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BREAKING NEWS

Emergency Lifted!

See page 11

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 241

Q. Is the international criticism of February First justified?

Total votes: 483

Weekly Internet Poll # 242. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. How do you rate the performance of the council of ministers in the past 60 days?



Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey welcoming his Chinese counterpart, Li Zhaoxing, as he arrived Thursday in Kathmandu for a two-day visit. Chinese Ambassador, Sun Heping, is at left.

MEDIAWATCH

- Two years after he was abducted by Maoists, it has only now emerged that rebels killed Radio Nepal's Surkhet-based Kham language newsreader Dhanbahadur Roka four months later. His wife Dilkumari said the Maoists had informed her that they had killed him. Press and human rights organisations have expressed outrage over news of the murder.
- So far five journalists have been killed at the hands of the Maoists and state security has killed six. Nine journalists are currently under government detention.
- Editor of the *Dharan Today* who was critically injured in an assassination attempt by suspected Maoists on 15 March is still hospitalised in Siliguri. His condition is said to be serious. *Dharan Today* has stopped publication.
- State-run Radio Nepal has started blocking BBC World Service news in English that it relays over 103 FM in Kathmandu. The station plays instrumental numbers based on songs of Chandani Shah starting the top of the hour GMT for 15 minutes.
- FNJ celebrated its 50th anniversary on Tuesday with the biggest rally ever for restoration of press freedom and civil liberties in Kathmandu and other main towns. This was the first demonstration that the government didn't try to stop in the capital since 1 February.
- Managing Editor Mukunda Acharya and Editor Dipak Chauhan of *Ankush* daily in Birganj were summoned to the army camp on Thursday and warned not to print any security-related news.



Who'll blink first?

Two months after the royal takeover everyone is in the rut

KUNDA DIXIT

Two months after King Gyanendra seized power on 1 February everyone is in a fix:

- **King Gyanendra** gave the international community and his subjects a choice: me or the Maoists. He needs to show foreign powers that the Maoists are a real threat to the state, while simultaneously proving to the people that things are returning to normal after he took over. How will this contradiction be reconciled?
- **Donors** are trapped by their own rhetoric. They want to help, but they can't be seen to be aiding a dictatorship. Britain and the US want to bolster the army's deterrence against the Maoists, but were required by their own laws to stop aid because of February First.

- **India** is in a dilemma. Overt support for Nepali political parties can be a kiss of death for them, and exerting more pressure on the king will allow him to rally the people's support. If owners don't act when the house is on fire, don't the neighbours have to try to put it out?
- **Political parties** still believe in a constitutional monarchy, they want to give the king a face-saving way out, but they aren't in a position to be of any help.
- **The Maoists** are in a fix, too. A serious rift in the ranks threatens to undermine the revolution, a soft landing is out of the question and there is no immediate prospect of gaining the upper hand militarily.
- **The RNA** was prepared for criticism at the current session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, but

February First magnified the condemnation. UN Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Jean-Marie Guehenno, even put it down in writing this week: 'We will be keeping under review the participation of members of the RNA in our operations.'

- **The Nepali people** are confused. The security forces were supposed to be chasing Maoists, but if there have been any major victories the army is not boasting about them. In fact, security forces had their hands full in the past two months putting down pro-democracy rallies, keeping politicians in detention, enforcing censorship and intimidating the media. The people may want to give the king a chance, but the longer this drags on the more they will see February First for what it really was.

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KIRAN PANDAY

RALLYING HACKS: Hundreds of journalists march through the streets of Kathmandu on 29 March in support of press freedom. For the first time after February First, the police did not intervene.



KIRAN PANDAY

FLAG-WAVING: Half-a-dozen NC activists taunt police by waving party flags in front of the Democracy Wall at Ratna Park on 27 March. They were arrested soon after this picture was taken.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PRATIMA'S EYES: Pratima Lama, a blind student, dictates answers for her SLC exam paper to a Grade Eight student at Namuna Machendra School in Patan on Wednesday.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

MEN OF THE MATCH: Pokhara Cricket Club Team, winners of the first Darshan Memorial Cricket held in Dharan, pose with their trophy on Wednesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

MOCK UN: Anoop Pandey, representing Secretary General Kofi Annan, announcing his resignation after a simulated UN session at Rato Bangala School on Wednesday. "Kojo is innocent, but that's not the point, it was improper and I don't want this controversy to besmirch the UN," he said. The real Kofi Annan hasn't resigned.

Bahadur JB

JB Pun Magar has always been tempted to jump straight into the lion's den. Son of a Gorkha soldier in the Assam Rifles, he probably inherited his fearlessness. But he is not a soldier, he's a journalist.

Abducted and threatened with death by an anti-Maoist vigilante group last month, the *Himal Khabarpatrika* correspondent in Butwal took it all in his stride. It was not his first time.

At the height of the Maoist insurgency 10 years ago, JB dared to trek to the cradle of the revolution in Thawang. Against the advice of his editor at *Rajya Satta*, JB went to

Rolpa merely out of curiosity. "I just wanted to find out what it was like out there," he recalls matter-of-factly.

The notorious Operation Romeo that resulted in extrajudicial killings of many civilians had just been launched. Even the Maoist militants were shocked and confused to see a little known journalist walking into their stronghold.

When he went to Rolpa again last Dasain, the Maoists were holding a secret meeting with Prachanda. The army, having received information about the meeting, had surrounded the area.

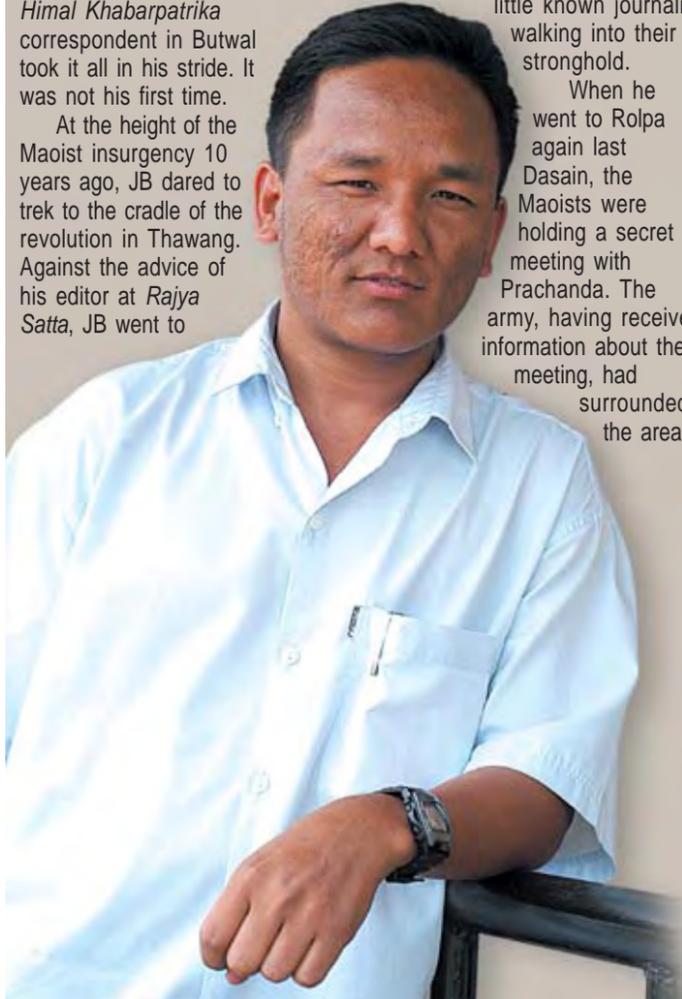
The rebels accused JB of being an army spy and threatened him. It was his nonchalance and fearlessness that saved him. After eight hours of hostile interrogation, he was finally released.

"Journalism is about adventure. Unless you accept that you don't get anywhere as a real reporter," says the 31-year-old JB. He has been offered jobs by editors in the safety of Kathmandu but he has turned them all down. "It's fun in the field, desk jobs are boring," he says.

JB has now the distinction of being detained and interrogated by just about every armed group in the country: the guerrillas, police, army, vigilantes and criminal gangs. On one trip, JB happened to be in a village when the Maoists attacked vigilante leader Muna Khan's house. Khan managed to escape with his family even after the Maoists hurled three socket bombs killing three of his bodyguards. Suspecting JB of helping the rebels, he was detained for the night and warned not to return. To their surprise, JB showed up three days later. Finding it difficult to shake JB off, the notorious Khan finally gave in and agreed to an interview.

JB says with his characteristic grin: "I don't mean you should be suicidal but you should be prepared to take risks if you are in the business of finding out the truth."

But there is one thing that really scares JB: his mother's scoldings after each trip. ●
Naresh Newar



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Times

Congratulation to the winners of the 4th Nepali Times lucky draw (March 31, 2005)

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Mrs. Jeena Rana receiving the 1st prize (March 17) on behalf of Anudan Rana, Constellation Pvt.Ltd. from Sunaina Shah, General Manager Marketing

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WAVE Special Issue

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Cover story: **On the road**
Nationwide Youth Survey

Exclusive: **Prakash Ojha: Case Of The X**

Stuff: **Abortion Inside Out**

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Assn. of Cartoonists

THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG

by JIGME GATON

The Adventures of HeroJig

The Do's and Don'ts of an Expat Living in Nepal

1) Do give generously (heck, you have an IRA)	1) Don't think ur smarter than a Nepali (ur not.)
2) Do take your shoes off (even if host insists)	2) Don't yell at kids during Holi (its only water)
3) Do eat Dal Bhat with ur fingers (tastes better that way)	3) Don't forget u are a guest - behave!

HeroJig is like the "lata" khairmanche leading the blind.

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.

But be a heroji, and use your manners.

"Treat everyone with politeness, even those who are rude to you - not because they are nice, but because you are."

~Author Unknown.

Have more Do's and Don'ts? Send to this fine newspaper care of HEROJIG.

#62 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Coloured Expressions** Paintings by Chirag Bangdel at the Art Shop, Darbar Marg. Until 4 April. 4470193
- ❖ **The Ovalism** by Ratna K Shakya at Buddha Art Gallery, until 6 April.
- ❖ **Nepal Money Expo 05** at BICC, 8-10 April. 5549071
- ❖ **Thalara Framed** Black and white photographs by Devendra SJB Rana at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. Until 15 April.
- ❖ **Magic Pencil** Artworks by Britain's best children's illustrators at the British Council, Lainchor. Until 6 May. 4410798

EVENTS

- ❖ **French Film Festival** 6-10 April at Russian Cultural Centre. For details, contact Alliance Francaise. 4241163, 4242832
- ❖ **Jat Sodhnu Jogi Ko** Play directed by Anup Baral at Gurukul, Dhobikhola, Setopool, 5PM. Until 10 April. 4466956
- ❖ **Nepali New Year's Day** on 1 Baisakh, April 14.
- ❖ **China Trade Fair** at BICC, 15-18 April, 10AM-12PM. 5555888
- ❖ **Guided Meditation** Mornings at 8AM-9AM at Himalayan Buddhism Meditation Centre, Thamel, Kesar Mahal. 4414843
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Garage sale, food, stalls, pet practices and more. <http://www.extreme-nepal.com/1905sundays.htm>
- ❖ **Alpha Course** From April to June at KICC. alpha@kicc-org.np, 5525176
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Smart Art** for kids at Buddha Gallery from 2 April. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Saturdays, for both experienced and beginners. 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Saturdays at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.



