S

sung by mounting international criticism, the royal government has lashed back at critics, accusing them of double-standards.

In one of his first statements after being sworn in, the king’s point man in the government, Tulsi Giri, told media not to call the rebels ‘Maoists’ and said American and Indian criticism was “unfortunate”. He added: “Every country has its own problems, it’s not fair to make comments on how Nepal is dealing with it.”

An official, “there is a backlash against foreign uses aid to cover some regular expenditure. development budget from donors and even recalled en masse this week, there seemed to on how Nepal is dealing with it.”

As Nepal-based ambassadors were recalled on the same week, it seemed to be a sense of uncharacteristic defiance in Singha Darbar. The government derives 80 percent of its development budget from donors and even uses aid to cover some regular expenditure.

“They are still in shock,” admitted one government official, “there is a backlash against foreign critics that Have never seen before.”

To be sure, the government is playing good cop-bad cop. Some, like Finance Minister Madhukar Rana, have taken a softer line assuring that cuts in media and other freedoms will be relaxed. This came as International Federation of Journalists and Amnesty International reps were in Kathmandu. Both issued strong statements Thursday denouncing curbs on freedom. The government is also exploiting disagreement within the donor community about a possible aid moratorium. Among donors taking the more radical approach have been the Danes, Swiss and Norwegians. For instance, they have been openly critical of the Asian Development Bank for signing a $20 million loan the day after the royal takeover. Even the Americans say they are under pressure to reexamine assistance.

On Monday, DANIDA became the first aid agency to announce a suspension of development aid to the government, but said it would continue help civil society.

“Donors want to work without being monitored or audited, we can’t list that happens,” one finance ministry official told us. Some donors at a meeting on Thursday were peeved the Danes announced the aid cut unilaterally. Others are taking a wait- and-see approach (see p 5) but all donors share concerns about working conditions in the field. “We will continue as far as possible,” said Mark Mallalieu of DfID.

“But the two key criteria will be safety of our staff and whether our programs can continue to be effective.”

Finance Minister Madhukar Rana told us he is in touch with donors: “They asked us if the government accepts their operating guidelines, and we said we support it.”

Before he was recalled to Washington for consultations earlier this week, US ambassador to Nepal James Moriarty spoke to us about the king’s move. He said the Nepali people must unite against the insurgency and for the restoration of democratic institutions.

Hang in there

Nepali Times: Your reactions on the developments after the royal takeover? James Moriarty: We have said we are extremely worried and we want to see the detainees released immediately. We want to see constitutional freedoms restored. We also want to see the government reaching out to the political parties.

What do you think will happen now? The king has said that he has two desires, one is to move back to multiparty democracy and the other to address effectively the insurgency. We totally support both those goals and the question is how this is going to be done.

What has been your role in all this? We are talking to the government. We are telling them what we think needs to be done. We have had to unfortunately remind the government that our assistance is under constant review and that these events are putting pressure on our provision of the assistance for the government of Nepal.

You met the king before February First, did you know what was coming? I want to state this as categorically as I can. I had no idea that this was happening. We had made clear we thought multiparty democracy was the way to go. We were worried any sort of unilateral move by the king would end up walking the country back away from democracy.

There are allegations that was for public consumption but you covertly backed the royal move.

I say that is absolutely false. I know that is absolutely false. I am in a position to know and that is absolutely not the case.

How optimistic are you that multiparty democracy will be restored? I think democracy here has deeper roots. I realise that Nepal is facing huge problems and the king says that is why he had to act. So be it. But again, he has stated that his goals are to return to multiparty democracy and address the Maoist insurgency effectively. We look forward to his doing so.

How much coordination is there among India, Britain and you? We work very closely because all three share the same goals, which curiously enough are the goals stated by the king. I am in constant contact with my colleagues here. Our capitals are talking about Nepal very regularly. There is a lot of coordination going on.

Any message for the Nepali people? I would urge the people of Nepal to hang in there, to unite, to face the insurgency and also to rebuild democratic institutions.
struggle against each other. NC's weakness began when the parliament was first dissolved. Political instability began as soon as NC tried everything to dissolve the UML government led by late Manmohan Adhikari. The Mallik Commission did not take any action against those involved in atrocities during the People's Movement of 1990 and the parties aligned with those individuals. Consequently, the Nepali Congress split. UML was also divided into two factions. The party leaders were intent on going to any extreme to grab power and seat in the government. As for now, a united movement for democracy is not possible unless the parties rid themselves of their bad reputation and bring a complete change in themselves. Instead of announcing a new movement in a hurry, the parties should find a new direction in order to lead the people with a completely new political vision and concern.

Hungry refugees
Nepal Samacharpatra, 14 February

BANKE—People seeking refuge at a camp in Rajena, Banke are facing serious food crisis. They ran away from their villages in the Karnali zone and other mid-western districts to escape the Maoists. Living on their daily wages, the relief aid provided by some social organisations has stopped. After the recent political changes in the country, they say they are facing problems finding employment.

The Maoists forced Hasta Ale Magar of Danda Pranjul VDC, Dailekh to leave the village with her four children and husband. Two hundred other displaced families from Dailekh, Humla, Moga, Jumla, Kalikot, Achham and Jajarkot live here. “We left our villages to the rebels hoping that the government would come to our rescue,” said Dil Bahadur Shahi of Badabhairab VDC, Dailekh. He was forced to leave the village two years ago for supporting the Nepali Congress. He says the families are on the verge of starvation. Some charities have donated 5,260 kg of rice, dal, oil and salt for the last three months, says Chandra Buda head of the refugee camp. The Red Cross has provided tents and utensils and the Saham Samuha has given 50 blankets. INF in association with Rudec Nepal have promised to build 85 huts but was able to complete only 57. “What we want is employment, not dal and rice,” says Lek Bahadur Shahi of Achham. The number of refugees is increasing.
T he king has sliced the Gorkhian knot and ended the triangular stalemate between the Maoists, the Nepali state and agitating political parties that had been suffocating the life out of the country.

At the very least the dramatic February First declaration will have the effect of forcing both internal and external forces to show their hands. The festering political stalemate and moral ambivalence had been抑制ing major actors from pursuing their position due to their conventional conclusions. The royal initiative will bring about a final polarisation in Nepali politics.

Guest Column

Saubhagy Shah

Denial of personal responsibility by invoking vacuous platitudes or retributive abdication of agency has been a part and parcel of Nepali public culture. In order to stop the country from spinning further into chaos and mayhem, someone, somewhere had to take charge of the situation and say the buck stops here. Only when there is clear acknowledgment of responsibility can there be accountability. The crown has now made itself clear. This specific task of ending the dispute

Circumstances have forced the king to act in a way that has been vindicated by how well he delivers on these two specific objectives. The government, in the Gita has a lesson here; it is of the nature of crises on a Mahaabarata scale that not all variables will be known and understood. In such circumstances, the helm must act to restore order using their best judgment, sincere intention and sacrifice in  a manner that will be acceptable as honourable brute without excuses.

Everyone appreciates that this is a potential and logical action but the peril of not doing anything was grave. It is not only selfish but also irresponsible for individual leaders to act alone. They will be condemned to prove that it is all normal when those living in the basement have been huddled for weeks. Somebody has to call for an evacuation and douse the blaze before it consumes the whole country. Facing exceptional situations calls for extraordinary measures and the lived experience tells us that this is the most extreme phase in their nation’s 236 year history.

