by a head-of-state twice in such quick succession. In his address the king repeatedly referred to the realities

of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ironically, even as the address was concluding, the phone and cellphone lines went dead, ISPs were shut down, the airport was closed, senior politicians were put under house arrest and security forces posted at all media outlets. King Gyanendra suggests a three-year period to transform Nepal into a democratic, peaceful and well-administered kingdom pursuing free-market policies of good governance, transparency and structural reforms to achieve the goal of sustainable development. The key word, often used, was “discipline”. The king also assured his subjects the monarchy did not need to seek populism to prove itself. Meanwhile, in the outside world, a global neocon tsunami is sweeping across countries. In this new scheme of things, property rights are presumed to precede political rights. Several political experiments are being conducted in different parts to ensure that free-market fundamentalists come out on top. It began in Pakistan in 1999 after a coup was staged from an aeroplane. That test-case has since progressed to a stage

where the Chief Executive says he will keep his uniform on. Meanwhile, his banker-premier Shaukat Aziz has been in Davos to push his economic ideology. In more anarchic societies like Afghanistan and Iraq, stage-managed elections are the processes of choice to install hand-picked favourites. The polls in Iraq and Afghanistan were, as *The Economist* put it ‘democracy at gunpoint.’ With international monitors mostly staying away for fear of personal safety, it was impossible to assess the fairness of the poll or accuracy of the turnout estimates. But the US-led forces have already got what they wanted: an opportunity to install their favourites in symbolic positions of power. In slightly more settled societies, the modus operandi of neocons is to install or unseat rulers through a combination of pre-poll and post-poll political engineering. The method has worked exceedingly well in South America. Now it is being implemented with some success in post-Soviet republics of Central Asia where a string of velvet revolutions are being staged to seat or unseat democratic rulers. So, in that sense it’s probably a blessing in disguise that we’re not going for elections anytime soon. ●

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal

complete with photograph and title. Yet, in attempting to undermine Shah’s opinions, samudaya has chosen to hide behind a website. Why? Furthermore, a disclaimer on samudaya.org site states that ‘while samudaya.org advocates freedom of speech and multiple perspectives on an issue, it does not necessarily agree with or support all views expressed on this site’. It is ironic that samudaya.org should choose to violate the very tenet of its own website: was the letter sent to the *Nepali Times* endorsed by all who subscribe to samudaya.org? Till date, I considered the *Nepali Times* a model publication. Not only had the quality of information published consistently been of the highest standard but contributors to the *Nepali Times* could be identified either by name, known organisational affiliation or both. In the midst of an emerging media industry (where the distinction between tabloids and professional journalism is often grey), what promoted the publication of this letter? Is this an indication that the *Nepali Times* will now publish letters sent in by any individual using a website instead of a name? Will letters from ‘www.cnn.com’ be

allowed next? This is clearly not a precedent a professional publication should establish. **Praduma Bikram Thapa, JHU School of Advanced International Studies**

**BEED** As a graduate student of economics, I would like to comment on Artha Beed’s Economic Sense column, ‘Six blind men’ (#232). Although I do not fully agree with what you have expressed in the article I feel that real economists (so-called) ought to focus on this very sensitive issue of exchange rates. I have not seen any debate, neither in paper nor in any electronic media and have not heard of any research being conducted on this issue. On the first day of class, our professor said to us that it all depends on circumstances to decide on adopting fixed or floating system of exchange rate management. He never did advocate for any system until and unless there is full and in-depth research on this matter. Not to forget this is the main line American economists’ view on perspective of exchange rate. The Nepali intelligentsia have to divert their attention on some very key issues like exchange rates and stop commenting on

depreciation/appreciation of Nepali currency without concrete findings. **Anjan Panday, Baylor University, Texas, USA**

**FASCIST** Even the warning by the UNHCHR Louise Arbour doesn’t seem to have changed the dastardly tactics of Maoist killing and maiming of innocent civilians, including children. I hope the ghosts of their victims will continue to haunt them until their very last breath. Their stated goal of establishing communism is nothing but, to quote Susan Sontag, ‘fascism with a human face’. Rather than wait for a Darfur-like situation to develop, the international community should set up a war crimes tribunal for Nepal without further delay. They should then formally indict those who have violated human rights. **SK Shrestha, Kathmandu**

● Isn’t it ironic that the day after Louise Arbour told the Maoists in no uncertain terms that one day their leaders could be dragged to the international criminal court for targeting children, 1,100 school children and teachers were abducted from various parts of the country. The Maoists are thumbing their noses at the UN,

the very institution that they want to mediate in the conflict. **Gyan Subba, email**

**UNDIVIDED** Pranav Budathoki’s (‘Nepalis go underground in Britain’, #230) allegation that The Reading Nepali Society, Reading, UK is divided is entirely false. We have associations based on the multiplicity of ethnicity but Reading Nepali Society has over the years cherished being a common association of all Nepalis, including Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars, living here with the aim of preserving Nepali tradition and culture. We celebrate festivals and events such as the Nepali and English new years, dasain, tihar and tij together to promote Nepaliness rather than what Budathoki referred to by saying ‘divided’. Last tihar, we sang *bhailo* and *deusi* together, visiting each other to exchange best wishes. In Lhosar, all Nepalis, even those who wouldn’t normally celebrate it back home, are invited. It is beyond our

understanding what Budathoki meant by ‘divided’ and where he saw division per se. We are more united, firm and established together. We assume that if Budathoki had attended any of our programs, he would have certainly seen our solidarity, though belonging to different ethnic communities. He is always welcome to observe our events as a Nepali brother. We hope that the *Nepali Times* as a reputed paper will examine facts before publishing articles like this in the future. **Arjun Basnet, Reading Nepali Society, Reading, UK**





# “Was all of this worth my pain?”

The conflict is taking its toll on Nepali children

Many of us have childhoods free from fear or intimidation. A childhood where we go to school, play with friends, meander in the fields and innocently dream of our futures. Childhoods full of calm, confidence and enthusiasm.

**NEPALI PAN**  
Keith D Leslie

Yet, many of these qualities of childhood are being taken from the children of Nepal. Their childhood is disappearing. This beloved country, known for its peacefulness, seems to have lost its way. Nepal has gone into a wilderness of war, fear and betrayal.

Today, instead of eager students finishing their high school, youth are clothed in khaki and carrying guns. Instead of studying at homes in the evening, they are reciting lessons of ideology and dogma. Instead of playing with their friends by their local schools, children are forced to work as porters for armies of the night. Instead of finally being accepted in school, lower caste youth are told that war is the answer to oppression and the means to emancipation.

But, unfortunately, in our all-too-brief human incarnation, there are no simple emancipations or revolutions. There is always a price to pay and someone, some individual, has to pay it.



Too often the price of war has been paid by the children of Nepal. So, it remains for us to speak on behalf of the children, to say what we see today in Nepal. It is for us to speak about the traumas and terrors of a situation that has not brought the children of Nepal a better future, but is sacrificing that potential in the animosities of today.