MUSIC

- ❖ **1974 AD Live** at La'soon Restaurant & Viotheque with buffet and snacks, 1 April, 7PM onwards, tickets Rs 999. 5537166
- ❖ **San Miguel's Pulse** Glamour and music at Radisson Hotel on 1 April.
- ❖ **Live with Prism** at Red Onion Bar, 7.30 PM onwards. 4416071
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by JCS trio and Peter McTwister, Thursdays at Full Moon Bar, Mondays at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4700736
- ❖ **Fusion Time** Mondays at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Live Music** Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Kutumba Live** at New Orleans Cafe, Thamel on 2 April, 7PM. 4700736
- ❖ **Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle, Fridays, 7PM onwards. 4701208
- ❖ **Classical music**, 7PM onwards, Fridays at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** Wednesday, Friday, Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **As much as you can eat** Barbeque lunch Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Sekuwa and Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **LQ Cauldron** Six days a week at Latin Quarter Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited. Order in advance. 4254260
- ❖ **Arniko Special Lunch** Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Exotic Seafood** at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
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- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
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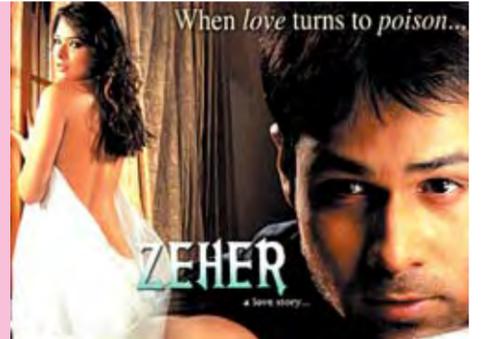
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JAI NEPAL CINEMA

In a small town in Goa steeped in azure seas and sultry secrets, the chief of local police station, Siddharth (Emran Hashmi), finds himself caught in the eye of a storm and about to be blown away. Siddharth is in the process of divorcing his wife, Sonia (Shamita Shetty) whom he still loves but he is also involved with another married woman, Anna (Udita Goswami). Things get even more complicated when Siddharth realises that Anna's husband beats her and that she is dying of cancer. In heat of the moment, he decides to give Anna the money he recovered in a drug raid for her medication. Anna dies in a bomb blast that very night and Siddharth now races to uncover a murky trail of drugs, money, murder and deceit. But all the evidence points to him.

Now Showing: Zeher

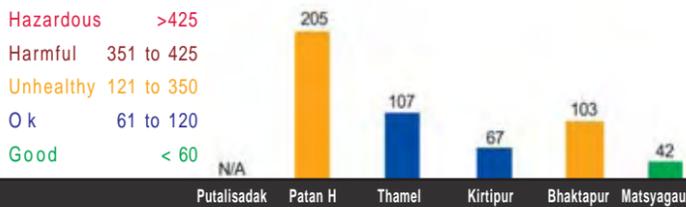


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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

As the PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) data from Putali Sadak is still not available due to technical problems, the average PM10 for Kathmandu Valley seems to be well below the national standard. However, the weekly average of PM10 value for Patan Hospital area is still 70 percent higher than the national standard, which is 120 microgram per cubic meter.

20 - 26 March 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



All clear as far as the eye can see in this satellite picture of the subcontinent taken on Thursday morning. Spring has been fairly wet in Nepal and we now seem to be headed for more normal dry pre-summer weather.

Since the second week of March, the mid-tropospheric westerly jet has been unusually active injecting moisture into the Himalaya and triggering convection storms accompanied by high wind and precipitation. We will still see large buildups along the midhills towards late afternoon during the weekend. Last week's snow is melting quickly in the high valleys but it is still lying in great heaps down to 3,500 m along north-facing slopes in Manang, Mustang and Khumbu. The days will be warm with the temperatures climbing to 28 celsius by next week. Minimum temperatures are still abnormally low for this time of year but they will climb steadily in the coming week.

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TO POSTERITY

by Bertold Brecht

1

Indeed I live in the dark ages!
 A guileless word is an absurdity.
 A smooth forehead betokens
 A hard heart. He who laughs
 Has not yet heard
 The terrible tidings.

Ah, what an age it is
 When to speak of trees is almost a crime
 For it is a kind of silence about injustice!
 And he who walks calmly across the street,
 Is he not out of reach of his friends
 In trouble?

It is true: I earn my living
 But, believe me, it is only an accident.
 Nothing that I do entitles me to eat my fill.
 By chance I was spared. (If my luck leaves me
 I am lost.)

They tell me: eat and drink. Be glad you have it!
 But how can I eat and drink
 When my food is snatched from the hungry
 And my glass of water belongs to the thirsty?
 And yet I eat and drink.

I would gladly be wise.
 The old books tell us what wisdom is:
 Avoid the strife of the world
 Live out your little time
 Fearing no one
 Using no violence
 Returning good for evil —
 Not fulfillment of desire but forgetfulness
 Passes for wisdom.
 I can do none of this:
 Indeed I live in the dark ages!

2

I came to the cities in a time of disorder
 When hunger ruled.

I came among men in a time of uprising
 And I revolted with them.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.

I ate my food between massacres.
 The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep.
 And when I loved, I loved with indifference.
 I looked upon nature with impatience.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.

In my time streets led to the quicksand.
 Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer.
 There was little I could do. But without me
 The rulers would have been more secure. This was my hope.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.

3

You, who shall emerge from the flood
 In which we are sinking,
 Think —
 When you speak of our weaknesses,
 Also of the dark time
 That brought them forth.

For we went, changing our country more often than
 our shoes.
 In the class war, despairing
 When there was only injustice and no resistance.

For we knew only too well:
 Even the hatred of squalor
 Makes the brow grow stern.
 Even anger against injustice
 Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
 Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
 Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
 That man can help his fellow man,
 Do no judge us
 Too harshly.

(translated from German by H R Hays)



LETTERS

PEACE FIRST

The condemnation of the royal proclamation by the international community has mystified the Nepali people about the agenda of our country's allies ('One country, two view points' # 239). There is no doubt that the Nepali people and our foreign friends seek the same goal: peace. The UK, US and India feel that democracy is the only way to defeat the Maoists. According to the British ambassador, as his country is a "functioning" democracy it can't support a military structure. But can you really enjoy even the basic elements of democracy in a society without peace? What is the point promoting democracy or restoring fundamental rights for that matter, when the people have to live in an atmosphere of fear? The current emergency is a means to achieve the goal of peace and is not an end in itself. The roadmap exists to end terrorism. The envoy's refusal to see the light boosts the Maoists.

Sanchit Shrestha, email

● Instead of acting as a catalyst to solve the present stand-off, it is embarrassing to find a person of Surya Bahadur Thapa's stature busy requesting politicians to enlarge the current political vacuum by further creating divisions in their respective parties. A nation's political future is sure to make its way for further degradation when a person who has occupied the prime minister's chair more than anybody else,

is still engaged in his petty motives with a handful of his coterie. There is also an urgent need for the younger generation to take charge of politics in a real sense. Time has come for all the pro-constitutional forces to unite and tackle the insurgency. Irresponsible remarks and allegations by both sides against one another will only deepen the crisis further. As a first step, the government should restore civil liberties and release political detainees. And the politicians shouldn't go back to their old tricks.

Bikendra Shamsheer Thapa, Kathmandu

● The righteous groups of NGOs are at it again preaching about humanity. We are trying to come to terms with a conflict that was triggered by inept political leaders through their nepotism, corruption and lawlessness. They were the real antithesis to democracy.

The rights groups and NGOs are not the champions of freedom and human rights, they print their do's and don'ts in newspapers but have no transparency themselves. They should come clean or just shut up. We should put our own house in order so it can withstand outside pressure with strength, fortitude and independence. We have to assure that human rights of all the people is safeguarded, not just of a few elitist group of politicians and their hangers on.

Pravin Shama, email

● Kudos to an absolutely profound editorial ('It ain't broke', #240). Everytime I read your

editorials online, I wonder if their readership includes and affects those who need to read it most. Let's hope whatever is broken will soon be repaired. The press has been shattered to smithereens and the people have been deprived of accurate information relevant to their everyday lives. In an apparent attempt to restore peace, all the paraphernalia for democracy and development have been dismantled.

Anup Kaphle, London

● CK Lal in his State of the State column titled 'Statutes of liberty' (#240) couldn't have put it more plainly: 'the state must restore press freedom, not for us, but for its own sake'. It's a real pity that to correct one mistake (end the insurgency) the government is making another mistake (curbing civil liberties and curbing press freedom). It's time the government realised you can't fight totalitarianism by suppressing democracy.

Bhanu Parajuli, Pokhara

LHOTSAMPA

Bhutani refugees certainly deserve better treatment both from Nepal and the international community as Kanak Mani Dixit argues in his Southasia Beat column ('Lhotsampa chargesheet', #238) The refugee problem has been Nepal's most glaring foreign policy failures. Despite being top priority on the foreign policy agenda, Nepali mandarins never pursued the matter competently. Take the results of the Joint Verification Team. Even a four-year-old child was categorised as a criminal. Our own sins won't be lessened by

blaming Bhutan which was never committed to take its people back anyway. What it has always wanted is to buy time and delay any meaningful discussion on refugees that would bind Bhutan for a mandatory repatriation. And Nepalis played right into Bhutani hands, first by agreeing to four categories for verification, and then subsequently by agreeing to Bhutan's outrageous verification and repatriation conditions.

John Narayan Parajuli, Columbia, South Carolina, USA

● I totally disagree with Ugyen Tshewang (Letters, #239) in response to Kanak Mani Dixit's factual recounting of the events of 1991. In fact, it is Tshewang who needs to hear the other side of the story. I have visited the refugee camps in Jhapa twice and you don't have to ask the Bhutanis how they are doing. You just need to look around at the dead-end lives of stateless people. All have tears when they talk about home and their hope that one day they will return.

WHO THEY?

The photograph of hundreds of women on the steps of a temple that accompanied your poll ('What people say', #239) was beautiful. I want to know what occasion it was that so many women gathered and what they are staring so enthusiastically at. In future, can you please not forget to put captions on your online edition?