A number of foreign governments, the UN and others have criticised the monarch’s attempt at resolving the present crisis. While their concern is well-warranted, there is also a need here to liberate the Occident of its heavy civilizational burden by disabling it of the costly misconception that only the west has the good of the Third World at heart and if allowed to act alone, local governments will go berserk and ruin themselves and their planet.

While foreign players intervene because of their contingent ideological position and strategic interest, the local states act for a longer term stake and also because it is a good thing to do. It is hard to believe that there will be no resentment, no legal asymmetry that there can be goodness that is of entirely indigenous origin. Besides a general shared concern for citizens’ welfare, progress and human rights, there is one consideration that distinguishes the local state from all other actors; while foreigners cannot be forced to join the cause of an ideological and cultural alliance of the Nepali nation-state (westerners generally tend to scoff at nationalism in an informal context, infatuated except when it concerns their own nation) the cause moral by character of this imperative as well.

The fate of Kashmir, Tibet and Sikim are sobering reminders of this fact. While natural beauties, the Himalayas remain comparatively safe except when the Maoists, the Nepali state and agitating political parties that had been suffocating the life out of the country.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

The diplomatic grapevine and the internet discussions are humming with a sanctimonious cry for sanctions. There is little talk of a trade and investment embargo, a tourist boycott and one donor has already opted for aid moratorium.

A section of our diaspora democrats have joined in the frenzy through group emails to register their transcontinental outrage at February First. A word of caution here to these long-range well-wishers of our freedom.

Kathmandu based ambassadors who have been called back to their capitals for consultations this week and the governments they represent must be advised against taking any knee-jerk and precipitous display of pique. For any retaliation, you have to ask yourself, who are you trying to punish? As Nepalis in Nepal it is our sincere suggestion that the Commonwealth, embassies, embassies, embassies or moratoria will and up hurling the very people who have borne the brunt of the conflict in the past nine years and decades of misgovernance.

The challenge of service delivery and the need for aid is even greater now that the conflict is more entrenched. Both sides are hunkering down for the long haul. In the present information vacuum when society’s feedback mechanism is thrown into low gear, responsible public opinion is our only weapon.

Let us pray that it is not a worry about the state, but a worry about the state.

First the good news

Everything will turn out all right in the end, it always does

In keeping with the spirit of the times, the Fourth Estate has become phenomenally responsible. In the changing circumstances, this is as it should be. Even though the press, unlike the other three states of the state, is not drawn upon the public conscience, it has a responsibility towards the society it serves. Services of desired nature can be assured if the press doesn’t abuse the freedom to be irresponsible. Since national interests, as outlined by the appropriate authority, supersedes all other interests, it is the duty of the media to be dependable, to protect it at all costs.

For far too long, we in the media have been revelling in reporting calamities, disasters and scandals. Now we must desist from commenting upon the appointment of stalwarts Tulsi Giri and Kirtinidhi Bista to the king’s council of ministers. Instead, the time has come to go back to our roots and discover the ways we enraged news and views in the past. We need to rekindle the traditions to suit present realities. Unlike the contemporary media, which devotes its time to sensationalising, in the past we wrote with emphatic reassurances. We strove to ensure that others did not get too worried about the state of the state.
**PRUNING TREES**

Not a single song among these trees is a complete disaster, as your editorial states (‘Hariyo ban Nepali dharti’, #233). Some pruning was clearly needed to get rid of the parasites living off them: they were endangering the very forest. Such behaviour has been clearly needed to get rid of the parasites living off them: they were endangering the very forest.

**K Limbu, Canada**

- Although I don’t agree with them, I’ve heard a large number of people in Kathmandu supporting the king’s action because the democratic government failed to bring peace. You reflect this argument in your editorial (’Between the lines’, #234). It is somewhat understandable, but as a columnist, it is a bit more complicated than that. Depends on the price of peace, I suppose. That is if the move isn’t absolutely counterproductive for the cause of peace to begin with.

*Janardan Riddhi, email*

- In his words of wisdom to the international community, Dipta Shah has your column (New News, #235) in mind. Rather than condemn King Gyanendra’s takeover on February First, those who claim to be friends of Nepal should provide him with the space to deliver the King’s message. Rather than engaging in a peace process, let’s have some meetings with leaders who can rightly claim to represent the true interests. At Losar, let’s pray that the Gods will grant our leaders, whether elected or hereditary, the wisdom to reject violence and seek to resolve differences through peace and compassion. We can really take account of collective views of a nation of 24 million. Well, in the situation in Nepal, the assumption that a minority two and a half per cent of the population can really take account of collective views of a nation of 24 million? I agree with Shah that we should take pride in being Nepali. But if we are to do so, OK, let us be able to convince the third world that we are showing for the Valley’s greenery. Finally and brightly, healing the wounds inflicted by a colour for their movement. Some old hands are rapidly gaining ground. Now we stare at each other wondering what should we do next. Not wrong the mess and start afresh? Let us be realistic enough to move on to fair elections inculcating a culture of accountability and responsibility.

*Ishwor Gurung, Pokhara*

- The situation in Nepal demands a deep introspection by both the political leadership and the people. What are we facing now is the result of years of neglect on both sides. There is no point in blaming just the political parties for this mess. We are all responsible for allowing them to do whatever they wanted without holding them accountable. The leaders are responsible for treating the country like an animal carcass. Now we stare at each other wondering what should we do next. Not wrong the mess and start afresh? Let us be realistic enough to move on to fair elections inculcating a culture of accountability and responsibility.

*Bhumiha Ghimire, Florida, USA*

- Loved your Page Three Girl (‘Ten days old’, #235). What a great way to fill the gap left by CK Lal.

*T K Singh, Kathmandu*

- Congratulations on your ability to make exasperated paragraphs magically reappear on your home page. These past weeks have brought out the creative genius of Nepali journalists.

*Marco Gianoli, email*

- Heartfelt congratulations to you and your team for the excellent work you all shown for the Valley’s greenerie. Finally we are beginning to see some commented commentary on the issues of great environmental importance. But while I am on a congratulatory frame of mind, let me bring to your attention the valiant conservation and recycling efforts being made to reintroduce leopards which have not changed their spots back into the wild. These species now have been rescued from the brink of extinction, a laudable conservation achievement and no mean feat.

*Name withheld, email*

- DUNG HEAP

I was really happy to read ‘Hurrum, Nepal’s future is in the dung heap’ by Naresh Newar (#234). I wish to congratulate Mr. Fine for his pioneering work of John Finlay who made the foundation of the GGC biogas model that has become popular in Nepal. Nepal’s present operation rate by BSP-Nepal alone is more than 97 percent, which is a lot higher than India, China and elsewhere. Although the security measure puts some limits on what can be written, in Nepal. Although the security measure puts some limits on what can be written, I think your guest column (’Reason over threat of an adversary’, #233) has advised them not to give space to the likes of the international community (or anyone else).

*Amrit B Karki, Jhamshikhel*

- Thanks Naresh Newar for the article on gobar gas. Believe it or not, it is the most uplifting article I have read from or about Nepal in a long time. Seems like our press censorship is at least doing something good: we are talking about something other than those never-ending depressing stories about politics and policies. Maybe the time has come for journalists to discuss more of the social and economic issues which have been ignored for a long time.