War is not a solution. War is rarely glory or noble sacrifice. War is too often death, tragedy and the abject failure of adults to find reasonable solutions to often unreasonable problems. A country, where one could walk tranquilly in the hills, has become an armed

encampment, where homes are shut tight in the evenings and villagers dread a stranger's knock on their door at night. In communities throughout the nation, naïve and vulnerable children are taken against their will to the jungle for political indoctrination or taken furtively in the barracks to inform on a relative or friend.

There is hardly a day that goes by when we are not dulled or numbed into almost disbelief by the stories of children caught in the crossfire. Children whose parents are murdered in front of them. Children who are dragged from their own homes and shot or beaten based on an unproven or

unquestioned accusation or allegation. Children whose teacher is taken away in the night by men in uniform and never returned. Children whose local school is turned into a militia recruitment ground or a brutal battlefield. Children who are seduced into the romance of war or the promise of an complicated future.

Are we permitted to question such promises? To ask why instead we can't promise the children of Nepal a quality education, a healthy life, a well-managed school? Can we not begin to hold ourselves accountable for these more mundane promises? Promises

that government after government has made to its own people, as well as the international community, yet rarely sustain.

You only know what you have lost when it's gone. Does every party to this conflict understand what it has lost? Must we lose our own sons and daughters to understand the pain of those who have already lost their children to this internal, internecine conflict? How many more dead must we count to appreciate the value of a single human life? Wasn't one child killed by this dreary conflict enough for us to realise our own obligation as adults not to murder our own children? How many children must die brutally for us to pause to reflect on what we have done? When will the fires of such young cremations burn some sense into our collective national consciousness?

Time is not on our side. Time carries its own momentum. We have already lost a decade, how many more decades do we have to give? Who will be able to answer when one child comes back to ask us what happened to their childhood? Who will be able to stand to respond? Because we all know, some day, when this war is over, that child will want to know: “Was all of this worth my pain?” ●

Keith D Leslie is director of Save the Children US. This is an excerpt of his speech at the launch of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Report last week.

## When nature calls

### Our highways need to be more women-friendly



KIRAN PANDAY

**AMIKA RAJTHALA**

She works for the government's women's development division and needs to travel frequently by bus all over the country. She lives in Kathmandu and tries not to travel on long distance buses. Reason: there are no bathrooms on

the highways. “Men can go and relieve themselves anywhere,” says the civil servant, “but it is difficult for women.” At night it is much easier, most female passengers just walk off the road and duck behind a bush. Kala Swarnakar lives in Dang and works for the Dalit Women's

Association and finds it impossible to go whenever and wherever the driver pull over. The men all clamber off and head for the nearest tree. These days, Swarnakar makes sure she drinks as little as possible while travelling. But that exposes women to dehydration. Sajana works for Step, an NGO and is

from Achham. She says drivers ignore women requesting pee stops.

Dipak Khadka is a bus driver on the Kathmandu-Pokhara route, and acknowledges that long distance bus drivers and operators should pay special attention to the comfort and security of passengers, especially women. But he argues that he stops the bus when the conductor tells him to do so and blames his assistant.

These days the ordeal of long-distance buses is compounded by the highway gridlocks caused by security checks, bandas, booby-trapped barriers and even pitched gun battles along the highways. But there is a hidden advantage to all this, says Khadka, because security checks have male and female personnel and passengers can use their facilities. These makeshift latrines made by the security forces with tents and fenced by grass and wood provide some relief to passengers.

But lawyer Basanti Shrestha, who is a frequent traveller to the districts from Kathmandu, says she has never used the army's toilets and hasn't seen others use them either because of the lack of privacy.

Swarnakar's greatest fear is that the bus drives off with all her belongings while she is trying to find a private spot. She can't very well carry all her luggage when she takes a break.

Most women passengers say their number one priority is to

have clean and accessible lavatories along the highways, and drivers should stop only at places where such facilities are available. The prevalent custom is for drivers pull up at restaurants where they have a business relationship, and women are forced to use the rest rooms even if they are filthy.

The regional manager of Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH), Saraswati Khanal, has suffered the travails of bus travel in Nepal and is thankful that her NGO has actually tried to do something about it. Between 1991-1994, NEWAH built seven public toilets for bus passengers along highways in Damauli, Dhulikhel, Khairenitar, Abukhaireni, Dulegaunda, Saurahachok and Pokhara-Baglung bus parks. They function well, and are managed by local people.

Now, WATERAID and NEWAH in cooperation with Kathmandu Metropolitan City, have completed a study on public toilet management in the city while its Biratnagar regional office is conducting a study on public toilets.

When these studies will actually go into the implementation phase is anyone's guess. But till then, women passengers have no choice but to drink as little as possible and be more assertive in getting the bus to stop where they want to and not where the driver wants to. ● (Sancharika Lekhmala)



### Everest tsunami

The chairman and executive director of Everest Bank Limited handed over a cheque for Rs 1,00,001 to SS Mukherjee, the Indian Ambassador to Nepal as a token of assistance to the affected Tsunami victims in India. The employees and the management of the bank had voluntarily collected the amount.

### Tag, they’re it

Tag Heuer has announced superstars Uma Thurman, Brad Pitt and Juan Pablo Montoya as its new 2005 global ambassadors. Along with Maria Sharapova, Tiger Worrrds and Kimi Raikkönen, TAG Heuer's new ambassadorial team represents a fusion of sports and glamour.

The ambassadors will be featured in the new 2005 “What are you made of?” campaign, shot by top fashion photographer Patrick Demarchelier.

### Ultra modern

Yamaha has started a new ultra modern showroom in Biratnagar. Morang Autoworks, authorised distributor of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal, celebrated Yamaha Utsab in Biratnagar to mark the event. A year's free petrol is also being provided to new customers of Libero, Curx and YBX. This scheme runs till 11 February.

### Dettol media

Dettol, an international power brand has recently launched aggressive media activities in the Nepali electronic media. Dettol antiseptic liquid is a household name for effective protection against disinfections. Dettol is now also available as skincare soap with special moisturisers.

### Harpic commercial

Harpic has started an informative television commercial in Nepal with anchor Aman Verma. A dominant player in the organised toilet cleaner market, Harpic is available in three basic types: Harpic Power, Harpic Bleach and Harpic Fresh. They come in two sizes: 500 ml and 200 ml.

#### NEW PRODUCTS

INCENSE CYCLE: A top incense brand in India, Cycle incense has recently launched some of its range in Nepal. An initial soft launch among Kathmandu consumers had positive results. Cycle incense has more than 20 ranges of incense brands available of which a few will be launched in Nepal. The most popular are Lia brand and Rhythm brand.



SILKY SHAMPOO: Dabur has launched Anmol Silky Black Shampoo, available in 200 ml for Rs 88 and 500 ml for Rs 152. Six ml sachets have been introduced for Rs1. Enriched with almonds, amla and shikakai, popular Bollywood actress Rani Mukherjee has endorsed the brand.