Pooja Shrestha, email



Women at the steps of the Shiva temple at Hanuman Dhoka at the Indra Jatra Festival in 2003.

Meddling along

Aidocrats can't work in a democratic vacuum

Before the successful People's Movement of 1990, entry of global do-gooders into Nepal was strictly regulated by the Social Services Coordination Council and closely monitored by the administration. After the new constitution came into effect, the ground rules were changed. It became much easier for international organisations to open up shop in Nepal.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



From fly-by-nights to supranational conglomerates, all kinds of INGOs descended on Nepal. Their commitment to democracy was ambivalent even though they became one of the biggest beneficiaries of political openness.

Operating almost independently of the government, many INGOs took on local collaborators as force multipliers. A slew of local NGOs sprouted overnight. Apart from remittances and security related activities, NGOs have been the only other sector of the Nepali economy that is still booming.

AIN is an informal grouping

of 52 INGOs currently functioning in Nepal. Recently it paid for ads in the papers with a fairly long list of do's and don'ts largely for the benefit of its own members. The aidocrats claimed their 'programs seek to strengthen democratic systems'. One would be hard pressed to see evidence of that. In fact, as with other actors of Kathmandu's power elite, aidocrats were complicit in creating the conditions that led to February First.

Despite claims of transparency, most INGOs are fairly opaque. Our right to freedom of information does not extend to their headquarters in Brussels, Geneva and London and their local officers can feign ignorance. There are exceptions but most INGO brochures don't tell us much about funding sources, operating procedures, internal governance or decision-making criteria.

The organisation structures of most INGOs are corporate rather than democratic. Little wonder, then, that working for INGOs has been a lucrative career option for the best and brightest of the Valley's high society.

Again, with notable exceptions, the merit assessment of aid agencies have been heavily biased in favour of the country's privileged classes. Such a meritocracy by its very nature is impatient with the sluggish messiness of democracy. Perhaps that is why these groups have been partly instrumental in shaping their organisation's negative attitude towards the political parties.

Such criticisms revolve around the lack of commitment of elected representatives to 'good governance' and their supposed propensity for pelf, privilege and payoff. It's easy to tar politicians with graft charges but no aidocrat will bear part of the responsibility for the rise of the culture of corruption. INGOs need to be a lot more accountable and transparent themselves before they cast the first stone.

AIN declares that the budget of its member organisations rose from \$29.4 million in 1999 to \$100.3 million in 2005. Even as an absolute figure, this almost four-fold expenditure increase in as many years is a remarkable trend. What makes the claim a lot more intriguing is that such



a jump in expenditure has taken place in an environment of unprecedented uncertainty in the country: the insurgency has intensified, democratic decay has worsened, the human-rights situation deteriorated and the rule of law went into a tailspin.

INGO activism, it seems, is inversely proportional to the health of democracy. Similar phenomena have been observed in many conflict-ridden countries—once INGOs are allowed to undermine the legitimacy of political parties, insurgency and activism begin to feed on each other and facilitate the rise of authoritarian regimes.

Indeed, international meddlers are as responsible as any other actor in Nepal's power elite for society's creeping authoritarianism.

While fighting corruption and promoting accountability are noble goals by themselves, 'good governance' can't be a sustainable substitute of self-rule anywhere in the world. Divorcing development from democracy invariably leads to a

humanitarian crisis.

Unless the extraordinarily articulate aidocrats in our midst realise this reality, all their pleas to the parties of ongoing conflict will have no meaning. Without an unequivocal commitment to the reinstatement of democratic rule in the country, all their 'operating guidelines' will have little real meaning.

Bilateral donors and multilateral financial institutions are bound by ideology, realpolitik and rules of diplomacy. INGOs aren't. They are free to speak their mind. Why are they so scared of the 'D' word? Despite the bravado of senior functionaries of the royal government, foreign aid will continue to play an important role in the development of Nepal for quite some time and INGOs will be shouldering an ever increasing burden of international assistance.

They need to transform themselves from aid entrepreneurs to social activists, and an unwavering commitment to democracy is an integral part of that process. ●

It's not an issue of nationality, it's an issue of humanity. The Bhutani refugee question needs to be internationalised and the truth told about the world's worst refugee crisis in per capita terms.

Name withheld, UK

● I would like to thank the HMG for its decision to declare public holidays for those holding different religious beliefs and ethnicities. It is an acknowledgement by the government that Nepal is a pluralist country. I am particularly happy that 25 December has, for the first time, been declared a public holiday. With my prayers for peace in Nepal.

Bhaju Ram Shrestha, email

CAMBODIA

I read with great interest Kunda Dixit's chronicle of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia (Memories of a holocaust', #239). Nepal could unfortunately be the next 'pure' Maoist playground. What does the power game between Prachanda and Baburam mean? They should learn their lessons from other communist revolutions.

Jean-Pierre Rigal, Paris

● In the list of books on Cambodia that accompanied Kunda Dixit's shocking retrospective of the Khmer Rouge genocide there are two really good books missing: Nayan Chanda's classic research work, *Brother Enemy*, and the recently published *Pol Pot, the Killer Smile* by Philip Short who tries to fathom Pol Pot's mysterious personality.

M Gilbert, email

CENSOR

It is unfortunate that better quality journals like yours have been lumped together with the gutter press and suffer from censorship due to the emergency. Yellow journalists had free reign during the past 15 years of dirty party politics whereby they were bought and sold to print filth. Wouldn't it be great if only these irresponsible journalists were flushed down the toilet and papers like yourself were allowed to print in a free spirit?

P Gurung, Kathmandu

TREE HUGGERS

Why isn't anyone jumping up and down about the appalling slaughter of trees seen everywhere in Kathmandu? When asked, the contractors of KMC say it is for road-widening. Fair enough, maybe. But there is no such road-widening in progress in places like Baluwater, (under the very nose of the powers that be) and many other parts of the city. There, the contractors explain, the trees are being cut for security or culled. You don't have to be an arborist to see that the trees being chopped would indeed be alive for another 50 years or more. So what's going on here? Can somebody from the KMC explain? If such a contract is underway, please monitor them. And you multiple green-NGOs, is it not time to get out there before we all weep for a future treeless, barren, ugly city? I am sure your donors would highly approve.

Jan Salter and Neeta Pokhrel, Kathmandu



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SLC by FM

Despite the requirement under the state of emergency only to broadcast music, some FM stations are openly flouting the rule. They are sidestepping the ban on news by studio chats, phone-ins with news in disguise and now Srinagar FM in Palpa has started broadcasting SLC tuition classes for the ongoing exams.



More than 30,000 students in Palpa and adjoining districts are getting exam tips. "It's great, it has really helped us a lot," says student Anju Pande, "I felt like I was in a tuition class and it was totally free!"

The station had invited several high school teachers to provide lessons in English, Mathematics, Science and other subjects. The station staff was also thrilled because their station was going into a slump. "We learnt we can do much more than just provide information and entertainment, we can also do education," says station manager, Jagdish Bhattarai. Students usually gather around in one of their houses and study together with their broadcast 'teacher'. Some schools had also helped provide radio sets to their students. The program also gives information on their exam centres, schedule and guides them on how to score better in the tests. "There isn't one student here who doesn't listen to this program," says Bhesraj Subedi, principal of New Horizon Boarding school in Palpa. Because of the listenership, Srinagar FM's ad revenue has also picked up. (JB Pun)

Sharad Chandra Shah in Bangkok

BANGKOK—Nepal expects the United States will ultimately resume its military assistance to fight Maoists despite its criticism of the takeover by the king two months ago, a top Nepali official told Thai media last week.

"I believe that there will be cooperation, there are certain problems but I think it will work out between the US and Nepal," said Sharad Chandra Shah, vice-chairman of a new High Level Commission for Information Technology (HLCIT). "We need helicopters, light arms, visual-radars, these are the kind of things which make such a lot of difference. That's what we want in terms of support from Washington," said Shah, who was here to attend a regional IT meet. He spoke to journalists at the Foreign Correspondent's Club on 26 March and was accompanied by Yadav Khanal, charge d'affaires of the Nepali embassy in Bangkok.



When questioned about bloggers in Nepal bypassing censorship, Shah said he was unaware of it. He said there would be no crackdown against Nepal's bold bloggers, which include www.blog.com.np and freenepal.blogspot.com. "They are free to do it. All you have to do is put it on the Internet and send it, right? What is the problem?" Shah said. He defended media censorship, saying papers were exaggerating their attacks and making them "sound as if they are larger than life". He added: "You are from the press and you probably don't like it but to some extent, a little bit of control of the press has seen to this problem." (Richard S Ehrlich)

Crisis reports

Human rights organisations have used the 61st UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva to make stinging criticism of the country's human rights record. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has called on the government to establish a UN human rights monitoring mission that could help in peace building. "ICG's report on Nepal's human rights crisis is meant to complement the more detailed reporting of specialist human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch," analyst Rhoderick Chalmers told us.

Addressing the commission this week in Geneva, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan challenged member states to rise above national and regional interests and restore the credibility and legitimacy of the UN to protect victims of human rights abuse. On Nepal, she said: "Nepal is a test case to measure the Commission's willingness and ability to tackle human rights crises. Failure to act decisively will prove that not only do power politics prevent the consideration of serious human rights violations in large countries but that the members of the Commission are incapable of acting to prevent a human rights disaster in any country." Government officials have said there was no need for international rights monitoring in Nepal.

Making inroads



PRAGYA SHRESTHA

Maintaining Nepal's roads is not easy but it is made easier by lengthworkers

PRAGYA SHRESTHA
in DHADING

Ever wondered who those people in fluorescent orange safety jackets are, working away diligently by the sides of the highways on holidays and even bandas?

They are lengthworkers. That is the ungainly name given to the men and women who are hired locally to carry out routine maintenance on Nepal's roads. Lengthworkers have become so vital to reliable road maintenance in Nepal that donor agencies are interested in replicating the model in other developing countries.

Lengthworkers were introduced to Nepal 10 years ago under the Swiss-funded Strengthened Maintenance Division Program (SMDP). Highways are not just difficult and expensive to build in Nepal but because of the terrain and weather, they are as expensive to maintain. SMDP cashed in on the Swiss experience with the Lamosangu-Jiri road and expanded the lengthworker system to other highways.

Today, the Department of Roads employs 1,600 lengthworkers for routine maintenance of roads. Local villagers from the road neighbourhood are employed on a daily-wage basis of Rs 90-150 a day and deployed to look after up to three km length of road each. (That's why they are called 'lengthworkers').