*Name withheld, email*

**NEW NEWS**

My compliments to Shrinkhala Sharma for her thought provoking article (’23 weeks to go’, #234) on the opportunities now present to journalists and newspapers to review and improve their reporting style. She has hit the nail on the head. I hope her words are acted upon and that we see more thought provoking journalism styles in the future with articles that go beyond the surface of events. For example, rather than an endless list of bland reports of meeting agendas, let’s have a more in-depth background and results achieved. Instead of statistical repetitions regarding accidents or conflicts, let’s hear about the effects on the people and their families and what should be done to prevent similar happenings in the future. Tell us about the stories behind the headlines.

Make our minds work. In my opinion, real news is about people and research into how current events affect their lives. There are some very good journalists in Nepal. Although the security measure puts some limits on what can be written, there is a wealth of material out there that will not cross any censorship guideline. I congratulate you and your team for this excellent and insightful articles. I have some very intelligent writers. I wish their skills were emulated by more of the daily papers in Nepal and the reporters producing scripts for TV newscasters.

*Elsie James, Canada*

**UKRAINIAN ELECTIONS**

I am shocked by Moscow-based Jugul Bhurut’s highly parochial and illogical article (’The next great game’ #233). The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe that watched the elections in Ukraine and obviously recognized the result of elections in the country. Had Yanukovitch’s supporters been in the majority, they could have shown it even more clearly in the new elections. But this was not the case. So to claim that the OSCE has caused this outcome is nothing more than an untruth. The assertion that the supreme court was forced to order an unprecedented and utterly unconstitutional third round: do you think that the Ukrainian Supreme Court ordered new elections because it doubted that the outcome of the elections was fair? That the 55 member states of the OSCE agreed to force it to take illegal action? I think Russia is very interested in the world is closely watching its authoritarian political practices of intimidation. Next it seems to fear for the regimes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

To belittle the protestations organisations there Bhurut ridicules them for choosing a colour for their movement. Some old Soviet states seem to be afraid of a new world order that asks for more transparency and influence of their own citizens. What is easier in that case than to claim negative influences of our political systems and try to find supporters of his distorted ideas in Nepal. But where do you think you would find the most democratic freedom and justice? Where would you rather choose to live? In the states of the old Soviet Union or in Europe? Please consider the influence you open yourself up to.

*Elisabeth Pitzenbaurer, Germany*

**UNDER MY HAT**

Inspired by the mood and heavy heart, Kunda Dixit’s latest Under My Hat (’All the news that is fit to print’, #234) brought a smile to my face. Arun Upadhyay, email
Radio activity

Nepal set an example in South Asia with community empowerment through radio, now it’s all on hold

MANISHA ARYAL in PALUNG

W hen Hari Bahadur Karki, 72, learnt last May that his grandson, Arjun, was diagnosed with blood cancer, he was devastated. He had heard about a local radio station starting up in Katurva, Dama in Palung VDC. He walked up to the hilltop where station manager Bishnu Hari Dhakal and his staff were preparing for test transmissions and got straight to the point. “My grandson has blood cancer,” Karki said. “The doctors say he will not survive unless he has chemotherapy.” Karki had no idea what he would accomplish by rushing up to the station. The radio producers ushered Karki into their newly constructed studio, turned on the microphone and asked him to tell his story. The result was a 30-second radio spot.

“My name is Hari Bahadur Karki. I live here in Palung I have had a road labour all my life. I have 11 children and four sons. My 17-year-old grandson, who goes to Janakpuran High School and is in the school’s volleyball team, has been diagnosed with blood cancer. I am poor and have no savings. Please help save his life.

Over the next weeks, Palung FM played the spot many times. "The response was overwhelming," recalls Karki. "People I barely knew stopped to inquire about Arjun." They would reach into their pockets and pull out 100, 500 or even 1,000 rupee notes. "Six-year-old students handed over lunch money for Arjun’s treatment."

Others who did not know where the family lived came up to the studio to leave envelopes. It became difficult for Karki and got straight to the point. The radio station asked Palung Multipurpose Cooperative Bank to open an account for Arjun Karki. In the two months following the first broadcast, Rs 150,000 had been raised.

Proponents of community radio believe this to be the spirit of local FM radio: they are sensitive to have the tools to serve the needs of communities they operate in. In countries as ethnically, geographically and linguistically diverse as Nepal, they say hundreds of local FMs should be allowed to bloom. One national broadcaster may hold the country together with nationally relevant content but it will never address the needs of local communities.

When it started in 1996, Radio Sagarmatha in Kathmandu became a pioneer of public service broadcasting and a symbol of free airwaves not just in Nepal but in South Asia. Since then, a rainbow of FM stations have been launched with a listenership of eight million and providing employment to over 2,500 people. The ownership pattern is diverse but even the most commercial stations have one thing in common with community stations: local content and local programming. Local FMs are more relevant to local needs. Radio Nepal may aim to reach all 25 million Nepalis but community radio has catered to villages all over the country.

While state broadcasters in the region serve as a propaganda arm of the government of the day, local FM use airwaves to communicate with their communities. They say hundreds of local FMs, linguistically diverse as Nepal, operate in. In countries as ethnically, geographically and linguistically diverse as Nepal, the needs of communities they operate in. In countries as ethnically, geographically and linguistically diverse as Nepal, they say hundreds of local FMs should be allowed to bloom. One national broadcaster may hold the country together with nationally relevant content but it will never address the needs of local communities.

Manish Aryal in Palung

Now with the 4 February circular from the Ministry of Information and Communications that FM stations limit themselves to broadcasting ‘pure entertainment-based programs’ and not broadcast ‘news, information, articles, thoughts and expression’ the space for educational and information content on radio will shrink. Thousands of Arjun Karkis in Palung, Baglung, Ilam, Chitwan, Nepalgunj, Jhumka and across Nepal, who had come to depend on their local FM are now deprived of credible and relevant information and tool use the medium to communicate with their communities.
**Danish aid**

The Danish government has suspended new aid agreements and projects in the pipeline for Nepal. “There will be no new aid agreement and the preparations for new projects have been put on hold for now,” said Danish Charge d’Affaires Gert Meinecke on Tuesday before leaving for Copenhagen. His government has called him for consultations over the recent developments in Nepal. Meinecke is one of the western diplomats called by their government for consultations. The German ambassador Franz Erwin Ring and the Norwegian ambassador Tore Toreng have also left. The French ambassador Michel Jolivet is already in Paris. British ambassador Keith Bloomfield left for London on Monday while Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mahapatra flew to New Delhi on Monday afternoon. Foreign missions in Kathmandu await their instructions on how to go about things. Denmark has become the first country to suspend aid. “In response to the developments after February First, our government has instructed us not to sign any new agreement with the Nepali government for now,” said Martin Hermann, deputy chief of mission at the Danish Embassy. “Those projects which are currently underway will also be reviewed.” The Danish government, however, will continue providing assistance to civil society, he added.

**Dailehkh defiance**

The residents of Dailehkh have boycotted the bands and blockades called by the Maoists. They said they have had enough of Maoist activities ranging from extortion to abductions. These were the same people who rebelled against the Maoists a few months ago. “Their spirit has not died,” they always gave us trouble so we protested against them. Now the Maoists don’t come to our village,” says Pabitra Khadka from Guangali. “Because the Maoists aren’t allowed into the Dailehkh villages, they are unable to inform the villagers about bandas, chakka jams or blockade. Hence, it doesn’t affect the village even when they call these protest demonstrations. People still go to work or to shop in Dailehkh Bajar. ‘Earlier as soon as we heard rumours of a banda we would be scared to walk the streets but now seeing that the Maoists don’t have any influence, we are no longer scared,” says Basanti Khadka from Cheudipusa.