# T’is the season

Media bashing media has begun again in the name of nationalism

It’s that time of year again when self-appointed vigilantes of the Nepali media sphere don a more-Nepali-than-thou attitude and start bashing supposed foreigners amidst us. Last year around this time, the Nepal Media Society cartel of newspaper publishers ran an incendiary campaign against *The Himalayan Times*, crying that foreigners (read Indians) should not be allowed to invest in Nepal’s “sensitive” print-media.

STRICTLY BUSINESS  
Ashutosh Tiwari



Fanning the flames of a probable riot *a la* the *Hritik-Roshan-kanda* of 2000, column inches were misused to report public burning of *THT*’s copies. But because the agitators used the unsustainable avenue of nationalistic hype to challenge the presence *THT*’in the Nepali market, the campaign ended a damp squib.

This time, the target is the two-year-old Nepal One satellite TV channel, run by the well-connected Indian journalist Nalini Singh. It uplinks from a cramped studio in an office block just outside Connaught Circus in New Delhi. Uplinking from outside a receiving country and market is itself nothing new in the age of satellite television.

Nepal One has been focussing on innovative entertainment and infotainment programmes at a time when Nepal-based channels have been loathe to invest in programming. Its most recent journalistic coup was to film and broadcast footage of the skirmish in the Malekhu stretch of the

Prithbi Rajmarg. This scoop appears to have raised the channel’s profile and made it an attractive advertising receptacle for those looking to reach the Nepali-speaking audience in Nepal as well as in the Southasian neighbourhood. The Delhi-based channel is obviously collecting a good section of its revenue outside Nepal and being an Indian-owned channel seems to be attractive for Indian advertisers.

For this reason, Nepal One is obviously a threat to a spectrum of media companies in Nepal, from television to advertising. Unsurprisingly, the Advertisers Association of Nepal (AAN) has decided to raise a ruckus. Unfortunately, the media greats who spoke up in well-publicised events stressed nationalism in their case against Nepal One. What the agitated executives should have done was to try to focus attention on any possible illegality billings and payments, press registration or television ‘uplinking’ rights. In which case it would have been a simple matter for the station’s executives to defend themselves or be exposed.

The Ministry of Information and Communications issued a strange statement: “Nepal One is similar to foreign TV channels such as Aaj Tak, NDTV, BBC and CNN and it should be dealt with accordingly.” What is the point? Is Nepal One to be respected as much as those other news channels? If not, what does the Ministry expect to gain by setting itself up as Nepal One’s clarification agency?

At best, the Ministry seems to have succumbed to the demands of the ‘nationalistic’ cabal seeking



to highlight for the public’s benefit that Nepal One is ‘foreign’. If there is a violation of Nepal’s laws, then slap the channel with a lawsuit. It is meaningless to point out Channel One’s non-Nepali status as if that should matter to viewers and advertisers who pay their own money to either watch or ignore the channel in ways they see fit and not because they take cue from the Ministry.

Whenever a foreigner ‘threat’ looms, those imbued with Panchayat-era patriotism rush into the fray. What they need to understand is that in today’s technology-rich and competitive landscape, Nepal’s private media outlets are simply no more than moneymaking or losing ventures and should be treated as such. They compete to collect ads, retain good employees, be a step ahead of competitors, integrate new technology and constantly innovate—all these while nurturing a credible reputation by reporting the verifiable truth. Meanwhile, the Nepali television stations must start with investing in programming beyond music videos and talk programmes, using the inhouse talent and the technology they have aplenty. Being based in Kathmandu rather than New Delhi, it will not be difficult for them to attract the loyalty of viewers based on content, rather than nationalism. ●

नेपाल अधिराज्यको संविधान २०४७ ले प्रत्येक नेपाली नागरिकको आधारभूत मानव अधिकार सुरक्षित गरी स्वतन्त्रता र समानताको आधारमा नेपाली जनताका बीच भ्रातृत्व र एकता कायम गर्ने कुरामा जोड दिएको छ। जुनसुकै विचार धाराका भए पनि नेपाली सबै एक हौं भन्ने भावनाले राष्ट्र निर्माणको काममा अग्रसर हुन सके मात्र यस देशको विकास तीव्र गतिमा हुन सक्ने हुँदा विचार फरक भएका विषयहरूमा आपसी समझदारी र सहयोगको भावना लिएर छलफल गरी निष्कर्षमा पुग्नु र संपूर्ण नेपालीलाई भ्रातृत्वको दृष्टिले हेर्नु प्रत्येक नेपालीको कर्तव्य हो।

श्री ५ को सरकार  
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# Gorkhalis still flock to