SMDP's Maintenance Adviser, Devendra Dhar Pradhananga, pioneered the lengthworker concept and still conducts training. The work is mainly clearing drains, sweeping the road, cutting bushes, cleaning road furniture and turf embankments. "We were improving the technical aspects of highway construction in Nepal but were weak in the social side, and this was having a negative impact on road maintenance,"

Pradhananga told us, "so the lengthworkers became the go-between between us and people living along the roads."

Supervisors oversee four to six lengthworkers within a 15-20 km stretch. The workers are provided with hand tools, wheelbarrows, safety jackets, safety flags, helmets and raincoats. Lengthworkers take pride in the upkeep of their road sections. "It's a great way to keep people employed and reduce pavement deterioration cheaply," says Bhoj Bahadur Dhakal, chief of the Road Division in Butwal.

Their orange jackets and flags make these industrious lengthworkers highly visible. But few highway users stop to talk to them or thank them for what they are doing. "We need the public to realise we are actually working for them too," says Padam B Praja, who is a lengthworker at Jogimara on the Prithibi Highway. His main problem is that villagers believe they have a right to do what they want with the road. Drains are misused for irrigation and that reduces the lifespan of the highway's surface.

The conflict has made the work more dangerous because of landmines and lengthworkers often find themselves trapped between the army and the rebels. "The Maoists regard us as HMG staff whereas the soldiers think we are rebel sympathisers," says Dharma Sapkota a supervisor working at Krishna Bhir.

Recently, Sapkota was beaten after soldiers accused him of helping the Maoists plant a mine.

Because a lot of their work is to patch potholes, security forces worried about landmines often suspect lengthworkers. And the Maoists blame them if they remove rebel obstructions along the highway. For their own safety, lengthworker flags have been changed from red to orange. Min Bahadur Tamang was caught in the crossfire between Maoists and the army in Hetauda and says it was his highly-visible orange



jacket that saved him because he was recognised as a lengthworker.

"People must understand how difficult road maintenance is. No work is complete without participation and support," says Director General of the DoR, Durga Prasad KC.

Five percent of all lengthworkers are women. "Equal pay with men is the best part of our job," laughs Sita Thapa Magar, whose husband is also a lengthworker in Dhading.

Expenditure on routine road maintenance carried out by lengthworkers make up 10 percent of the total road maintenance budget which amounts to about Rs 100,000 per km. And besides keeping roads in good shape for less money, the system also contributes to poverty reduction among the rural population along the highways. ●

Go mango

Division Road Office Lahan has decided that mangos are the way to go. It worked with the local Buddha Women's Cooperative whose members planted 700 mango trees along a seven km road section from Chaparadi to Pathariya on the Mahendra Highway.

By mutual agreement, they will have to look after the mango trees for the next five years and can harvest the mangoes in return. This is one of the Department of Roads' programs that is designed to mobilise the public in maintaining road reserves while encouraging community empowerment.

Central American lessons

How business interest helped El Salvador forge democracy through a negotiated peace settlement

The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero exactly 25 years ago this week lit the fuse of El Salvador's civil war. Throughout the 1980s, despite national and international attempts, talks between the Salvadoran government and the

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



rebels broke down repeatedly. With a death toll standing at around 75,000, both sides finally reached a negotiated peace settlement in 1992. Since then, political inclusion and electoral competition—both foundations of democracy—have come to mark Salvadoran politics.

Indeed, El Salvador with a population one-fourth of Nepal remains an intriguing country to study. Fifty years of family rule followed by another 50 years of

military rule only to be followed by a civil war appear to have resulted in a genuine multiparty representative democracy.

How did the Salvadoran peace settlement come about? Coffee exports long made about a dozen families in El Salvador rich enough to own much of the land. With money to spare, these oligarchs diversified business holdings to include banking, cotton and sugar. Meanwhile, increasing landlessness, joblessness and poverty caused thousands of ordinary Salvadorans to be a ready audience to various leftist insurgent groups that espoused the cause of social justice, took protests to the street and bore the brunt of state brutality. These groups eventually coalesced to form *Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional* (FMLN).

Fearing that an armed conflict between the rich and the poor was imminent, reform-minded military officers took control of the government in 1980. Their first act was to nationalise banks and foreign trade mechanisms, and re-distribute land. But these measures further antagonised the elite, who responded by forming their own political party called National Republican Alliance Party (ARENA) in 1981. By the mid-1980s, a triangle made up of conservative ARENA, the military-managed government and the leftist FMLN was in place in Salvadoran politics. Assassinations of political dissidents and widespread killings continued apace—leading to gross human rights violations and reduced military funding from the US.

In 1985, Alfredo Cristiani, a

coffee trader, became the moderate head of ARENA. He saw he could not count on the military rulers to be an ally. He sought to broaden his party's base to include small-business owners who brought varied concerns. They agreed that FMLN could not be wiped out militarily and that a peace settlement was necessary. When Cristiani was elected the president of El Salvador in 1989, he set the stage to initiate the peace process, despite several attempts on his life. The United Nations acted as a mediator for several rounds of talks, which led to compromises by both sides—resulting in a declaration of peace in January 1992. In the 1994 national elections, the former FMLN rebels, who had by then solidified as legitimate political actors, won a respectable 25 percent of votes.

Some scholars such as

Elisabeth Wood of New York University argue that 'democracy was forged from below in El Salvador via two processes': first, the insurgency created its own counter-elite, composed of moderates who gained influence as the state's military bluster waned. Second, the elite running the country had diversified business interests and was not limited to the export of coffee alone.

Once both sets of elites came to see what lay underneath their class-based opposition intersected at certain points (including matters related to nationalism), they came to accept a negotiated peace settlement as a way out of the conflict. As a result, it was the businessmen, playing by the rules of electoral politics and engaging in skilful negotiations, who brought in rebels into the political mainstream in El Salvador. ●

India concerned on UTL restrictions

Although the government has allowed Indian joint venture UTL to resume its wireless phone service to re-registered customers, it hasn't allowed it to add any more customers.

This has drawn flak from the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu which this week expressed concern over the telecom tie-up. The embassy said the impasse could erode foreign investors' confidence and undermine India-Nepal economic ties. United Telecom (UTL) is a joint venture between MTNL and VSNL and Nepali partners with Rs 3 billion invested in Nepal.

"We trust that UTL will be allowed to operate in an unfettered manner in accordance with the terms of its licence," the embassy statement added. Government officials have said UTL is not being singled out and Nepal Telecom's own mobile service have not yet been resumed. Army officials say privately they have evidence that the Maoists have used the cellular and wireless phone networks to plan and coordinate attacks in the capital and elsewhere.

Sita abandons Nepal



India's leading tour operator Sita Inbound has shelved plans to acquire a travel management firm in Nepal and is now focussing on Sri Lanka and the Middle East for finalising takeover targets, according to media reports. Sita has initiated talks with two firms, one in India and another in Sri Lanka, as part of its growth strategy.

Dabur raises stake in Nepal

Dabur India has decided to increase stake in its subsidiary Dabur Nepal from 80 percent to 97.5 percent and invest Rs 370.66 million in Dabur Foods and the recently acquired Balsara Home Products to meet their expansion and operational needs, report newswires.

As per the existing shareholding, Dabur India holds 80 percent stake in Dabur Nepal and local Nepali partners hold 20 percent. Dabur International, a wholly owned subsidiary of Dabur India and a hub for all its global operations, would be acquiring 17.5 percent stake of local Nepali promoters in Dabur Nepal at a cost of Rs 37.6 million, Dabur Group Director PD Narang said.



Lucky Karki

Prakash Karki, a tempo driver, has won Rs 1 lakh in the Jojo Lucky Seven scheme of Jojo noodles. Karki matched all seven pairs of numbers listed on the coupon to win the big prize. Other winners were given cash prizes of Rs 100, Rs 1,000 and Rs 10,000.

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One thing they all agree on: the political

Former Minister Buddhiman Tamang in *Jana Astha*, 23 March

आस्था

The king's February First move must be seen in the light of the change that the people had wished for. They were not safe even in their houses and wanted peace restored. The political parties were not able to save the people and had let down their constituencies. Everyone was desperate. But now I've begun to feel some positive changes.

When the Maoists began attacking workers of other parties, we didn't voice our outrage, saying they were not from our party. Only when the Maoists began targeting our party members, we realised what a menace they had become. Even local representatives could not stay in their areas. I was voted to power from Dhading in the Panchayat era and again during the multiparty system but couldn't visit my district.

The question is: how can we create a condition that will allow us to go back to our villages? We need to use the February First move to foster reconciliation. We need to support movement towards peace. The monarchy is indispensable for national unity in Nepal.

Considering its 300 years old history, we should not think it is weak or seek an alternative. I have always been loyal to monarchy. Even if there is no one else, I will come out on the streets to support the king's move. Circumstances now are new, as opportunists have surfaced hailing the king's move. Yes, people can bring out rallies for peace but I've seen many pro-monarchy rallies brought out with vested interests. The palace needs to be on guard.

I think the political parties are free to continue their activities. They have been holding meetings. The Nepali Congress and the UML have done so, the RPP is holding its meeting and we have even opened a new party. Detained party leaders and cadre are being released.

The ministers, they are all experienced politicians, but they need to carry themselves with more responsibility. When one becomes a minister, one shouldn't lose one's temper in public. They should be diplomatic and thick-skinned.



Interview with Hiranyalal Shrestha, former MP in *Sanghu*, 28 March

साधु

How do you evaluate the work of the Council of Ministers?

It has been functional for little more than a 100 days, how can one evaluate it? It has not yet been able to improve the security situation. You cannot evaluate this government until it can restore peace. Just a peaceful lull in Kathmandu is not enough. Among all human rights, right to life is the most important.

Because former governments were unable to provide this, the people are ready to give this government a chance. But to succeed, the government must call a ceasefire and create conducive conditions for peace talks.

But that's exactly what senior members of the government say they don't want to do.

Of the two vice-chairmen in the government, one is for peace talks while the other is not. Because they have expressed contradictory opinions, chances for talks cannot be ruled out nor can it be ascertained. The Maoists would do well to talk to the king now, like they said they would but they have shown a divergence of opinion as well. We need to move in a sense of brotherhood with open minds towards compromise.

If peace talks were not possible when the political parties were in power, how can it take place now?

The king said he moved on February First to save the nation but that didn't mean democracy and human rights had to be sacrificed. It is imperative

that the monarch and political parties discuss this issue. The Maoists should be called to talks with agendas within the parameters of social justice. Only when the main aim of the discussion is nationalism, democracy and social justice will all emerge as winners.

The Thapa, Chand and Deuba governments were unsuccessful, how can this one be otherwise?

When Sher Bahadurji was reinstated, UML, RPP, Sadhbhabana, all those who won majority seats made the multiparty government. Deuba might have been

successful but the Maoists refused to come for talks. Now, the king is the chairman of the government. It's a do-or-die situation. The Maoists and the monarch should be able to sit down and talk, why are they delaying it? This government must try to bring together the Maoists and the political parties to identify a common roadmap that does not address the ambitions of any individual.