**Through fares to India**

Indian Airlines has announced its ‘Through Fare’ scheme between points to and from India to Kathmandu from 16 February to 30 September. The fares are applicable for travel between Kathmandu and 20 cities in India. The fights can be taken either via Delhi or Calcutta. Indian Airlines says the fares are “substantially cheaper” than sector fares and are available for Indians, Nepalis and Bhutanis. “We hope that Nepal’s will take maximum advantage of this scheme,” says Indian Airlines country manager for Nepal, Nirbhik Rai Narang.

**Bank accounts**

Based on the six months average of bank accounts, Everest Bank’s operating profit showed an increase of 21 percent over last year. The bank’s profit is of about 10.5 million for the first six months of this fiscal year. The bank’s credit has grown by 25 percent and total deposits of the bank have increased by 18 percent. The bank continues to maintain strict control over the Perforning Assets (NPA) which remains at 1.7 percent in gross value.

**“Most donors are in wait-and-see mode”**

Jan de Witte flew to New Delhi on Monday afternoon. As major ambassadors Tore Toreng have also left. The French ambassador Basanti Khadka from Cheudipusa.

**‘Chicago Boys’**

**Chile’s lesson: curtailting criticism means policy errors go uncorrected**

The Latin American country Chile, stretching from Peru to Argentina, provides an intriguing link between a nation’s political life and its economic vibrancy or lack thereof. From 1973 to 1990, it was perhaps one of the most bitterly contested political parties which contested in elections that threw up eight consecutive presidents of six different ideological persuasions. There were, thus, various economic reforms, none of which lasted for long. Indeed, the pendulum swung from one side to the other. The Marxist Salvador Allende to be elected president in 1970. Allende increased his government’s central control over all aspects of the economy, starting by printing money to pave the way for the ‘Chicago Boys’ to socialize. Allende’s attempts to redesign the economy soon ran into trouble. By 1973, Chile’s per capita annual GDP growth rate nosedived to minus 4.3 percent, inflation was at a whopping 600 percent and negative growth in the wage levels made even households join protest rallies. All these led not to civil war but mass disenchantment, which made it easy for General Augusto Pinochet to assume power in September 1973.

With a cabal of advisers who clamped down on all political rights, Pinochet went on to rule Chile until 1990. Initially, Pinochet was at a loss as to what to do with the economy. He tried to run it through a central economic control that, when his attempts failed, he filled the Ministry of Finance with so-called ‘Chicago Boys’. These were Chilean economists who had studied macroeconomics at that bastion of free-market capitalism, the University of Chicago. Many Chilean intellectuals ridiculed these economists for their belief in market-based solutions and for their lack of hesitation to work for Pinochet. But their task was to create and make Chile’s macroeconomic architecture work. The ‘Chicago Boys’ quickly set out to lower tariffs, slash subsidies, loosen up the labour market, privatise the pension system, impose international competition to flourish in the marketplace and open up the economy. They accomplished all these while scaling back the state that was the hallmark of the previous government. True, they were able to push for reforms because there was no resistance to what they did. They did not have to deal with the messiness of satisfying the rural swing voters, competing with political interests. Still, after a series of false starts, Chile’s annual growth finally started averaging at five percent from 1985 till 1998. In 1999, through a referendum, Chilean voters decided to freely elect their post-Pinochet government. Meantime, so successful had Chile’s economic reforms become in generating wealth that the elected governments decided to maintain and continue on with the Chicago boys’ policies. Envidia Chile’s growing rate, neighbouring countries such as Argentina, Peru and Bolivia too started getting their own US-trained economists to devise policies to resuscitate their regions. All these reform measures have yet to solve a myriad of Latin American ills but by most indications, they have delivered more than the alternatives.

What has been the outcome?

Many are in a shocked state. Most are in a wait and see mode. Some may have expected a change in the government as they Pinochet’s rule was anathema. There is a Dutch who the local people come into the scene. There have been quite a number of good initiatives about the local development funds. Donor agencies have been holding seminars etc to discuss the current situation.

What has been the idea of working with community based organisations been successful?

There was an understanding with the previous government that the Maoists must be impelemented. But the problem is that the money for such projects has to be paid through the government. That is now local bodies come into the scene. There have been quite a number of good initiatives about the local development funds. Donor agencies have been holding seminars etc to discuss the current situation.

What have you considered SN’s most successful areas?

The most successful has been the renewable energy program which has built 120,000 biogas reactors benefiting many families and the environment. Ultimately, these will be handed back to the people. The Green Development Mechanism and Nepal can trade its carbon and re-invest it to develop other initiatives.

What has been your reaction to recent developments in Nepal?

There was no resistance to what they did. They did not have to deal with the messiness of satisfying the rural swing voters, competing with political interests. Still, after a series of false starts, Chile’s annual growth finally started averaging at five percent from 1985 till 1998. In 1999, through a referendum, Chilean voters decided to freely elect their post-Pinochet government. Meantime, so successful had Chile’s economic reforms become in generating wealth that the elected governments decided to maintain and continue on with the Chicago boys’ policies. Envidia Chile’s growing rate, neighbouring countries such as Argentina, Peru and Bolivia too started getting their own US-trained economists to devise policies to resuscitate their regions. All these reform measures have yet to solve a myriad of Latin American ills but by most indications, they have delivered more than the alternatives.

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What are the lesson from Chile that is not a regime such as Pinchoets is more likely to adopt free-market reforms. It is flawed. But when does it, the benefits does come at a very high cost to society. A lack of opposition, though.
Demystifying Himalayan degradation

Myth, myths, muddied policies and new threats

Professor Jack Ives is one of the original montologists who gathered in Munich in December 1974 to highlight the problems that the world’s mountains faced, in particular the Himalayas. That conference spawned three major ‘movements’ whose impact we see today.

BOOK
Dipak Gavali

The first was an alarmist report by the New York Times science editor, Eric Eckholm, whose book Losing Ground (1976), for all its discredited science, still functions as the policy bible for Himalayan resource managers. The second achievement was in eventually seeing the publication of the journal Mountain Research and Development in 1981 that continues to serve as an important forum for physical and social scientists despite its migration from Colorado to Oxford. The third was the establishment of ICIMOD in Kathmandu in 1982. Mountain Research and Development has since 1983 challenged the Eckholm paradigm that Ives and his Swiss colleague Bruno Messerli have termed ‘Myth of Himalayan Degradation’. Ives lists eight features of this supposed downward spiral that can be caricatured as an imminent Himalayan environmental collapse due to population pressure and increasing conversion of fragile hilltops to agriculture. This then supposedly leads to vicious cycles of environmental degradation, increasing poverty and even flooding in Bangladesh.

Challenging this alluringly simplistic non-science was the now famous Mohor Mountain Conference on the Himalaya-Ganges Problem in May 1986. The book that came out of it by Ives and Messerli called Himalayan Dilemma in 1989 showed how the myth of Himalayan degradation was just that: a scientific myth.