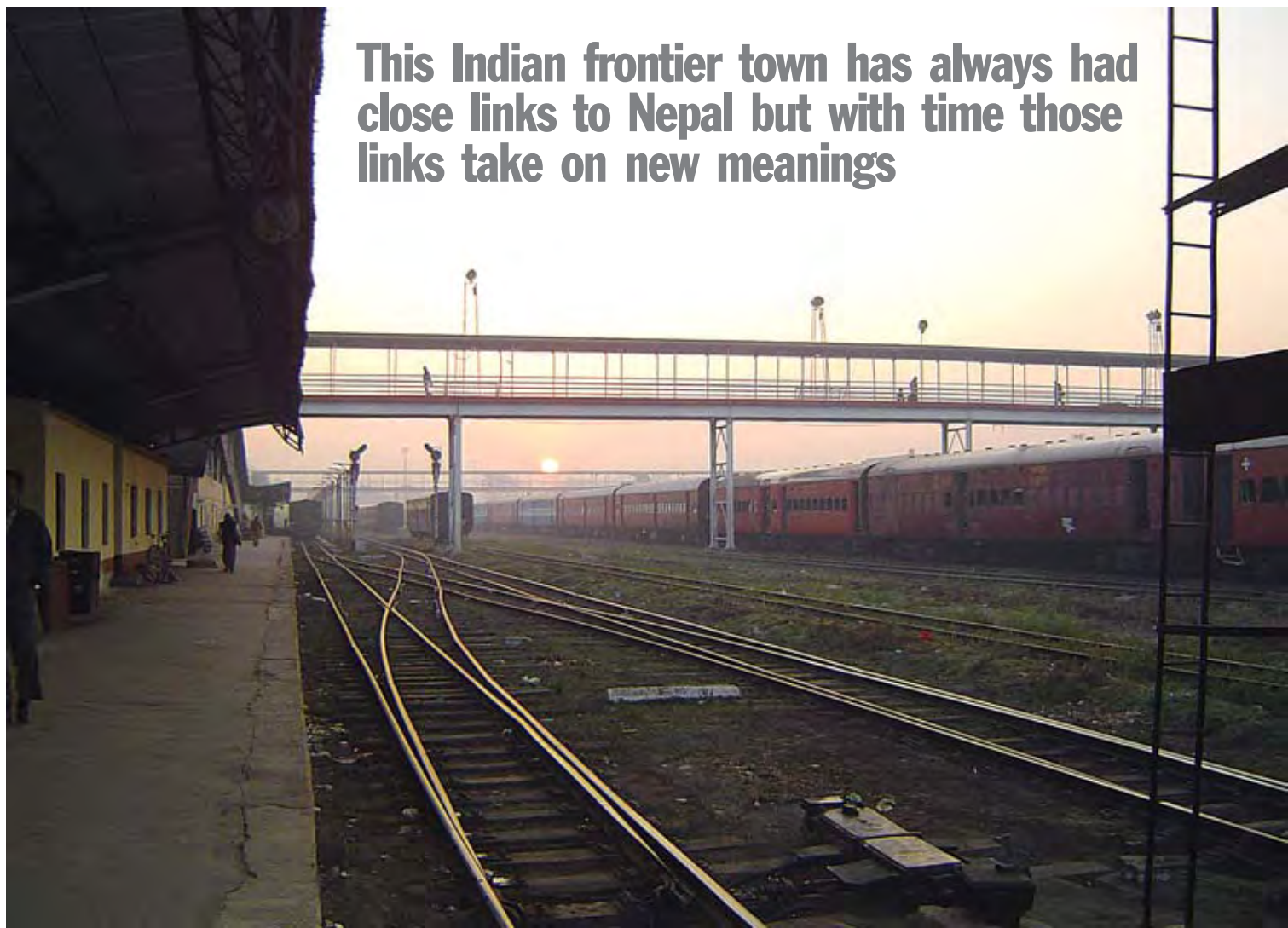
**HIMALI DIXIT**  
in GORAKHPUR

People from central Nepal have always passed through Gorakhpur for the town has long been a rural hub and railway junction. Today, as the internal conflict sends more and more Nepalis fleeing to India, this traffic has grown. But few linger in this city of eastern Uttar Pradesh especially after the Indian security forces have started looking out for Nepalis with possible Maoist connections.

Trains leave Gorakhpur now for just about anywhere in India, and Lucknow and Banaras are no longer necessary transfer stops for many travellers. This newfound connectivity has accelerated a boom in industry and business, and nursing homes, too, have sprung up in great numbers to balance the void of medical facilities in the surrounding rural areas of eastern UP.

Nepalis who find themselves in Gorakhpur flock to worship the newly installed white marble image of Gorakhnath in his temple (*see box*). Many are pilgrims of a different kind, arriving here from Arghakhanchi, Palpa, Gulmi and other districts of central Nepal in search of medical care. Many stay at Bhaktalal Hirachan's Nepali Lodge in the central thoroughfare of Golghar. Long a refuge for Nepalis in Gorakhpur, Hirachan's simple lodge has dormitory-style rooms, common bathrooms and serves Thakali-style, some of the best Nepali food south of the border.

Many Maoists, too, used to



ALL PICS: HIMALI DIXIT

**This Indian frontier town has always had close links to Nepal but with time those links take on new meanings**

come to Gorakhpur for treatment but with the Indian government's crackdown, they now stay away from the city proper. The security alert has made Gorakhpur an unfriendly place for Nepalis and young Nepali men in particular are now vulnerable to searches and interrogation. In the past few years, many innocent people who arrived here fleeing Maoist recruitment in their home villages have been hassled or arrested.

Most street side restaurants in Gorakhpur have Nepali staffs who have been working here for a number of years but many new arrivals no longer feel safe in the city. The search for security and work now takes them deeper into the vast north Indian heartland and further away from home.

At Gorakhpur's railway station, hundreds of Nepalis can be seen at any given time, waiting on the platforms for trains headed in every which direction.

Outside, there are those who are returning on holiday or furlough, piling their bags on to buses and jeeps headed for Sunauli and Bhairawa. If not wearing Dhaka topis, men from Nepal's hills at least can be recognised by their recently adopted custom of carrying backpacks. One such backpacker who was waiting for the train on Platform One on a recent morning was Kumar Bahadur Khadga, headed back after a vacation in Gulmi to

Bhubaneswar in Orissa, where he was employed in the Orissa Armed Police. His unit has 1,500 Gorkhalis, with Nepali authority right up to the level of assistant commander, he said. His father had been in the same line before him and it was easy for him to follow in his father's footsteps as the Nepali division recruits for itself through networks of family and friends.

Many other Nepalis are not as forthcoming and hesitate to talk

## The next great game

**From Ukraine to Iraq, it seems elections are ok as long as our guys win**

MOSCOW—The recent triumph of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine has shown that a season of colourful revolutions rolling across Eastern Europe sweeping aside 'old regimes' and installing New World Order government is far from over. Post cold war revolution is all about

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Jugal Bhurtel**



choosing a colour that is pleasant

to the eyes of the world's sole superpower.

In its eyes, a colourless version of people's revolution tried out in Yugoslavia earlier was only partially successful. The 'tyrant' Milosevic was replaced by nationalist Vojislav Kostunica, whose ideas of liberal democracy were somewhat different than those preached by western powers. Now, no western country is willing to help rebuild his country devastated in 1999 by NATO's depleted uranium munitions and cluster-bombs.

Georgia became the second pilot project. US-educated lawyer (and thus highly qualified for the top job) Mikhail Saakashvili stormed the parliament building riding on the back of western media and hundreds of Georgian supporters holding roses in their hands.

They were protesting the results of parliament elections, which had a few days earlier given a clear mandate to the supporters of slightly pro-Russian President Edward Shevardnadze.

The Rose Storm not only wiped out the poll results but also sent Shevardnadze into political oblivion. Amidst accusations of widespread vote rigging in new presidential election, Saakashvili became the president of this highly volatile state. This time, understandably, the election had the stamp of approval of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which claims to have an exclusive right of monitoring elections in the former Soviet states. Western media promptly christened it as 'The Great Rose Revolution'. A Pepsi bottling plant was promptly opened in the capital, Tbilisi, while the US army was invited to teach its Caucasian counterpart the art of defending itself against Russia's imperialistic designs.

It is tempting to extrapolate these events to the 'orange' campaign

spearheaded by Victor Yushchenko in Ukraine. The election outcome was not favourable as he lost to his Moscow-supported 'sky blue' opponent Victor Yanukovich by a small margin. Bruce George, a British Labour MP and head of the OSCE election monitoring mission cried foul and bluntly called on the supporters of Yushchenko to act.

Tens of thousands of orange supporters filled the central Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev. A tent city went up and government buildings were blockaded. The election commission was prevented from making the official announcement. It was obvious the 'spontaneous' protest was, in fact, carefully planned and financed. Yushchenko had no intention of losing the election. The Supreme Court was forced to order an unprecedented and utterly unconstitutional third round that finally gave Yushchenko a comfortable victory. Colin Powell publicly accepted assisting the dissidents in Kiev, now famously known as 'The Great Orange Revolution'.

Now, 'authoritarian' regimes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are two immediate western targets in the post Soviet space. In fact, the innovative Kyrgyz opposition is contemplating a lemon as its logo of future revolt. Probably we are going to witness the emergence of the Great Citrus Revolution that may soon overthrow President Askar Akaev and install yet another new-world-order government.