In that case, shouldn't their approach to work be different?

This government has emphasised control of corruption, good governance and peaceful efforts. It is too early to say if

they are doing the right thing by these measures. Yes, those who prove corrupt need to be brought to justice but this must be done through the rule of law by the right authority.

Was it not possible to bolster the CIAA?

CIAA was doing its work but the RCCC was setup because it was inadequate. But whatever the organisation, it cannot transgress the law.

Hearts and minds

Kapil Kafle in *Rajdhani*, 26 March

राजधानी

Years ago, when the Maoists hadn't yet started on their murder spree, the rebel group wasn't as unpopular as it is now. They made headlines with their punishment for polygamous men, forcing gamblers to do sit-ups and shaving the heads of those found exploiting villagers.

These Robin Hood deeds had impressed the media. And journalists gave priority to Maoist news because they thought this would force the political parties to get over their pettiness and devote themselves to nation building. But the Maoists got carried away with violence and stopped respecting the people they were supposed to liberate. The social reform actions turned into a bloodbath. And even the sympathetic media started becoming critical.

The people found out that punishing the polygamous was a trick to get to power. Shaving the heads of exploiters seemed to be a way of threatening all political opposition. And the sidelining of Baburam Bhattarai proves that the Maoist can't be trusted when they say that they will maintain press freedom when they come to power. If that is the fate of a senior politburo member, how can we trust them on their professed respect for diversity, tolerance of those with different viewpoints? How can we entrust the country in their hands?

Modern Nepali citizens don't trust speeches and rhetoric anymore, they look at actions.

And it is in this competition for the hearts and minds that we see the RNA newly active. It used to be digging new roads and disaster relief but today's army can be seen helping farmers with their rifles slung behind them. Guns are not enough to defeat the Maoists. Those who believe in violence like the Maoists can't be defeated by guns alone, programs based on political ideologies are needed. It looks like the RNA rank and file are beginning to understand this.

In the past, the RNA has remained aloof from the people. When it did come in contact with ordinary people it was rude to them. RNA personnel used to victimise drivers who dared overtake them on the road. But lately, there has been a change in the army's approach. Speaking to the media last week, army spokesman Deepak Gurung revealed that the army has investigated 40 incidents of human rights violations and 44 have been jailed, 31 have been discharged from service and 12 demoted, etc. This will restore the citizens' confidence in the RNA. Maybe there is a need for the army to maintain secrecy in military matters, but on economic, social and character issues it must be as transparent as glass.

Rolpa hospital

Rajdhani, 28 March

राजधानी

ROLPA—The first zonal hospital in Rolpa was unofficially inaugurated on 26 March. Though it still doesn't have its own building, it operates from the premises of the Zonal

Development Committee. According to the Chief Zonal Administrator Ganj Bahadur MC, once facilities have been installed, the hospital will move into a building recently handed over to the zonal administration by the British Gorkha Welfare Fund. Hospital premises had been built in Libang, Reugha 12 years ago, but due to a disagreement between the contractor and the government, the building has been left to rot and all the equipment was lost.

No doctors

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 March–13 April

हिमाल

JAJARKOT—Jajarkot District Hospital has only Cetamol left. Other health posts don't even have painkillers. If you get sick in Jajarkot these days, you either have to visit faith healers or go down to Nepalganj. It's not just medicines, there aren't any doctors either. The 15-bed Jajarkot District Hospital has been without a doctor for a year now even though there are supposed to be three doctors posted here. The midwest has one zonal hospital, 14 district hospitals, 26 primary care centres, 142 health posts and 426 sub-health posts. But except for the Bheri Zonal Hospital in Nepalganj, there are no doctors or medicines in most of them. The reason there are no medicines is because of the shortage of helicopters to transport them. Last month a Mugu bound helicopter loaded with medicines landed near Surkhet and the Maoists looted all the medicines. Since then the government has grounded Kamali helicopters.



Targetting schools

Samaya, 31 April

समय

At a time when the Maoist party is threatened by a serious rift, its fraternal student wing has once more poised to target and destroy the country's education system. It has threatened all private schools outside Kathmandu Valley with closure from the next school year and has warned schools not to enroll any students after 1 Baisakh. It also wants private schools to hand over information on board of directors, capital, running costs and pay scales. Their intention seems to be to raze the country's education system with the slogan:

'Let's set fire to the education supermarket'. The Maoist call has been strongly criticised by schools, students and guardians. It is clear that this anti-people move will further alienate the Maoists from the public. Parents and guardians of children outside the Valley have been seriously worried about the future of their children. The private school association, PABSON, has instructed all schools to enroll and open as usual. But this hasn't assuaged the fears of private schools. The Maoists' threats have also psychologically affected the 250,000 students appearing this week in SLC exams because of the Maoists' call for a 10 day nationwide strike from 2 April. There are more than 8,500 private schools all over the country with 1.5 million students enrolled in them. More than 150,000 teachers and staff are employed in these schools. Private schools say they have raised the quality of education and saved billions of rupees from going overseas by allowing Nepalis to study in Nepal. "If there are problems, these should be regulated and solved, not close down the entire school system," says education expert, Tirtha Khaniya.

parties have to unite



Former Minister Jog Meher Shrestha in *Janadharana*, 24 March

There is no point talking about happiness and sorrow in this dishonest country. I have been involved in politics for nearly 55 years and no one has accused me of corruption until now. I've never had to go to court to fight for my parental property. I am 78 years old, recently had my jankhu organised to mark the day I turned 77 years, seven months and seven days old. The crowd that turned up at the ceremony proved my popularity. It is one of the reasons people have been against me. I can't help being popular and if it becomes the reason behind the

conspiracy to punish me, I can't do a thing. I am innocent but there is no place for honest people in this dishonest country. I don't know who is against me.

But this was not what I told the Royal Commission for Corruption Control. What use would it be? They asked me why I had come to them. "The commission summoned me demanding an explanation, and here I am to respect the commission's request," I said. The issue of embezzling government funds in the name of Dasain expenses is widely misunderstood. Does anyone know how many have been victimised by the Maoist insurgency? If the state gave them two or three thousand rupees, what is wrong with that? Moreover, it was not the first time that such help had been extended. Even when I was Home Minister, there was a relief fund that I provided to those in need. I'm responsible for whatever happened then but this time, my ministry did not distribute the funds. Yet I'm been projected as guilty. I am shocked.

Interview in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 March-13 April

So you're home, what are you doing these days?

I'm thinking about the future course of action for the political parties.

And what direction will that take?

The solution lies in all political parties that don't believe in violence getting together, accepting and analysing their mistakes and weaknesses of the past and reasserting their commitment to democracy and widening its base. We need the collective wisdom of all sides at a time when democracy is stalled, the Maoist insurgency is reaching a climax and the country is sliding towards failed state status.

All along we have been saying that democracy has been threatened. Other parties pronounced that regression had ended and joined the government, some were happy they had executive powers and still others rejoiced at the reinstatement of the Deuba government. But we never agreed and the international community used to pressure us to join the government. This time, they understand that we were right all along.

What of foreign policy post-February First?

We have changed tracks. But we can't go it alone like Cuba, North Korea or Burma.



Multiparty democracy

Constitution 1990

राजधानी *Rajdhani*, 27 March

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



The Maoist problem will not be solved even if the army troop strength is expanded to 500,000.

Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in *Rajdhani*, 29 March.



The king has often stressed in his speech that he is in favour of multiparty democracy. I decided to see how far it was true. I got arrested the moment I reached Asan with my party flag. Is that democracy?

Nepali Congress leader Balbahadur Rai in *Budhabar*, 30 March.



It is not possible for Pakistan to give military aid to Nepal.

Foreign Minister Natwar Singh in *Kantipur* on 27 March.

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The government is launching an ambitious campaign to get more children enrolled in school and keep them there

Education for a



Girl students during a class break in Shibpur.

NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR

At Shibpur in Kapilbastu district last week, 50 children 5-10 years old sat on the mud floor of a shed, listening attentively to their teacher. Parents here in the

central tarai are so poor they can't even feed their children properly. But they will save and scrounge to send them to school.

Such is the desperation of many parents in rural Nepal that communities are selling firewood, digging sand or crushing stones

all day just so their children get an education. With such demand, the problem in Nepal is not to fill schools with children. It is to keep them there.

Currently, only 40 percent of those who enroll in Grade One ever finish primary school and

only 10 percent complete SLC. From the Nepali new year on 14 April the government is launching an unprecedented drive to get children enrolled in schools—especially girls and children of disadvantaged families. Motivators will be going

door-to-door on 'Enrollment Days' with admission forms to catch children who would otherwise not be sent to school by their parents.

The idea is to take a determined step to meet commitments Nepal made at a UN Summit in 2000 to reach Millennium Development Goals for universal primary education by 2015.

Nepal's enrollment rate is not bad. According to government estimates, 82 percent of children or nearly six million children are currently enrolled. The problem is that the dropout rate is as high as 40 percent or more although the government claims that it is less than 15 percent (see p9).

There appears to be a correlation between democratic governments (1959-60, 1990-2002) and emphasis on education and the results can be seen in enrollments and a surge in literacy rates.

After 1990, successive democratic governments pushed the Education for All program and this raised enrollment at the primary level by 70 percent in a decade.

But government schools have been unable to cope with the

Earning by learning

More than 300,000 young Nepali boys and girls appeared for their SLC exams this week. If trends in past years are any indication, less than a third of them will pass their exams.

Those who pass represent only 18 percent of the two million or so children from all over Nepal who entered primary school with them 10 years ago. In other words, between 80-90 percent of all children of school-going age in Nepal are either dropouts or have the 'failed' label pinned on them for life.

What could be a bigger waste? For all the money that has been spent on education, for the money poured in from donors over decades, we knew all along that the quality was not up to mark. But it is now clear that neither is the quantity. Experts warn that if something is not done fast about this crisis in education, Nepal's future in the next decades when today's Grade One children come up to SLC, will be far worse. Dropouts and joblessness will create social tensions that will make the present problems look like a picnic.

The government's own statistics show that 467,000 children every year 'disappear' between Grade Five and SLC. Where do they go? Most help out in the farm till they are teenagers and then migrate to the cities or to India to work so they can support their families. Many of them have nothing to read and no reason to write and soon lapse back into illiteracy.

What can be done to bring these half-a-million Nepali children who opt out of the formal school system every year into the fold? What can be done to keep them in school? What should be done to improve the quality and relevance of their education so they can be capable citizens that can contribute to their community and country?

One reason many have dropped out of the school system is because of the content of education. Nepal's school system is dominated by 'general education': an

academic stream that prepares students for an antiquated exam system that declares nearly three-fourths of its students to be failures every year.