The purpose of Ives’ new Himalayan Perceptions is to examine all the mountain research since 1989 and to see if they validate the debunking of the myth, as well as to look at new (and unacknowledged by scholars hitherto) threats to mountains and the people living there.

After describing the myth and the mountain context in the first two chapters, Ives goes on to examine various geophysical and economic concerns in the next four and concludes that new evidence certainly validates the overthrowing of the false Himalayan degradation paradigm. However, this academic success is still a failure in policy terms because the movers and shakers of mountain lives continue to live by the old creed.

New research has shown that forests today are overall better because of the ingenuity and dedication of villagers. Although pockets of degradation exist, they have only local impacts that pale into insignificance when compared with the geomorphological processes that are going on in the Himalayas. They certainly contribute next to nothing to flooding in Bangladesh, which is caused primarily by heavy precipitation in the Meghahaya and Bangladesh itself.

Heavy rainfall on seismically and geologically unstable land forms are the primary cause of unexpected landslides. Ives mentions that the world’s largest recorded rockfall occurred in Langtang probably 25,000 years ago bringing down some 10 cubic km of rocks. Another recently understood threat is that of glacial lake outbursts, which result from causes such as global warming and the failure of a lake’s ice monane dam. Such events, frequently hard to detect and almost impossible to predict, are characteristic of these mountains. Policy making for mountain development, however, ignores these more fundamental risks and continues to be guided by the unscientific myth of poor mountain farmers causing floods in Bangladesh.

Ives links mountain hazards to the huge risks of human interventions, as developments planned or unplanned, with intentions benign or malign, through globalisation or wars. This is where geophysical sciences come face-to-face with mountain social sciences. The result is more uncertainty on a Himalayan scale and this is what makes the book fascinating and challenging.

Ives recounts how tourism certainly has been a major factor inducing social change in all mountains. However, the blessings are mixed: despite negative impact the opportunity for marginalised farmers to earn extra money in certain welcome. But it can become an ephemeral resource because, once a group of people has attained considerable material benefits and become dependent on them rather than on their traditional occupation, international wars or local insurgencies can destroy it all.

The same cautions apply to development activities because, in its name, nationally dominant groups have oppressed ethnic minorities. Ives dedicates an entire chapter to conflict situations: Chitlang Hill Tracks, Nepal, Bhutan, Nepal’s Masai insurgency and Sichuan. What is happening in many of these places shows that shangri-la is a fleeting experience and those threats are rarely beneficiaries. Despite the fact that mountain people are resilient, hospitable, gracious and all that, it is failed development, often through insensitive central government agencies, that has provoked the violent reaction and they can be undone only through sensitivity that has political backing.

On these issues linking mountain societies with potential risks, the book certainly raises more questions than it answers and hence becomes invaluable for researchers trying to understand mountains and the travails of the people living there. Himalayan Perceptions must be read by everyone involved with mountain resource management from Afghanistan to Thailand and every place in between.

Unfortunately, with a price tag of £48, it will remain inaccessible to students, scholars and policy makers in the broader Himalayan region where it’s most needed.

Excerpts

There is a general consensus, at least within the academia, that there is little support for the notion that uncontrollable environmental degradation, from the mountains to the Bay of Bengal, poses an imminent super-crisis. The World Bank’s (1979) year of reckoning (that by AD 2000 no accessible forests will remain in Nepal) has passed and Nepal’s mountains and forests are relatively intact.

On a per capita basis, Bhutan is the greatest source of religious inspiration in the world.

Landslide in Kakani just below the Trisuli Road taken in 1978 (left) and the same site re-photographed in October 1997. There are more trees and the landslide has not only healed but is, according to the farmers, the most productive of the hillsides.

Erwin Schneider’s 1961 photograph of Khumbu’s Namche Bajar and Khunde/Khumbung (left) and Alton Byers’ 1995 photograph of the same place. Overall condition of the forest cover has not changed in 34 years nor has the gully scar above Khunde despite many reports in the 1970s that this feature was rapidly expanding due to ‘deforestation’ in the slopes above the village.
Course conduct

Refresher for those who are already aware and an eye-opener for lessons on the golf course.

Do not penalize for violating etiquette, however, it is considered very impolite to breach it. Try to circulate following the norms and the golfing community will quickly shun you. Time shouting is acceptable (and in fact expected).

Ball may stop. If your ball heads towards where other golfers might play a shot out of the rough, or if it is due to ignorance. It ends up disturbing fellow golfers and careless and inconsiderate. However in most cases, ‘bad behaviour’ breach good golfing behaviour, often trying to make their opponent hit the ball when one of them is playing or佔 a position or line of an opponent’s putt and even leaving one’s shadow across that line while he puts is some simple examples of bad golfing etiquette. Some golfers knowingly breach good golfing behaviour, often trying to make their opponent hit a bad shot or to get psychological advantage. Others can be just careless and inconsiderate. However in most cases, ‘bad behaviour’ is due to ignorance. It ends up disturbing fellow golfers and unnecessarily causes embarrassment to everyone involved. Basic etiquette is part of what golf professionals teach during the initial lessons on the golf course.

Refresher

It’s been nine years but the games have finally begun

Every Saturday morning, they gather at Lalitpur. Forty people from the City Gym and their friends have been doing this for the last six weeks, bowling for three-hour practice rugby games at Baluwatar. Similar to its American version, rugby is beginning to gather some interest in Kathmandu.

It’s not just Nepal, rugby hasn’t caught on in South Asia the home of other contact sports like kabaddi and wrestling. The ‘Rugby Academy’ as City Gym also calls itself, is focusing on its first demonstration run match. It was offered the Duesit Stadium but due to construction work and ground maintenance in preparation for an international football tournament, the area allowed wasn’t enough.

It took quite a bit of searching before they found a piece of playground for practice sessions behind the prime minister’s quarters. Tundikhel would have been ideal but the bits of glass and garbage would have made it difficult to make touchdowns.

Lainche’s experienced players know it wasn’t big enough. “We do a lot of warm-ups, run around in circles, exercises designed for rugby,” says Craig Young, a Scotman who teaches English in a Matiheli school. Back in Edinburgh, he played rugby and during the eight months he’s been in Kathmandu, he’s been trying to get enthusiasts to play. Some had played rugby before, others were just curious. Few know that Nepal had a Rugby Association under the chairmanship of Siddhi Shadmher Rana. Besides a few random games there hasn’t been much going on in the rugby department. Says Ramesh Khanal, chief of the Sports Development Division at the Sports Council: “Rugby was not a priority game and so not much has been going on.”

Since there aren’t too many players and a game needs 15 players on each side, the match will be held between the members of the new club. Made up of expatriates, some British Gurkhas and young Nepalis, they hope to develop it as a serious sport and introduce it to schools also. “It’s interesting and enjoyable,” says Mahesh Manamnath, an 18-year-old who had been practicing every weekend. “You do get a few scrapes and bruises but its not too bad, I usually take the ball and run.”

Trying to teach the game the first time was confusing says Craig Young, because in rugby you pass the ball backwards not forwards. “But even those who had never played before were pretty good now, they picked it up surprisingly quick,” he says. Unlike popular opinion, rugby has fewer injuries and because the players expect contact and to get hit, its not so bad.

Good conduct includes replacing divots, repairing ball marks on greens and restoring disturbed bunkers after playing a shot out of the sand. Where caddies are used, players usually ask their caddie to do some of these tasks. However, it is still totally a player’s responsibility to ensure they are done.