Protagonists of Nepal's conflict can extract their own lessons from these events in the ex-Soviet states. After all, the same western governments gave a clean chit for elections in Kosovo, where more than 200,000 Serbs were stripped of their voting rights.

And in Afghanistan no one knows exactly how many votes President Karzai received even from the territory not controlled by the Taliban. Nobody doubts the forthcoming Iraqi elections also will be hailed as legal and democratic. ●

Jugal Bhurtel is an environmental researcher based in Moscow jugal\_bhurtel@yahoo.com



# Gorakhpur

to strangers. No more do they sit down and swap names of hometowns, as many have fled under conditions of extreme hardship and threats. When they do talk, their voices carry a patent longing for peace and home.

Many Nepali pilgrims still come to Gorakhpur to visit the Gorakhnath Temple. The shrine is the city's biggest owner of business and real estate, and has emerged of late as an important and active political force. The man in charge of the temple's affairs, the 32-year old Yogi Adityanath, is also a Bharatiya Janta Party Member of Parliament who has adopted an ultra-conservative Hindutwa agenda. Despite decades of effort on the part of the Rashtriya Shiva Sena and others, Hindu nationalism had not seemed to have caught on in Gorakhpur. Many attribute this to a legacy that goes back to the Independence Movement and its secular traditions. But now, with Adityanath's increasing clout and the ubiquitous presence of 'Hindu Yuva Bahini's promoting religious nationalism, this town not far from our border could develop into a communal hotspot.

There has always been much travel and transportation of goods between central Nepal and eastern

Sunrise over the chhoti line at Gorakhpur station (overleaf). A memorial to shahid Gautam Gurung, across the street from the Gorkha Recruitment Depot. (below) and Bhaktalal Hirachan outside the Nepali Lodge in Golghar.



Uttar Pradesh. Economic interaction, however, has not developed beyond that traffic. As Gorakhpur evolves from a rural backwater town to a more vibrant economic hub, it can be expected

that economic relationships will evolve to benefit people both sides of the border. For the present, however, the city remains a transit point and a place for Nepal's pilgrims and ailing. ●

## Gorakhpur's Kathmandu connection

Gorakhpur and Kathmandu Valley are linked on the borderlines of history and myth. The ascetic Gorakhnath, apparently a real person, is supposed to have been a pupil of none other than our own Machindranath about 1,000 years ago.

Master and pupil may have arrived in Kathmandu on one of the waves of immigration that followed the destruction of Indian Buddhist establishments by invaders. Gorakhnath is fabled to have wreaked havoc in Kathmandu Valley when, having charmed all nine of the chief *naags* into a well, he refused to budge as he sat atop it in meditation. Immobilised, the *naags* were not able to bring rains to the valley and a massive drought and famine ensued. After 12 years, when Machindranath was called in from Assam, Gorakhnath was finally obliged to rise out of respect for his guru. The *naags* then crept away and it immediately began to pour. Gorakhnath's arrival in Kathmandu is still celebrated every spring as part of the much older chariot festival of Bungdyo.

It is this same Gorakhnath who arrived in the town of Ramgram in the plains a year after Timur's invasion of the Gangetic basin. On the spot where Gorakhpur's Gorakhnath temple now stands, he is said to have performed other impressive yogic austerities.

Drought and all, worship of Gorakhnath reached a height in Kathmandu in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It then went into decline, but revived again with the arrival of the Gorkhalis, who revered the yogi as the patron saint of Gorkha. The temple remains an important pilgrimage spot for Nepali Hindus from central Nepal and beyond.



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# Appeasement revisited

It is hard to imagine a more shameful deal

I vividly remember the slightly ludicrous, slightly risqué and somewhat distressing predicament in which western diplomats in Prague found themselves during the Cold War. They regularly needed to resolve the delicate issue of whether to invite to their embassy celebrations various Charter 77 signatories,

## COMMENT

Václav Havel

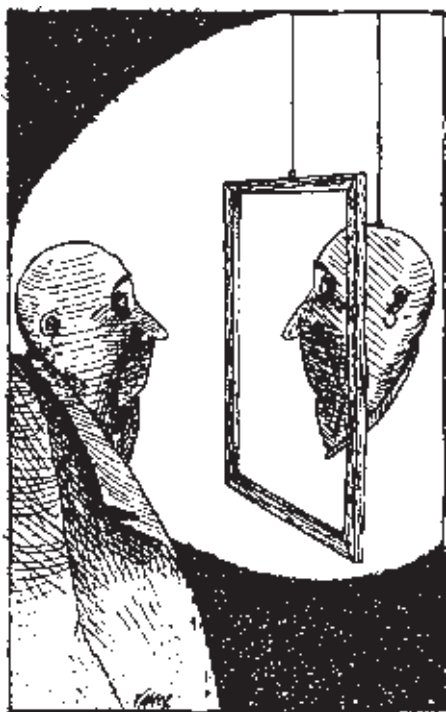


human rights activists, critics

of the communist regime, displaced politicians or even banned writers, scholars and journalists—people with whom the diplomats were generally friends.

Sometimes we dissidents were not invited but received an apology and sometimes we were invited but did not accept the invitation so as not to complicate the lives of our courageous diplomat friends. Or we were invited to come at an earlier hour in the hope that we would leave before the official representatives arrived, which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. When it didn't, either the official representatives left in protest at our presence or we left hurriedly or we all pretended not to notice each other or—albeit on rare occasions—we started to converse with each other, which frequently were the only moments of dialogue between the regime and the opposition (not counting our courthouse encounters).

This all happened when the Iron Curtain divided Europe—and the world—into opposing camps. Western diplomats had their countries' economic interests to consider but unlike the Soviet side, they



took seriously the idea of 'dissidents or trade'. I cannot recall any occasion at that time when the west or any of its organisations (NATO, the European Community, etc) issued some public appeal, recommendation or edict stating that some specific group of independently-minded people—however defined—were not to be invited to diplomatic parties, celebrations or receptions.

But today this is happening. One of the strongest and most powerful democratic institutions in the world—the European Union—has no qualms in making a public promise to the Cuban dictatorship that it will re-institute diplomatic Apartheid. The EU's embassies in Havana will now craft their guest lists in accordance with the

Cuban government's wishes. The shortsightedness of socialist Prime Minister José Zapatero of Spain has prevailed.

Try to imagine what will happen: at each European embassy, someone will be appointed to screen the list, name by name, and assess whether and to what extent the persons in question behave freely or speak out freely in public, to what extent they criticise the regime or even whether they are former political prisoners. Lists will be shortened and deletions made and this will frequently entail eliminating even good personal friends of the diplomats in charge of the screening, people whom they have given various forms of intellectual, political or material assistance. It will be even worse if the EU countries try to mask their screening activities by inviting only diplomats to embassy celebrations in Cuba.