Now, the government with SDC and the Asian Development Bank are turning their attention to those who opt out of school by offering them technical and vocational education and training so they can learn and earn. Academic education rewards only the higher grades, allowing them to go on to become engineers, doctors and managers. Now, those who can't make the grades will not be cast out into the wilderness but will have a chance to get skills training as plumbers, electricians, health workers, farm technicians and construction workers.

More than 80 percent of school-going Nepali children never complete Grade 10, they deserve a second chance

We need to decide which skills the country will require in the coming decades. How can school-age children who are now being cast by the wayside contribute to the nation's development? What kind of jobs are needed overseas so that Nepali workers can upgrade their skills and earn more than the pittance they are paid now?

At present there are hardly any opportunities for those who drop out of school before Grade 10 to find useful skills training. Even the few who go for skills or vocational training after SLC find their certificates are not recognised in the general education system.

The current 10th Plan has prioritised skills and technical training but it doesn't

spell out how that is going to be achieved. The Plan announces an ambitious target of achieving 90 percent enrollment for primary classes, 45 for secondary but doesn't acknowledge the huge problem of retention of students till Grade 10 and just mentions in passing short-term professional training.

At present only 16 percent of school children between grades five and 10 who drop out get any form of skills training. Only three percent of those who finish Grade 10 go into vocational or technical training and of these, less than half get jobs on graduation. The reasons are not hard to find: training of low quality that doesn't meet requirements of the job market.

Nepal's vocational and technical training today is ad hoc, trial and error and arbitrary. No surprise there. Why should vocational and technical training be a shining example when the rest of the education sector is so badly run? If we had to look for a reason it would be that there is no long-term strategy on dropouts and the government gives it far less importance to vocational training than to the general education mainstream.

Countries need to look 15-20 years ahead and plan the kind of academic, professional and technical human resources they need. Then they tailor-make their education reflecting this strategy. If Nepal keeps on going in this patchwork mode with education then we are headed for certain disaster. At a time when we are a member of the WTO, to ignore human resource requirement is to push the country back a century.

Let's start thinking about what to do with the 82 percent of school children who never complete Grade 10. And let's start doing it now. ●

Excerpted from 'Quality Education for All' Special Supplement in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 27 February-13 March.

Ready, steady

Forever Crafts Industries in Khusibu has started skills training for women where they get paid for learning a trade. Once trained, the students easily find employment. Women involve other women in their family or community to knit caps and sweaters and can earn up to Rs 35,000 a month as a group. Anita Maharjan of Kathmandu and Bindeswari Shrestha of Sindhupalchok earn enough to run their household and educate their children.

Young adults who have never been to school or have dropped out are being trained to produce thanngkas at the Janajati Welfare Centre in Swayambhu. Namgyal Bomjan says the 18 boys and girls he trained have all been employed in various thanngka studios. While some earn up to Rs 5,000 a month, others have even become thanngka supervisors. Purna Bahadur Lama of Kabhre, who escaped from the Maoists while in Grade Nine, now runs Popular Thanngka Centre and is launching his own website to start exporting his products.

Nepal Buddha Thanngka Art Gallery's Dawa Chhiri Sherpa is also a school dropout and has already sold Rs 80,000 worth of his own thanngkas in Germany. Says Sherpa: "If it wasn't for the training, I would still be herding yaks in Dolakha."



all and all for education

demand for education and are plagued with poor quality. Private schools thrived because of liberalisation and privatisation of education. Quality education was available but for a price.

After 1996, the education sector has been deliberately targeted by the Maoists as a symbol of inequalities in society. The rebels have often said they want to dismantle the 'bourgeois' school system and start from zero. Many schools have been closed and teachers have fled due to extortion and intimidation. The rebels have now warned private schools outside the Valley to stop enrolling children after the new year (see p13).

Despite all this, Nepal's literacy rate has shown dramatic improvement since 1990. "Education is going in the right direction, there is progress despite the conflict," says Rajendra Dhoj Joshi at the World Bank. Joshi is a team leader of the \$158 million Education for All project funded by a consortium that also includes the International Development Association (IDA), Danida, Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Norad and DfID.

The project will support the

government's effort to increase the net enrollment rate from 81 to 96 percent by 2009 and take Grade Five enrollment from 40 to 60 percent. To entice girls and the children of poor families, the project will fund 116,000 scholarships worth more than Rs 200 million.

But what worries organisations like UNICEF is the challenge of retaining children once they are enrolled. The dropout rate, already very high, has increased in conflict areas. "What we have here is a crisis on top of a chronic crisis," says UNICEF's Nepal representative, Suomi Sakai.

One of the key obstacles to children completing primary schools is the poor quality of public schools. The average pass rate for students from public schools in SLC exams is less than 35 percent over the past decade compared to over 75 percent success rates in private schools.

The shortage of trained and motivated teachers is the main reason, and the others are understaffed and underfunded rural schools. "The government needs to emphasise training teachers and upgrading teaching skills so they can prevent



Students giving their SLC exams at Namuna Machhindra High School this week.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

children from dropping out," explains Sudarsan Ghimire, an advocacy journalist for upgrading education, "children drop out of schools because teachers are too strict or unfriendly."

Most experts pin their hopes on the growing trend of schools being managed by local communities. Nearly 2,000 schools across the country are

already locally managed and financed. But the impact is still small because there are 21,000 public primary schools and most of them are in rural areas serving nearly 3.4 million children. The teacher to student ratio here is one for 40, only 12 percent are women and less than 15 percent are trained.

With less than 10 years to go

to achieve the Millenium Development Goal of universal primary education, Nepal will have to move fast. If the enrolment campaign next week is a success, it will mean we are on the right track. If it falters due to official apathy, Nepal's children will have been let down once more by their rulers in Kathmandu. ●

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Kenzo Tange, 91

He wanted his Lumbini masterplan to be a tribute to world peace

When the UN's Burmese Secretary General U Thant visited Lumbini in 1967, he was emotionally moved. As a devout Buddhist, he was spiritually uplifted by being in the nativity site but also sad to see the desolation of the place near the Nepal-India border.

On returning to New York, he set the ball rolling on developing Lumbini as an international peace site. A special UN committee was set up to push the plan and with money from UNDP a renowned Japanese architect, Kenzo Tange, was hired to draw up a masterplan for Lumbini's development. Tange took up the work passionately, visiting Lumbini several times and completed his work in 1978. His plan for Lumbini's sacred zones and its surroundings was supposed to have been finished by 1989.

Tange died last week, at the age of 91, with much of his Lumbini masterplan unfinished. When the UN hired Tange, it reflected U Thant's grand vision and dream for Lumbini—he had chosen the architect who designed the Hiroshima peace memorial at Ground Zero of the first wartime use of the atomic bomb in 1945. Kenzo Tange was the most influential figure in post-war Japanese architecture and was profoundly influenced by the work of Le Corbusier. In turn, Tange's hugely impressive body of work was to influence, indeed dominate, that of a younger generation of brilliant young Japanese architects.



If Tange began by imitating the late-flowering, sculptural concrete designs of the Swiss-French genius, he went on to create a body of internationally recognised work that was very much his own, fusing traditional

Japanese forms with the very latest in structural daring. Because of his penchant for raw concrete and megastructures, Tange as well as his disciples in Britain and elsewhere came to be known as 'brutalists'.

His finest buildings include the twin arena of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the Yamanashi press and broadcasting centre at Kofu (1964-67) and Hiroshima peace park and peace centre (1949-55).

Tange's plan for Lumbini is a three square mile mandala that leads in concentric circles to the sanctum sanctorum: the circular sacred garden surrounding the Mayadebi Temple. The plan includes a Monastic Zone and Lumbini Village for visitors will find lodges, restaurants, a cultural centre and tourist facilities. The eastern monastic zone was set aside for Theravada Buddhism from Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka and a Vipassana Centre, and the western zone for Mahayana Buddhism from Tibet, China and Bhutan. Tange's plan is being followed but not all the temples and monasteries conform to the overall harmony and scale he had in mind.

Tange was involved in the replanning of the city of Hiroshima after its destruction by the atomic bomb on 6 August 1945. At the heart of the revived city, Tange built a peace centre, raised on stilt-like, Le Corbusier-style columns, faced by a monument that married ancient forms and the latest structural technology. This peacetime fusion of a traditional Haniwa tomb and a concrete parabola was very much a symbol of new Japan, resolutely looking to the future while proudly recalling the best of its pre-imperial past.



KUMAR ALE

Avaas at the Paleti

Once he said he'd change the world but it changed him instead



The stage is backlit and the silhouetted orchestra is already into an instrumental number as the audience enters. The small studio is packed with about two dozen music enthusiasts sitting cross legged on the padded floor.

This is the third of monthly concerts at nepa-laya's Paleti sit-down concerts with the freshest new voice in Nepali music: Avaas. Held on the last Friday of every month, Avaas sings his new songs, discusses them with fans, the audience is encouraged to interact and inevitably there are requests from his hit album, *Palaa Palaa*.

Last Friday was Phau and Avaas began with a number on Holi that he had recently composed and was performing for the first time. It is iconoclastic Avaas: the words and music tightly meshed, the rhythm of poetry in harmony with the tonal textures and between the lines always the social message.

There is another new song, a recent composition *Eh Naulo*

Manche by Shrawan Makarung on the plight of people displaced from their land, nameless, faceless and stateless refugees. Avaas sings with feeling, the warmth of his voice and the colloquial simplicity of his words fill the tiny theatre and join performers and audience into an organic whole.

At intermission, nepa-laya has thoughtfully arranged apple brandy from Marpha (included in the ticket price) and the visitors tank up to get into the mood for the second half. Poet Manjul is in the audience and gets up to recollect how he and Avaas, newly-arrived in Kathmandu, struggled and created words and music. "Avaas was just a village kid trying to learn the tabla in those days," Manjul recalled, "but he understood the struggle and he felt deeply that Nepal belonged to all Nepalis."

Indeed, the underlying message in the lyrics that Avaas chooses for his songs, whether they are his own or something he picks up from his poet friends, go to the heart of Nepal's current dilemma but always carrying a sense of hope. Both the words and the music uplifting. Explains Manjul: "It comes from Avaas' own quick-to-smile personality, his belief that we may be in darkness but soon the sun will rise, as it must."

Avaas honed his craft under the tutelage of Amber Gurung and you can hear echoes of the master in his words and music. Avaas

says that if he likes the words of a poem he immediately turns it into song. "If it is good poetry, the words already carry the music, the musician doesn't have to do much," he explains.