Remember, even as a spectator, one is on the course golfers expect you to know and follow golf etiquette. As a golfer, take a refresher read through the etiquette section of the Rules of Golf or bring it up in a discussion with your golf professional. Adhering to proper golfing norms will help avoid unpleasantness and embarrassment, and will add to everyone’s enjoyment of the game. It shows you respect the game, keeping it’s beauty and tradition intact while making it enjoyable not only for yourself but also for others.

Marathon is good for health

More than 1,000 people from 20 countries including Nepal are participating in an international marathon in Kathmandu Valley on 18 February. Organised by the Marathon Society of Nepal, the race is a fundraising event to set up a health fund to help the poor people in the Valley get free treatment. The proceeds will go to a hospital that treats homeless and impoverished Nepalis at highly subsidised rates. The race will start from Basantapur Darbar Square and will continue to Bhaktapur, Patan, finishing at Dharat Stadium. The participation fee is $30 for international contestants and Rs 1,000 for Nepalis. With Toyota as the title sponsor, the winners can win a range of prizes. “This is an exciting event for a noble cause and we hope it will become an annual affair,” said Roy K. Kline of Scheer Memorial Hospital, the moving force behind the marathon. The Marathon Society, registered as a legitimate sport organisation, is also affiliated with the Association of International Marathon Runners and Races (AIMS). Out of the 1,000 marathon groups around the world, only 212 including one from Nepal are affiliated with AIMS.

Participants range from a schoolboy to a 70-year-old woman. “Once the word gets out, more people will participate in the coming years,” hopes Kline. The international participants from Europe, Mexico, USA, Africa and South East Asia have arrived in Nepal days before the event to acclimatise themselves to the weather.

Visit www.kathmandumarathon.org
Shhhh...Nepal’s best kept secret

Get to Bandipur for a relaxing weekend before everyone else discovers the place.

As the pale winter sun goes down, the 400 km of horizon to the north turns golden, then pink, then a grayish shade of mauve.

You heard it here first: your life is not complete without experiencing a sunset from Bandipur’s Chimkeswari hill. From high up on this ancient hilltop kingdom, the Gorkha valley below is enveloped in a gathering darkness below the icy knife-edge of Himalchuli. Then, dazzlingly, a huge coin of a full moon comes up from behind Ganesh Himal in the east.

Bandipur is Nepal’s best kept secret: situated half-way between Kathmandu and Pokhara, it is one of the most scenic spots in Nepal. It is very accessible with only a 20-minute climb up a new asphalt road from Dumre but hardly anyone goes there.

Bandipur used to be a Magar kingdom long before Prithbi Narayan Shah embarked on his conquest to unify Nepal. Being close to Gorkha, Bandipur fell fairly quickly and in later centuries was settled by Newari traders from Kathmandu Valley who brought art, culture and architecture that have remained intact in the bajar.

Time stands still in Bandipur. Except for the road, electricity and the dress of the people, nothing has really changed here since the days Nepal became Nepal. In 1959 when King Mahendra visited Bandipur he became so enamoured that he extolled its beauty and serenity in the lyrics of the famous song, “Bandipur Ye Uaka Lamo, Marsyangdi Dunga Le Tarera”.

Bandipur’s still talk about its glory days as a Magar kingdom ruled by King

NARESH NEWAR in BANDIPUR

AROUND BANDIPUR: (Counter-clockwise from left) Bandipur Bajar from Chimkeswari. Tourists at the Old Inn. Krishna Kumar Pradhan recounts Bandipur history. Tourists join in the celebrations of a Newari festival. Businessman Mani Kumar Pradhan recounts Bandipur’s glory days. Bandipur’s legendary sunset. A woman enjoys the winter sun in the bajar.
Mukunda Sen. They brought in Brahmin advisers from Lamjung and after the Shah conquest, Newars from Békaggar migrated here to establish the garment cottage industry. Bandipur became so popular as business flourished that it soon became a trading centre for Gorkha, Kaski, Tanahun, Lamjung and Manang districts. When Indian mills started producing cheaper cloth, it affected Bandipur to such an extent that in the early 1900s, the industry closed down. Bandipur returned to its early seclusion when the district headquarters of Tanahun was shifted back to Damauli. And the town became even more of a boondock when the Prithvi Highway bypassed it. Many of Bandipur’s Newar traders have now moved down to Narayanghat or Kathmandu. Still, Bandipur retains its cosmopolitan heritage and is a harmonious mixture of Magars, Bahuns, Newars and recent Gurung settlers.

“Suddenly, it felt like the place was dying,” Mani Kumar Pradhan recalls his grandfather telling him. Pradhan belongs to the sixth generation of Newar migrants to Bandipur and is glad that with the road, Bandipur will be vibrant again. Bandipur’s elders want to turn the town into a tourism and education centre like Darjeeling. But any visitor will tell you Bandipur has an edge; it is much prettier than Darjeeling.

Tourism is already picking up. A band of sophisticated tourists have discovered the place and keep coming back after their trek to relax. Pradhan’s house used to be empty, now he is booked. “I used to pay people to stay and look after my house,” says Pradham. “Today, tenants are willing to pay Rs 1,000 for one room.”

The establishment of the Notre Dame School by a handful of Japanese missionaries (see ‘Bandipur sisters’, #230) has helped establish Bandipur as an educational centre with students from all over the surrounding districts. Locals opened several private hostels for the boarding students. Says Krishna Kumar Pradhan, teacher: “Notre Dame brought education and jobs, we owe them a lot.” The school reopened after townspeople put pressure on the Maoists who had closed it down. The Maoist presence here is virtually nil and since the security forces moved out it has been peaceful.

American Peace Corps volunteers who worked here since the early 60s were among the first to promote Bandipur as a tourist destination. “The main attraction is that tourists get the taste of an old Nepali town amidst grand scenery,” explains Ram Charan Shrestha of the Old Inn, one of Bandipur’s best hotels.

The peaceful ambience of Bandipur is evident in the fact that there is no curfew, the shops are open till late and the festivals are celebrated with passion. “Nobody is afraid in Bandipur,” says Kala, a student going off to school, “There is no one with guns here.”
February First was inevitable

Himal Khabarparka, 12-26 February

There were enough indications since June 2002 that the country was headed towards this as the covers of Himal Khabarparka point to in the past three years. There is no point just looking at the past we now need to think about reviving parliamentary democracy which is in a coma. That is our wish on the 15th Democracy Day. Long live democracy.

In the gulf

Sundarayatika, 13 February

The number of Nepali youths going abroad for employment is increasing. Many of them have landed jobs in reputed companies but at the same time some are working for questionable companies. Nepalis are preference in the Gulf countries because they never shirk work and will do anything assigned if capable. But they have been the victims of accidents in Saudi Arabia. Some have lost their lives while others have been forced to return home mainied or handicapped.

Cornered

October 2003

The street protests by main political parties demanding multi-party government and restoration of parliament sutes the king enven more.

Whose call?

September 2002

Police Chief Prado Shamsher Rana creates an obstacle to the elections as he asks for postponement justifying that his force is not ready to provide security.

Decisive

July 2002

The two factions of NC led by Girija Prasad Koirala and Surya Bahadur Thapa are not able to strike a deal as they are unable to counter the drift towards erosion of democracy.

Parties show displeasure

November 2003

Political parties are discontented, lack trust and are unable to counter the drift towards erosion of democracy.