I can hardly think of a better way for the EU to dishonour the noble ideals of freedom, equality and human rights that the Union espouses—indeed, principles that it reiterates in its constitutional agreement. To protect European corporations' profits from their Havana hotels, the Union will cease inviting open-minded people to EU embassies and we will deduce who they are from the expression on the face of the dictator and his associates. It is hard to imagine a more shameful deal.

Cuba's dissidents will, of course, happily do without western cocktail parties and polite conversation at receptions. This persecution will admittedly aggravate their difficult struggle but they will naturally survive it. The question is whether the EU will survive it.

Today, the EU is dancing to Fidel's tune. That means tomorrow it could bid for contracts to build missile bases on the coast of the People's Republic of China. The following day it could allow its decisions on Chechnya to be dictated by Russian President Vladimir Putin's advisers. Then, for some unknown reason, it could make its assistance to Africa conditional on fraternal ties with the worst African dictators.

Where will it end? The release of Milosevic? Denying a visa to Russian human rights activist Sergey Kovalyov? An apology to Saddam Hussein? The opening of peace talks with al Qaeda?

It is suicidal for the EU to draw on Europe's worst political traditions, the common denominator of which is the idea that evil must be appeased and that the best way to achieve peace is through indifference to the freedom of others. Just the opposite is true: such policies expose an indifference to one's own freedom and pave the way for war. After all, Europe is uniting in order to defend its freedom and values, not to sacrifice them to the ideal of harmonious coexistence with dictators and thus risk gradual infiltration of its soul by the anti-democratic mindset.

I firmly believe that the new members of the EU will not forget their experience of totalitarianism and non-violent opposition to evil and that that experience will be reflected in how they behave in EU bodies. Indeed, this could be the best contribution they can make to the common spiritual, moral and political foundations of a united Europe. ● *Project Syndicate*

Václav Havel is Former President of the Czech Republic.

# The unbearable lightness of being Asif

"Corruption," pronounces Asif Ali Zardari, "is a state of mind. A corrupt person wouldn't have taken on the establishment, wouldn't have sacrificed eight years of his life in prison. I could have accepted a deal and got out."

No, no, no, there's been no deal with Gen Musharraf, he repeats. But he is confident that the government will have to call early elections, and that BB (Benazir

## LETTER FROM PAKISTAN

Beena Sarwar



Bhutto, his wife, whom he

refers to as his "leader") will be back, "inshallah".

We are at Bilawal House in Karachi a few days before his departure to Dubai. There is an air of expectancy about the place, which is buzzing with men, outside the gates, in the courtyards, under a shamiana, in the living room next to the book-lined study where we meet Pakistan's former First Gentleman.

Even when he was in prison he had an easy time of it, air-conditioned rooms, all kinds of visitors, nudge, nudge, wink, wink... And yet, it couldn't have been that easy. There were rough moments, including solitary confinement, denial bail, and worse.

He comes into the room briskly. We're expecting an informal meeting, but the seating arrangement—he sits behind the large wooden desk facing the four of us—implies an interview. During the ensuing discussion one thing becomes clear: Zardari isn't going to complain about his prison stint or political and personal adversities. Instead, he repeats what appears to be his mantra: positive thinking.

After eight years of imprisonment Asif Ali Zardari flew to Dubai last week to reunite with his wife Benazir Bhutto who lives there in self-imposed exile.

"There is an unrepresentative, undemocratic government, and the West will eventually have to stand with the democratic forces. Musharraf can't step out of the umbrella of democracy," he says.

"The PPP is not in a rush to get into governance, and we believe that a martial thought process is not the answer...real strength comes from the people, and we have to educate them against the prevalent defeatist attitude."

His only regret is not being able to see his children grow up. The eldest, Bilawal, was just eight when Zardari was imprisoned by the Nawaz Sharif government in 1997. But this is not a complaint. "I did it for the sake of democracy, for the people, for all our children."

Corruption comes up. He dismisses it: "They haven't proved one case against me. They created this image of me, as an Achilles heel of the PPP."

And then, some unexpected philosophy: "History will redeem me. What am I? I am just a bleep in the universal picture. So I might as well try and shine."

There were times when no one would come to see him, but he never lost faith. "Nawaz Sharif left."

My graph went up. I wasn't entirely isolated. I've spent these eight years thinking, dreaming about how we can change Pakistan's destiny for the better."

The answer, he believes, is utilising what is considered Pakistan's weakness, its burgeoning population, and converting this into strength.



"We must invest in manpower, a billion dollars in our people instead of planes. The emancipation of women is the future of Pakistan. The trouble is that we train our sons but not our girls." His son Bilawal and daughter Bakhtawar are both karate black belts.

What about Benazir, will they let her return? "They? Who are they to stop her?" Asif Zardari asks "She has chosen to stay away because the world has gone mad. She is working nine hours a day, to change world opinion about us, about Pakistan."

He disagrees that she is arrogant and unapproachable. "A person with an arrogant mindset wouldn't work so hard. Look, people here are hypersensitive. She has a thousand things on her mind."

So if there were fresh elections and a similar situation developed, would his party accept power with similar compromises? Zardari refuses to say.

"She's the leader. Her wisdom is more than mine. Whatever decision she makes will be correct and we will abide by it." But speaking for himself, what he would like to be if in power again, is environment minister.

"That's my passion." His minders finally prevail upon him to leave for his next appointment, and as he exits the room, he gives us a wide grin. You wonder who will have the last laugh. ●

Beena Sarwar is contributing editor, *The News*, Pakistan



# Charumati in Nepal

Main editorial in  
*Kantipur*, 2 February

कान्तिपुर

Sanskrit scholar Satya Mohan Joshi has proved that age does not matter when it comes to work as long as one has the willpower to do something. Joshi, 85, successfully produced the ballet of Charumati, daughter of Ashoka. He even managed to turn the story of Ashoka and his daughter’s visit to Nepal and her eventual marriage to a Nepali youth into a ballet. Joshi worked intensely for 18 months without remuneration, believing that his main purpose was to start something novel in Nepal. This ballet will definitely make a significant contribution to Nepali Sanskrit culture. It will also give an interesting account of this particular history of Ashoka’s visit to Nepal. He had come here with his daughter in search of peace after feeling exhausted from winning a big war. He was not an ordinary pilgrim but a devoted follower of the Buddha. During his pilgrimage, he built many religious monuments. The main theme of the ballet is the romance between Charumati and Debpal, a young Chettri. Their romance forged a new relationship between India and Nepal. It is really amazing to see how this ballet about ancient history has been able to mesmerise modern youth. Although the story is old, the ballet has managed to include modern elements to move with the times. Ballet is quite unusual for Nepalis. Stories of Kumari, Munamadan and others were usually presented through musical dramas. This ballet will definitely delight Nepalis. There are now plans to take this ballet to India as well. The Indians will not only get to know about Nepal-India relations of about 2,300 years back. They will also learn Nepal’s Sanskrit traditions. At a time when art and culture are so influenced by the west, this initiative by Joshi and the Lalitpur municipality will make significant contribution towards promoting Nepali identity.