Bhukuhiro Udna Thalyo is from the *Palaa Palaa* album, most in the audience recognise poet Chandra Bhandari's lyrics and they sway with the jazzlike interludes by Raj Kumar Shrestha on the violin and Hari Maharjan on guitar. "I see some moist eyes," Avaas says after the applause, "tears have a meaning, Amber Dai used to say if someone sheds a tear while listening to your music it means there is still humanity left."

Avaas has kept what he regards as his best song till the end: the confessional and almost autobiographical self-composition, *Godhulima Hidne* with the haunting line: "Once he said he'd change the world but it changed him instead." ●

Kunda Dixit



The next concert by Avaas at the R sala will be on 29 April Limited tickets: 5542646 nepalaya@wlink.com.np



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George Bernard Shaw's words hand on the plaque in Hira Pradhan's Gaushala clinic. And those words are what inspire the doctor who could be making big money treating rich patients. But she has deliberately decided there is a higher calling in her life to help society's outcasts, those that no one wants to help.

Pradhan started SEWA Kendra Leprosy Relief in 1989 to provide free medical care to the sick, especially leprosy patients. She still runs for her usual patients but started a weekly mobile clinic that goes to the Pashupatinath Old Age Home, leprosy communities at Khokana and Dolalghat and Beldanda. It gives free medicine, dressings, smears to detect leprosy, family planning and eye treatment. Occasionally, dentists accompany the clinics and if a specific treatment can't be provided, the doctors refer patients to a specialist willing to take the case for free.

"I get much more satisfaction treating patients who really need my help," says



Pradhan modestly, "it is spiritually fulfilling. You can't buy with money that level of personal joy at having helped someone in dire need."

Pradhan's group wants to detect leprosy while it is treatable and provide care to those who need it, especially women of low-income groups. There are beds in the SEWA's Centre for the leprosy-affected poor who cannot afford nurses. Patients don't just have to deal with the physical disability but the stigma attached to the disease in Nepal which means many are ostracised by their communities and families because of the mistaken belief that leprosy is contagious.

The healing process for leprosy is long and needs bed-rest because it causes a person to lose all sense of feeling in the affected areas of the body. Recently, Pradhan has started providing education for poor and marginalised children. Financial aid and scholarships are also given to children at Khokana who want to study nursing. ●

Text and pictures by
ELENA DUBAS and
ARTHUR PAZO.

4474650
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STOP PRESS

Emergency lifted, mobiles restored

The government has lifted the state of emergency, restored all civil liberties and released political detainees from jail on the occasion of April First, usually reliable sources said. But news of the restoration of freedoms could not get to the public because of the ban on broadcasting news on FM.

"We are still trying to get the news out but it is difficult when no one believes us," said the spokesman of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting speaking on condition that he not be quoted by name.

The government has also restored all pre-paid and post-paid mobile phones so people could spread the word on the restoration of democracy. However, the mobiles went dead as soon as they were restored because of network congestion as everyone started sending out dirty jokes on SMS. "We just hadn't anticipated the pent-up demand of people to communicate with each other freely and without restrictions," a Nepal Telecom official told us.

Dating Comrade Natasha

I remember the evening I first saw her at Butwal Lodge in Kalanki. I was there to meet a friend. But his bus had not yet arrived from Jajarkot. I decided to wait. In that dimly-lit lobby where shadowy figures flitted about, she was sitting in a corner—all alone and looking like a cross between Martina Navratilova and Shivani Singh Tharu.

I flashed my Everest toothpaste smile. She scowled back. I asked whether she had a cigarette. Assuming a quick kung-fu pose, she showed me a stick of explosives. When she later shook my hand to say goodnight, it hurt for hours. Little did I know that inflicting pain was her damnably seductive way of breaking ice: "You are cool and I am hot. Dinner tomorrow?"

We met for dal-bhat the following evening at Madan Bhojanalaya—a hideaway that was miles away from any police station. She showed up, dressed-to-kill: khaki fatigues, combat boots and a rifle slung from her

APRIL FULL
oohi ashu



left shoulder. Before sitting down, she frisked me from head to toe, pausing briefly to massage my pant-pockets for any concealed weapon. In no time though, with the glow from Tiger Lalteen bouncing off her face, we were whispering sweet nothings. She was Comrade Natasha, a rising star at the Destruction & Mayhem Bureau. She said she had instructions to finish "certain work" at Sanychayakosh buildings. I patted her cheeks, teasing that a bombshell like her should not work too hard.

You see, the thing about having an underground girlfriend was that you could never call her. You sat by the phone and waited for it to ring. When I didn't hear from her for days, I worried that the worst had happened. But when we did meet, we never visited Himalayan Java to snuggle on the couch. Nor did we go to Nanglo's Rooftop for sizzlers. Too risky, she chided. Instead, we met for *pani-puri* at back-alley eateries, far from army check-posts, where rats fought with roaches for leftovers on the floor.

Often, exhausted by the demands of her revolutionary war, she would visit me, only to leave at dusk with a pressure-cooker. Once I asked why she ran off with my kitchen utensils. She gave me that come-hither glance and soon had me tied up in a perform-or-perish Khajurao position, which was enjoyable.

To replenish supply, I continued buying pressure-cookers from a *sahu* down the road. After seeing on Nepal TV what had become of the cookers he sold earlier, he was too afraid to charge me money. Even the neighbourhood *dadas*, who used to beat me up before, bowed low with respect once they saw who I was with. Having a rebel lover meant access to power, influence, fun and wads of cash looted from banks.

But such times were too good to last. Eventually, politics destroyed our relationship. She asked me to prove my love by going underground. I told her I couldn't sink that low. Besides, I lived in a basement already. She wanted help with blowing up telecom towers. When she saw that all I could blow up were balloons, her disappointment was profound. She ordered that I criticise myself for disobedience. I smiled and tickled her nape with a peacock feather. But she shoved me aside. Putting the gun to the middle of my forehead, she announced that she had stripped me of all romantic rights and demoted me to an "ordinary lover" status. She growled that she might have to kill me to show how much she cared for me. I was touched that her love was so deadly serious. When we eventually did break up, I landed at Bir Hospital with 12 broken bones.

These days, I look back upon the whole affair and console myself that it was better to have loved and undergone a hip-replacement surgery than to have never loved at all. ●

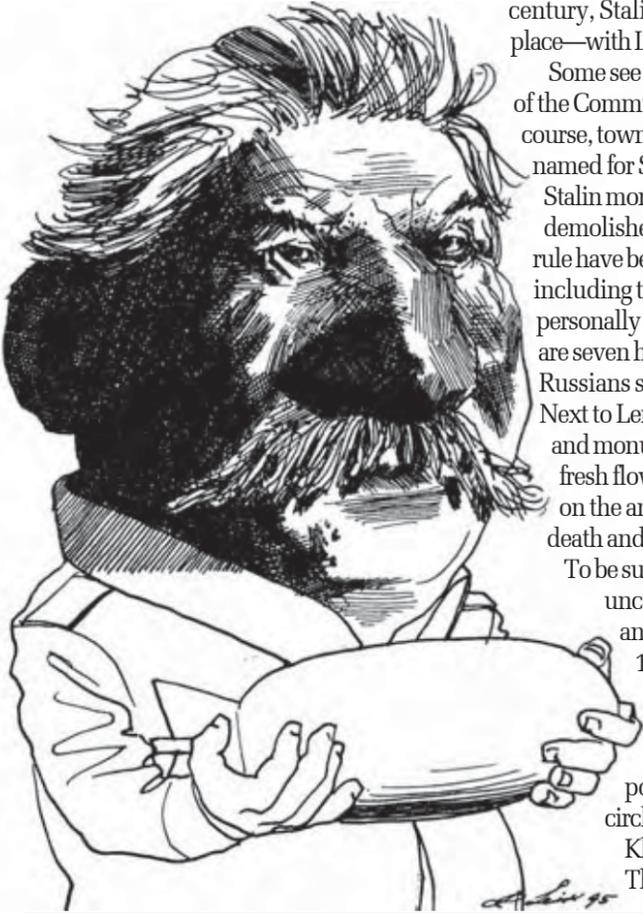
Adapted from a stand-up comedy act, written and performed by the author exactly a year ago at Dhokaima Café.

Reliving Stalin's horror

ROY MEDVEDEV in MOSCOW

The legacy of dead dictators from vanquished totalitarian regimes should no longer be ambivalent.

Only Germany's lunatic fringe dares to commemorate Hitler. Not even the pathetic remnant of the Khmer Rouge celebrates Pol Pot's memory. Yet, as Russia approaches the 60th anniversary of its victory over Nazi Germany, marking Stalin's role in that victory is proving to be damnably awkward.



Indeed, earlier this year, Moscow was roiled by debates about whether or not to build a statue to the dead dictator. In large bookstores across Russia, a huge number of political biographies and histories portray Stalin and his era. Some of these, based on newly opened archival material, are critical. But the majority of these books and authors portray Stalin in a positive light. Indeed, when Russians are asked to list the most important people of the 20th century, Stalin is still tied for first place—with Lenin.

Some see the hand of what remains of the Communist Party behind this. Of course, towns and cities are no longer named for Stalin. Though countless Stalin monuments have been demolished, many symbols of his rule have been carefully preserved, including the national anthem he personally approved in 1944. There are seven high-rises in Moscow that Russians still call 'Stalin's vysocki'. Next to Lenin's tomb is Stalin's grave and monument, where heaps of fresh flowers are always to be seen on the anniversaries of his birth, death and the victory over Hitler.

To be sure, Khrushchev's uncovering of Stalin's crimes and cult of personality in 1956 made a huge impression both in the Soviet Union and abroad. But many people in the political elite and military circles were enraged by Khrushchev's revelations. This incited many attempts

to rehabilitate Stalin, especially during the 20 years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, which is called the period of 'stagnation'.

Mikhail Gorbachev continued to uncover the crimes of Stalinism, shedding light on dark pages that Khrushchev lacked the courage to open to public view. During Boris Yeltsin's presidency, this criticism became even stronger. But demolishing the ideological, political and economic structures of the past is not enough to renew society. Yeltsin understood this. Eight years ago the remains of the Romanov family were publicly buried in the Peter-Paul castle in Saint Petersburg. Nicolas II gained the status of saintly martyr.

People of the older generation do remember the hardships of the 1930s and 1940s. But most Russians do not view the entire Soviet period as some sort of black hole. They see a time of hardship, yes, but also of great achievements—in economic development, science, culture, education and defence.

Today, Russians listen to old Soviet songs and watch Soviet-era movies, 1 May (Labour Day) and 7 November (the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution) remain much more meaningful than newly installed post-communist holidays, such as 12 June (Independence Day). For many Russians, the declaration of Russia's independence in 1990 represents a low point in the country's history, a year of anarchy and disarray.