Whose call?

September 2002

Prime Minister Deuba decides to take back Babu Prasad Bhattarai, the Prime Minister he sacked, calling him incompetent, takes control over state affairs and starts the process of finding a new prime minister.

Going it alone

December 2002

As soon as Lokendra Bahadur Chand is appointed as premier, he hands over most ministerial authorities and responsibilities to the king.

Handover

December 2002

Like mainstream political parties, the constitutional king also establishes himself as a key player in the government.

Political cardgame

February 2003

The only way out

January 2005

The king and the parties should have made a united effort to end the nine months of conflict and political instability inflicting the country.

Another Bahadur

May 2004

The king looks for an alternative to Surya Bahadur Thapa. Political leaders meet the king but the king decided to bring back Deuba, the same prime minister he sacked.

The Royal Proclamation is made, government is dismissed, emergency declared and the king takes control.

February First

February 2005

The street protests by main political parties demanding multi-party government and restoration of parliament sutes the king even more.

In the gulf

Sundarayatika, 13 February

The number of Nepali youths going abroad for employment is increasing. Many of them have landed jobs in reputed companies but at the same time some are working for questionable companies. Nepalis are preference in the Gulf countries because they never shirk work and will do anything assigned if capable. But they have been the victims of accidents in Saudi Arabia. Some have lost their lives while others have been forced to return home mainied or handicapped.

The company they worked for hadn’t paid their medical insurance or helped a victim. A year ago, Debil Gurung paid Imanish Manpower Rs 75,000 to go to work in Khamis, Saudi Arabia. Shortly after arriving, Debil lost his right leg in a road accident. “No one came to help me,” says Debil. He wasn’t able to work to pay off his debts. When his wife and family calls, he lies and says he is well and will be sending money in a few days. “It’s seven years since I can’t tell them, they’d get worried,” he says. He hasn’t even told his brother who is also in Sastika Ambia. The company he works for took care of the medical bills incurred during the nine months he was in hospital. “I don’t know how to return home like this,” he says. He’s been in the gulf for two years but has only worked for one, spending the rest in hospital. “I ashamed,” he says, “I can’t go home.” According to Chou Gladie of the Tamu Dhi in Damam, Debil is still a part of the company he was working for and talks are being held in the embassy about his visa and the insurance is supposed to receive. Other Nepalis have helped raise funds for him and given it to the committee.

Rumours

Sukraraj Tropical Hospital in Kathmandu has begun treating HIV/AIDS patients. The bad news is that the hospital has been forced to return home several times. “Many patients are afraid that they might be infected with HIV so they’ve chosen to go elsewhere,” says the nursing staff. The hospital sees around 15 patients a day and the number was more than doubles a few months ago. “We disinfect the equipments and other materials after each and every patient,” says a doctor, “But the other patients don’t understand this.” According to Lalbhusan Thapa, most hospitals in Kathmandu Valley restrict HIV patients to Sukhril Sukanti Tropical Hospital. “If the other hospitals also started treating HIV patients, society would get the right message.”

Will they learn?

Dristi, 15 February

Each representative of the international community, political parties and various bodies of citizens’ society have reacted differently to the royal proclamation of February First. The NC, UML, Unity Centre-Masal and NC-D have called on unity for the restoration of democracy. So far, the NC has made any statement. The Mandal faction of NSP has supported the king’s move. The Maoists who have often been fickle-minded in their opinions made a statement to signify that the possibility for peace talks is still alive. The NC-D wanted to hold direct talks with the king but even when given the chance they chose not to respond. The UN, India, USA, UK and the European Union, while expressing their deep concern about the new situation, have stressed the restoration of democracy in the country. The Americans have implied they may pull out bilateral aid if the new government fails to restore the democratic system, cooperate with major political parties and remove press censorship within 100 days. The political parties that have gone underground are preparing for a united movement. The public seems to think that the political leaders haven’t learnt their lessons. The royal proclamation is seen just a challenge to the parties but also an opportunity for the leaders to rectify their errors. They should realise that in the last 14 years of democracy, the parties have committed grave mistakes. They should focus on their power...
Leaving wives and kids
International forced marriages and abandoned children

A woman with a little boy approached me near the British High Commission in Karachi. Something about her made me want to listen. Nasima (not her real name) said she was married to a UK citizen of Pakistani origin. They had one boy and moved to Denmark. While she was pregnant with the second child, her husband brought her back to Pakistan to visit family. Then he took her passport and two-year-old son and went back to Denmark. Some months later, the divorce papers arrived. Since her second son was born, she has been eking out a living by stitching clothes. But life is hard. She feels she is a burden on her widowed mother and longs for her older son, “I want to go to Denmark and fight for my son’s custody,” she said. Meanwhile, her husband has threatened to take away the other boy when he turns four. The honorary consul of Denmark in Karachi (a Pakistani) turned out to be well versed with the case and thought the woman a nuisance, trying to worm her way into a cushy life abroad.

Sad, this is not a unique case. What her husband did is now recognised as ‘wrongful retention or removal (of a child) from one country to the other’ (rather than criminal abduction). Under the protocol on Child Abduction signed in September 2003, by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and judges of Britain, the principle behind this seminal agreement is that the judge in the child’s home country (where the child has recent history) is best equipped to adjudicate on the child’s welfare. Thus a judge in the other country will send the child back to his or her home country to enable a judge there to take decision on matters like custody. A side benefit of the protocol is that it enables mothers like Nasima whose children have been forcibly taken away, to go to that country to fight the custody battle.

To facilitate such cases involving British citizens, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London formed a Child Abduction team along the lines of the already existing Community Liaison Unit set up in 1999. Last year, the unit dealt with 50 cases but like forced marriage, these are beloved to be the tip of the iceberg.

The typical example of forced marriages involves a British male of Pakistani origin marrying a Pakistani girl (the man may have been forced into the marriage). The girl comes to the UK, lives with the man and has children. She has obtained her indefinite leave to remain (ILR). The husband then takes her to Pakistan ‘for a holiday’, with or without the children. He takes her passport and sometimes even the children’s passports and returns to the UK leaving her behind. Sometimes he will bring the children back, sometimes not. Sometimes the children are in the UK. In order to return to the UK, the woman has to prove she had ILR, which can take months. If she stays out of the UK for more than two years, she loses her ILR.

Social workers report that many British men of Pakistani origin are forced into marrying women from Pakistan, these women are treated no better than servants once in the UK. The abandoned woman is often stigmatised back in Pakistan. She endures agony without her children. But if they are with her, she may feel even more of a burden. Britain has taken a huge step by acknowledging this issue and protecting the rights of its affected citizens.

When the Kyoto treaty entered into force on 16 February, the global warming community congratulated itself to do good; they have secured the most expensive worldwide treaty ever. They have succeeded in making global warming a central moral test of our time. They were wrong to do so. Global warming is real and is caused by emissions of carbon dioxide. But existing climate models show we can do little about it. Even if everyone (including the United States) applied the Kyoto rules and stuck to them throughout the century, the change would be almost immeasurable. Postponing warming for a mere six years would cost at least $150 billion a year.

Global warming will harm developing countries because they are poorer and therefore less able to handle climate changes. However, by 2100, even the most pessimistic forecasts from the UN expect the average person in the developing countries to be richer than now and thus better able to cope. So Kyoto is basically a costly way of doing little for much richer people far in the future. We need to ask ourselves if this should be our first priority.