## People’s reactions

*Rajdhani*, 2 February

राजधानी

The people say that Nepal’s politics will be in trouble if, having relieved the Deuba government of power, peace is not restored. Eighty-seven years old Tika Das of Ramechhap says that if the king is able to hold talks with the Maoists and bring peace to the country, then he has taken the right step. “Right now we can’t say for sure that he has done the right thing. It is good only if peace is restored,” says Tika Das. Dhruba Pun, 27, from Kabhre runs a cloth shop in Chabel. But he is not convinced that this move will bring peace. “We can hope but its impossible to say that the king’s sole effort will result in peace.” Shanker Khaptadi also of Chabel believes that the step taken by the king was necessary to extricate the country from conflict. “It could not have gone on, somebody had to make this step,” he says adding that the move is fraught with danger.

Just the king taking over will not solve the problem, says taxi driver Kedar Dhakal of Kabhre, Deupur. A solution, he says is to bring the Maoists to mainstream politics. Shobha Neupane, a housewife in Baneshwor, says because the politicians were doing whatever they wanted, it was necessary for the king to take control of the country. “After all the corruption that the politicians were up to, it was inevitable. But I can’t say whether or not it will bring positive changes,” she says.

Lekhnath Bhandari, 30, of Terathum says that the king’s action was the best possible alternative. It has ended the debate between the political parties, he says, “Now the country has a chance for peace”.

## No more murders

*Gorkhapatra*, 3 February

गोर्खापत्र

In a country where there used to be news of murders and violence every day, these incidents have come to a stop after King Gyanendra’s royal address yesterday. There have been no untoward incidents anywhere in

the country. Security has also been tightened since yesterday to prevent violence. There have been no violent incidents even in Maoist-affected areas like Rolpa, Doti, Jajarkot and Dang. Reports from various parts of the country say that the situation is normal. Kathmandu Valley is also secure. No more tyre-burning, no more street obstructions and no irresponsible actions.

## Who is to blame?

*Rajdhani*, 2 February

राजधानी

Multiparty democracy has always been regarded as a successful medium for rule all over the world. Nepal has remained monarchical for the last 250 years. The unity between the king and the political parties has been the strength of the rule of the nation. Unless this is understood, instability will continue. The royal declaration called for unity and it seems necessary for multiparty advocates to make maximum use of this. Some of the positive steps taken in Nepal failed in performance due to lack of skill. The king’s move was not



unexpected. Even before February First, the political situation of the country was clear. Deuba rejoining the government after he proved himself an incapable prime minister was an open invitation for disastrous consequences. It was during his government that the Pajero culture and horse-trading of parliamentarians began. Like Girija said, Deuba was responsible for handing over democracy to the palace. It was Deuba who dissolved the House of Representatives. Even after breaking up Nepali Congress, he

leeches on to the regime. Such is the block in our restored democracy’s chapter. Whenever a new step is taken, new problems will be born. It will have negative impact if the establishment fails to carry out its responsibilities satisfactorily. Fear has gripped the people ever since the Maoists launched their armed rebellion. The important lesson we have learnt is we have done virtually nothing, just posed as mere spectators all the time. Instead of looking for people to blame, maybe we should blame ourselves?

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## NEPAL AND NEPALI PRIDE & HONOUR – AS HIGH AS THE SAGARMATHA

For the last few days a lot of misleading statements are being made against Nepal 1 television, creating misconceptions among viewers. Through this release we would like to present our stand before the people of Nepal. The channel - Nepal 1 – had started beaming its programmes in Nepali language almost two years ago and it became an international forum to present the contribution of Nepalese in general and Nepal in particular before the world. By beaming its news and other entertainment programmes in Nepali language, Nepal 1 TV, popular in India, has worked as a bridge between people of Nepal and Nepalese living in India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar and even in America. People of Nepali origin access the Channel on their own and also access the websites: www.nepal1tv.com and www.jumptv.com Nepal and Nepalese pride and honour are as high as the “Sagarmatha”. But, in the last few days a section of the people is trying to create misunderstanding by making misleading statements and we very humbly want to clear our position:

- The allegation that Nepal 1 TV does not pay taxes is a fraudulent and imaginary one. The channel functions within the law of the land to the best of our knowledge. We are particular of being law abiding and will always be so in the future also.
- Nepal1 had appointed an Advertising and Marketing Agency, which is duly registered under HMG's laws to procure advertisements. This company is paying taxes to the government regularly. (The VAT number of the agency is 301633246.) This fact can be checked with the government records.
- True, Nepal 1 TV is not registered in Nepal; Nepal 1TV is a channel under the TVLIVE (INDIA) Pvt. Ltd. However, Nepal 1 is having its Bureau office in Kathmandu. This office is being run by Nepali staffers. As many as nine journalists have been provided accreditation by HMG's Information Department of the Information and Communication Ministry. The Information Department had issued a circular to all ministries, secretaries, government organizations, and even the Press Secretary in the Royal Palace had been informed regarding the accreditation of our talents.
- The allegation that Nepal 1 is using V-SAT service for transmission of news to its head office in Delhi is completely false. Nepal 1 is sending its entire data through courier, air service and internet. We had already informed the Information Department about this vide our letter number 2454 dated 04/08/2061. We also want to clarify that since its inception, Nepal 1 has never done any live telecast of any event or incident.
- It is a distortion of facts that Nepal 1 is misleading citizens of the country. It is common knowledge in Nepal that we are up-linking our programmes from Delhi through satellite. Nepal 1 is an international channel. It is working in the open sky like other channels such as BBC, CNN, Star News, NDTV, Aaj Tak, etc. As far as the question of misleading the people is concerned, Nepal 1 has always received complete cooperation from every quarter in Nepal. In a very short span of time, the people have found the reflection of their culture in the programmes beamed by Nepal 1 and with their support the channel became more popular. Along with the people's support, Nepal 1 got the support from people from all walks of life, including the government, industry, cinema world, educational field, culture, sports and political fields. Eminent leaders like Mr. Ramchandra Poudel, Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli, Mr. Ishwar Pokhrel, Mr. Jhalnath Khanal, Mr. Arjun Narsingh KC, Dr. Ramsharan Mahat, Mr. Kamal Thapa, Mr. Thakur Prasad Sharma, Dr. Minendra Rijal, Mr. Arjun Thapa, Ms. Sujata Koirala had honoured us by visiting our Delhi studio and participating in different debates. Senior personalities like Mr. Durganath Sharma, Managing Director of Nepal Television, Mr. Lokdeep Thapa, Acting Chief Editor of The Rising Nepal under Gorkhapatra Corporation, Mr. Pushkar Lal Shrestha, Chief Editor of Nepal Samacharpatra, Kanakmani Dixit, Publisher of Himal News Magazine, Mr. Shyam Shrestha, Editor of Mulyankan Monthly also visited our studio. Renowned personalities like Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, former Prime Ministers Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala and Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa, Mr. Lokendra Bahadur Chand, well-known leaders – Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Mr. Pashupati Shamsher J.B. Rana, Planning Commission's vice-president Dr Shankar Sharma, Industrialist Bhaskar Rajkarnikar, Film actors and actresses of the likes of Rajesh Hamal, Bhuwan KC and Bipana Thapa graced various programmes on Nepal 1 television. We will remain grateful to them for their cooperation. Together with this, Nepal1 TV was awarded International Civil Golden Award for “outstanding contribution to promoting Nepali language, culture, and art through the established Nepali TV channel, Nepal1 from India” dated 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2004
- We also want to state that it is the wish of Nepal1 TV to present the best picture and image of Nepal to the world and in this effort we can claim success. It is the first channel in Asia to have a blind News anchor and we brought out the best from this anchor. Our contribution has been widely talked about the world over and Nepal made a mark in the leading TV channels in the world. Through our programme “Hamro Desh Ramro Desh”, we presented and took the positive aspects of Nepali society before the world. In our new programme “Nepal Star” we are going to present the finest talent from Nepal to the world which was undiscovered till today. The Mumbai film industry also took serious note of this effort of ours and came to Nepal in search of the new talent.

In view of the above facts, we are hopeful that the unfounded and fictitious allegations made against Nepal 1 would be cleared and that we would continue to receive love and cooperation from all quarters as before.

We want to thank AAAN, which gave us an opportunity to sponsor the “Kriti Awards” earlier. We want to assure AAAN that we would feel happy to extend our cooperation in future too. We also want to thank AAAN who helped us in getting advertisements for Nepal 1.

Mahaprabandhak – Nepal 1



## ABOUT TOWN

## FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Solitude of Colour** Paintings by Binod Pradhan at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. Until 18 February. 4411122, 4218048
- ❖ **Big Ben Toons** Exhibition of cartoons by Bigyan and Ben at the Via-Via Café and Gallery, Thamel.
- ❖ **Exhibition of Japanese Kites and Tops** at Nepal Art Council, 8-17 February, 9.30 to 4.30 PM. 4413174



## EVENTS

- ❖ **Current Regional and International Scenario** A talk program at the Embassy of Pakistan on 5 February, 11.30 AM. 437013, 437024
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale Rehearsals**, 7.10 PM at The British School, Jhamsikhel. 5534737
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Every Saturday at the Dharara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- ❖ **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Wave Web Winner 2004** Website designing contest. Entry deadline 15 February. www.wavemag.com.np.
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** every Tuesday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

## MUSIC

- ❖ **Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle every Friday, 5PM to 7PM. 4701208, 4701107, rum\_doodle@gohimalaya.com
- ❖ **Classical vocals and instrumental music**, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Happening live jazz in town** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Every Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM onwards.

## FOOD

- ❖ **Executive Lunch** Every Saturday and Sunday, 11AM to 2PM, all through February at Moksh, Pulchok, Jhamsikhel. 5528703
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Seasons Special** Luncheon at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La for Rs 450. 4412999
- ❖ **New delicacies** Introducing pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** with live music, dance, barbeque and karaoke at Garden Terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Delicious barbecue dinner** Fridays at Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Unlimited nature with delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijyantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

## GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Pure relaxation to escape the Kathmandu chill. 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** Great views, birdwatching and tranquil atmosphere at the edge of Shivapuri National Park. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** One night two days package for Rs 1,700 at Club Himalaya. 4411706
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia, special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Malaysia Dream Holidays** Packages starting from Rs 45,500 per person. 2012345, malaysia\_holidays\_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** Night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **AAA Organic Farm and Guesthouse** Rs 950 with three meals. 6631734
- ❖ **Temple Tiger** One night package \$250. 4263480
- ❖ **Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort** special packages available. 4225001
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Jomsom Mountain Resort** Two nights-three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, \$199 for expats including airfare and food. 4496110, salesjom@mail.com.np



## NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



It was an especially wide westerly front that traveled across northern India and Nepal this week, bringing rain, snow overcast skies to the region as seen in this satellite picture taken on Tuesday morning. Parts of northern and central India got more than double their monthly average of rain. This low pressure region has now moved away rapidly to the east, and we have clear horizons to the west as far as the eye can see. Kathmandu can look forward to misty mornings and increasingly warmer afternoons into next week. The minimum temperature will also start climbing, as the winter chill wanes gradually.

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# Don't you dare laugh

Two items of news last week from the world of rats was proof that lower mammals have an acute sixth sense that warns them of impending disaster. Rats are in fact known to have abandoned the Titanic even though it hadn't even struck an iceberg yet. Our rodent friends seem to have a built-in early warning system.

In the first incident, reported nationwide by the media before it was forbidden to tell lies, a

mouse reportedly got inside the trousers of a cook in a Darbar Marg café that shall remain nameless. The cook panicked and crashed into the bar, breaking several bottles of Kingfisher which gashed him and he had to be rushed to the hospital (don't you dare laugh).

The second occurrence took place the next day at a famous New Road eatery when a hungry customer about to wolf down a vegetarian samosa discovered that it contained a baby rat (Latin name: *Rats RUs*). As reported by the local media, other patrons then raised slogans against the restaurant management, demanding their money back. Thank heavens we're not a litigious nation, otherwise people would be suing the pants off the rats.

All this just by way of preamble as the country resumes its long march towards attaining Asian ISO 9002 standards by 2050 by unleashing four-directional development and go back to the village. Even as I write those words, I am swept by a heady feeling of nostalgia and déjà vu. The good days are back again, let's rock.

And now, the international headlines to

those of you who missed watching important events unfold around the world. It's a pity you didn't get to watch BBC and CNN this week because you missed a lot of earth-shattering events around the world. There is nothing like 24-hour television news to keep us abreast of what is happening globally. So, this is what you all missed:

1. Pope John Paul catches a cold but is getting better as we hear live from our correspondent outside his hospital in Rome.
2. Breaking news that jury selection in the Michael Jackson trial is finally complete even as the genderless, raceless and ageless king of pop says he's not a bad man, just a weird one.
3. Mugabe calls for elections in March: the West is sceptical
4. Iraq elections over: the West says it was a roaring success
5. Thailand elections next week: voting just a formality, says Thaksin
6. Captains of industry met in Davos and some of them slipped on ice in the sidewalk outside their hotel
7. Lords of poverty junket in Puerto Alegre winds up amidst fanfare and belly-dancing
8. Hillary Clinton faints, recovers and gives another speech
9. Tony Blair is kissed by party supporter at rally who is surprised he doesn't have a stiff upper lip. "They are rather soft," Tony's kisser told reporters.
10. SAARC summit postponed again, leaders to meet 'at latest' by 2025 by which time, member nations will have hopefully run out of excuses not to attend.


We have more international news in just a moment after the break. Don't go away.

## WOODEN WONDERS

*Tibetan Furniture in Secular and Religious Life*

EDITED BY DAVID KAMANSKY

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