Some of the world’s top economists, including three Nobel laureates, answered this question at the Copenhagen Consensus last May. They found that dealing with HIV/AIDS, hunger, free trade and malaria were the world’s top priorities, where we could do the most good for our money. Moreover, they put urgent responses to climate change at the bottom of the list. In fact, the panel called these ventures, including Kyoto, “bad projects” because they cost more than the good they do.

As the economics of climate change has become ever clearer, warnings from the global warming community (2100 with or without Kyoto) have become shriller. For example, the head of the UN Climate Panel says, “We are risking the ability of the human race to survive.”

Such statements make headlines, but they are nonsense. At a recent meeting at Exeter some participants warned of a 50-50 chance that the Gulf Stream winds could collapse within a century. Such a scenario looks great in the movie The Day After Tomorrow, but it is unmitigated.

We are told that sea levels will rise by roughly 50 cm by 2100. This is correct, and it will clearly cause problems in low-lying countries like Bangladesh, but the alarmists neglect to mention that sea levels rose through the 20th century by 10-25 cm. Did anyone notice?

The end-of-civilisation argument is counterproductive to serious public debate. It makes us believe that we only have one choice. Yet the reality is that we can choose to make climate change our first priority or we can choose to do a lot more good first.

To say this is not to suggest laissez-faire. Far from it. Thousands died in Haiti during recent hurricanes but not in Florida because Haitians are poor and cannot take preventive measures. Breaking the circle of poverty by addressing the most pressing issues of disease, hunger and polluted water will not only do good but will also make people less vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

With Kyoto, the world will spend $150 billion a year on doing little good a century from now. In comparison, the UN estimates that half that amount could buy clean drinking water, sanitation, basic healthcare and education for every single person in the world. Which is better?

Global warming really is the moral test of our time but not in the way its proponents imagine. We need to stop our obsession with global warming and start dealing with more pressing and tractable problems first.

Beena Sarwar is the contributing editor of The News, Pakistan.

Kyoto:
The end-of-civilisation argument is counterproductive to serious public debate

Beena Sarwar

International forced marriages and abandoned children

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Beena Sarwar is the contributing editor of The News, Pakistan.
We must act knowing that climate change and its effects threatens global security for both the rich and the poor.
**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**

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**Walkathon Postponed**

We wish to inform that the walkathon scheduled to be organised on Feb 17, 2005 has been postponed for an indefinite period. We wish to thank all those friends, supporters and well-wishers for their goodwill messages.

Radio Sagarmatha/Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NFEJE) Family
PLANTING ROOTS: Durga Shrestha, minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare plants a tree at Tundikhel on Wednesday to celebrate Queen Komal’s birthday.

LONG AND WINDING ROAD: A lone taxi defies Maoist threats against transportation on the Prithibi Highway on Tuesday.

WRITING ON THE WALL: A child writes on the wall of the Saraswati temple in Maitidebi during Saraswati Puja on Sunday.

FLY TIME: Phuket Air announces its Kathmandu-Bangkok-Dubai flights starting from March, in a press conference on Wednesday.

Long journey home

She carries the news from Kabhre to the capital. She roams the town looking for scoops, writes news and helps in editing as well. And she is probably the journalist with the longest commute in Nepal.

By the time she drives home to Dhulikhel in her trusted Kawasaki Calibre, it is already 10 at night. Reporter Bhagwati Timsina has grown used to the 100 km roundtrip everyday on her bike across two districts to reach her office Kamana Publications. And it is a matter of both interest and compulsion. “I have chosen journalism as my career but the challenge is to do that and manage my household,” says the 32-year-old reporter. When she started with journalism almost a decade ago, Bhagwati commuted to and fro from Kathmandu in a bus. For two or three years in between, she tried living in Kathmandu but her love for home and her social involvement in Dhulikhel led her to shift base once more. The motorbike gives her more mobility and also makes it hassle-free to commute back and forth.

Bhagwati and her motorbike are well-recognised on the highway out of the eastern edge of the Valley. It is not just a sign of her determination but also her identity. As a female reporter, Bhagwati is the perfect role model for her peers. Her courage and determination can be seen in the progress she has made in the print media, rising from a hawker of the Mahasangar Dainik to assistant editor at Nepal Samacharpatra. Says editor Pushkar Lal Shrestha about Bhagwati: “She is an example of courage and more women should strive to be like her.” But Bhagwati shrugs off the praise. For her the commitment and determination are a normal part of her career. She says matter-of-factly: “If you put your mind to it, nothing is impossible.”
Can we have a word?

Since no one has bothered to bring out full page ads in national broadsheets to congratulate me on the extraordinary honour conferred on me recently when I was nominated a life-long card-carrying member of the American Biographical Institute, allow me in all modesty to toot my own trumpet.

Just how rare and momentous a recognition this is can be gleaned from the fact that only two other Nepalis in history have been thus honoured by the American Biographical Institute (Motto: ‘Send us a cheque for $100 plus $12 for postage and your award plaque is in the mail’).

One proud awardee is the Grade Nine child prodigy who designed Nepal’s first Intercontinental Ballistic Missile and actually put this country on the US watchlist for rogue states that are automatically eligible for full membership of the Axis of Evil. The other one to bag the Crazy Scientist Annual Award is none other than the UML minister who, a few years ago, came up with the ingenious (and deadly serious) proposal to export Nepal’s abundant hydropower resources to China via satellite.

It makes me swell with pride to be in such illustrious company and to share this glory. Therefore, it is only natural that one’s peers should seethe with jealousy and not call me up on my mobile to extend their congratulations heartily. It’s a peculiarly Nepali trait that we don’t like to see fellow-Nepalis recognised and getting ahead. But at the end of the day, comrades, the fact of the matter is that I was honoured by the American Biographical Institute and you guys weren’t. Nyah-nyah-na-nyah-na. Ok, it set me back $112 but imagine how good it’s going to look on my cv. So stop being mean and make me a chief guest at your book launch so I can deliver a keynote address. Hey, where is my dosallah?

At the rate things are going, it looks like more congratulations are in order. Most people are just famous but a business transaction that I have recently entered into with my Nigerian partners is going to make me both rich and famous. What I am about to tell you is in the strictest confidence, so please keep this to yourself. A month or so ago, I got the following urgent email from Mrs Abacha:

Dear Sir,

I hope this mail finds you in the pink of health. Unfortunately I can’t say that about myself. Ever since my husband, Mr Sonny Abacha died I have been running from pillar to post trying to extricate his vast fortune stashed away in his secret Swiss bank account. My family would like to access that money so we can donate a part of it to tsunami victims. Unfortunately my late husband’s account has been frozen and all the $890 million in it. I can only get it if I can name you Finance Manager of the Tsunami Relief Fund. Rest assured you will be adequately compensated, in fact you will get 30 percent of the total sum for your troubles. All you have to do at the present time is deposit $100,000 in earnest money in the bank account below and please understand that this will be fully refunded to you.

Yours in deepest confidence,
Mrs Miriam Abacha

It’s not every day that one gets a proposal like this: to get rich quick while at the same time helping out in a humanitarian cause. I wired the earnest money two months ago and have been waiting patiently for further communication from Mrs Abacha who has promised to get back to me as soon as her lawyers complete the legal formalities. So, have you booked that space in the papers for your congratulatory ad?