What can Russians be proud of in the 15 years of post-communism? Shock therapy that ruined the economy and gave away the country's wealth to private but rarely clean hands? Neither democracy nor

markets are seen by most Russians as absolute values because they have failed to deliver either prosperity or security. What victories has Russia's army achieved in these years? It could not even subdue Chechnya, a small republic within the Russian federation.

The Russian federation remains a collection of multinational states in need of some unifying idea of statehood and nationality to keep them together. The easiest and the most understandable idea for Russians to cling to is patriotism. Only two events have the power to mobilise and energise this: the October revolution of 1917 and the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, which turned the USSR and Russia into a great world power. The victory over fascism, because so many of its participants remain active, is a living event in memory.

Victory Day this year will likely be the last 'round' anniversary of 1945 that Russia can commemorate while many thousands of veterans are alive and able to participate. So the Kremlin is preparing to mark the event on a scale that Russia has never seen before. Needless to say, Stalin's name will be mentioned countless times during these celebrations. But it would be a mistake to see this as a real yearning for every aspect of the system he created. Instead, acknowledging Stalin is a way for Russians to recall a time of great deeds and perhaps even greater sacrifices. ●

Project Syndicate

Roy A Medvedev, a dissident historian in the Soviet era, is the author of the classic study of Stalinism *Let History Judge*.

The Indian Prime Minister's office confirmed that Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf would visit India for a one-day cricket match in Delhi on 17 April. Musharraf had made it clear that he would visit if invited. But Musharraf's wheelchair-bound mother Zarin and son Bilal needed no invitation.

Begum Musharraf was on a nostalgic trip, visiting her girlhood haunts. In Delhi, she surprised the family living at Nehruwari Haveli, her home as a bride, where Pervez Musharraf was born. She expressed her desire for India and Pakistan to resolve issues

PERSONAL POLITICAL

Beena Sarwar



peacefully and through dialogue. The Indian PM, Manmohan Singh, hosted a lunch in their honour. And Bilal has invited Indian parliamentarian Rahul Gandhi to visit Pakistan.

In any case, this unofficial, spontaneous diplomatic initiative can only positively impact relations between South Asia's nuclear-armed neighbours. On a mass level, the Pakistanis and Indians have spoken. The 15,000 or so Indians who visited Pakistan for the cricket series last August were bowled over (no pun intended) by the warmth and affection they received. Shopkeepers and cabbies refused money and strangers showered them with hospitality and gifts.

One visiting Indian anxiously told journalist MJ Akbar that Pakistanis should not

Silly point

Cricket diplomacy seems to be the way to go for India and Pakistan

misunderstand if they did not get the same treatment in India. How wrong he was. Pakistanis visiting India for the ongoing cricket series have received as much hospitality and more as many Indians have opened their homes, offering to put up visiting strangers from the 'enemy country'. Until mass visas were granted to allow Indians to attend the cricket series in Pakistan, contact was restricted to government officials, bureaucrats and non-government organisations. Over the years, tensions, jingoistic nationalism and visa restrictions had not given ordinary people the space and opportunity to express themselves.

Consider the Indo-Pak tensions in the last few years alone: the 1998 nuclear tests, then Kargil and its aftermath in 1999. Barely two years later, 9/11 provided Washington a chance to establish American hegemony, telling world leaders it was ok to engage in military heavy-handedness and that all 'terrorists' were Muslims. New Delhi's knee-jerk reaction to the 13 December 2001 attack on its parliament, for which it blamed

Pakistan, kicked off a new phase in bilateral relations.

India barred Pakistan from over-flying its territory; Pakistan responded in kind. National economies as well as ordinary people were severely affected. Regional meetings or seminars even in Kathmandu or Colombo became difficult as PIA, then the only airliner linking all South Asian capitals could no longer over-fly India. Each side crowded over the economic losses the other was suffering with puerile reasoning: "It's hurting them more than it's hurting us!"

Diplomatic relations remained tense. Consular staff, even at the ambassadorial level, was withdrawn. By May 2002, armies were at the ready, eyeball-to-eyeball at the borders. Fears of a nuclear war loomed large. And then, a two-year old baby with a hole in her heart provided a way out of the impasse. Doctors in Pakistan had referred Noor Fatima to a cardiac hospital in India as her parents could not afford to take her to a western country for treatment. But India, though near, was yet so far.

Hearing of Noor's plight, in July 2003, Atal Bihari Vajpayee



offered to restore transportation links. Noor and her parents were on the first bus from Lahore to Delhi that August. Noor's surgery provided Indians the opportunity to show their goodwill towards Pakistan; her parents were overwhelmed by the media attention, love and gifts they received.

Interestingly, both governments grant visas to

selected Pakistanis and Indians even during times of extreme tension—as a way out of the corners they have painted themselves into. But if the restrictive visa regime is removed, there is likely to be a flood of people crossing to either side. Perhaps the process has begun. ●

Beena Sarwar is OpEd Editor at *The News International*, Pakistan

Less is more

Having more than one handicap is a real handicap

How does one know if you are a good golfer or a bad golfer? By your handicap. The handicap system reflects the yardstick of better levels of play. It allows players of varying abilities to compete fairly against each other. This has led to the integrity of the sport.

Golf in Nepal has grown really fast these past few years, both in relation to skill and the number of players and this has inevitably led to higher levels of competition. Players are out to scoop prestigious wins. But here's what they must pay attention to: their handicap.

The lower a handicap, the better the player, such that a zero handicap amateur is said to have reached one of the pinnacles of golf. A 28 handicap for men and 36 for women would indicate beginners. Because lower

handicappers are more appreciated in the golfing community, it is essential for a player to strive for less. To take pride in such achievements is expected and accepted because it is no small feat.

To maintain fairness and honesty in the handicap system, all players must diligently submit their verified score cards after each round they play. The essence of handicap allotment comes down to evaluating and averaging verified scores for a minimum of 10 full (18 hole) rounds. Recently, major tournaments have seen some confusion and disappointment because players submitted more than one handicap.

Compared to other capital cities, Kathmandu is considered small. However, it has three golf courses and a number of golfers who are members of all these clubs. Surprisingly, such members often hold up to three different handicaps, one for each club they play in! According to international standards, a player may have only one legitimate handicap. When players hold more than one handicap, finding out his actual handicap becomes confusing and difficult.

As small as our golfing community is, let us keep it honest and

intact. Look at the international standard procedure set by the governing bodies of golf to solve this issue. Amongst the guidelines given are:

- The local governing body of the sport should have all the golf courses in the country evaluated for their course and slope ratings.
- A player who is a member of more than one club must declare their home club and only the home club must maintain the handicap.

Thereafter, when players play any given course, their handicaps are adjusted according to a very well defined system. The bottom line of this system is that if the course being played is more difficult than the declared home course, the handicap allowance increases. Conversely, if the new course is easier, the allowance is reduced.

According to this internationally recognised handicapping system, the player is responsible for sending scores of all rounds played anywhere in the world to their home club, including all tournaments participated in. This way, handicaps can be properly maintained. We have a golf governing body in Nepal and we look forward to their taking up this issue seriously and promptly. The result of quick action will ensure that amateur tournaments continue to be fun and fair. ●

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



Kristjan B Edwards test driving the new go kart in Manamaiju.

KIRAN PANDAY

Give me speed

AARTI BASNYAT

What are you waiting for? Go karting, it's a brand new sport in town and its loads of fun. Narayan Karthekeyan, India's first formula one racer started his racing career with go karts. Who knows, you might just be Nepal's first as well.

"I don't see why not," says Kristjan B Edwards, a go karting enthusiast himself, "In fact, I'm willing to sponsor good Nepali riders to go and participate in go kart races in India and other countries." Edwards has made a go karting track in Manamaiju under the Tiger Karts' banner. He had the karts built in Nepal, importing only a few of the components and the engine.

"Go karting not only adds to the list of fun things to do in the afternoon but could also be a hobby," says Edwards. At a maximum speed of 40km per hour, you are barely inches off the ground as the world goes whizzing by. The racetrack is 240m in length and five m in width, longer than most go karting tracks. It's easy to get

addicted to the speed.

Initially, you feel hesitant about getting into the seat of a kart that looks like a toy but as soon as you are behind the wheel and you feel the rattle of the kart, the whirr of the engine and the wind in your hair, all your fears are forgotten.

The only thing on your mind is how fast you can go without having to brake for the turns. The adrenaline rush is addictive once

Go karts arrive and bring new thrills to an entertainment starved Valley

riders have enough experience to start racing. Riding karts is as simple as it sounds, with only a brake and an accelerator, the technique is: you are either sitting still or hurtling through space.

Edwards plans to have 10 karts in total and eight on the track. He and his team insist on

complete safety. They have tires all around the track to ensure that should a rider crash (and there will be quite a few of those) there will be minimal chances of injuries. The karts are built with low centre of gravity so they don't tip over, even in tight turns at high speed.

A safety helmet and bright yellow boiler suits are provided to protect the rider. It is an alcohol-free zone and anyone who has visibly tanked up is not allowed on the track. Only those above 15 years are allowed to ride and old age is no bar.

Tiger Karts is planning to have two systems for its customers—the lap system and the time system. The lap system will allow customers to pay for a certain number of laps on the track and the time system will allow them to ride according to time limits. Though the prices for either system have not been set as yet, they plan to make it affordable for the Nepali public. ●

Contact: Tiger Karts, Tiger Mountain 4361500, www.tigermountain.com

5th HIMALAYAN VW BEETLE RALLY

Welcome all Beetle and vintage car owners to take part in the ride of the year. **The 5th Himalayan VW Beetle Rally** is happening on May 7th. By joining the rally you will be contributing to three worthy causes. Please email us at info@beetlerally.net

Thamel - Basantapur - Durbar Marg - New Baneswor - Sano Thimi - Bhaktapur - Nagarkot

The Rally will raise fund for:
Maya Foundation, Antenna Foundation & Single Women Group

Beetles for Peace in Nepal and Around the World

In case of emergency, pull handle

The airline industry's top priority is the safety of its passengers, and that is why it pays special attention to in-flight announcements which relay vital information to make your journey smooth and safe.

Most passengers tune off when the public address system crackles with yet another announcement in four languages about en route weather. If you are one of those frequent fliers who stopped listening to in-flight announcements back in 1983, then you don't know what you've been missing. Like this one on a recent domestic flight from Biratnagar:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your co-pilot. As some of you may have noticed we are now taxiing back to the terminal because the Captain detected a malfunction in one of the engines. Please remain seated, relax and enjoy the in-flight service. We should be on our way again shortly as soon as we change the Captain."

Airlines have to follow strict ICAO and IATA regulations on passenger safety, and as planes become bigger and more sophisticated,

in-flight announcements can last the entire duration of a longhaul flight. In fact, there are so many announcements these days that there is no time left anymore on flights to Kathmandu for entertainment and refreshments.

"The pleasure in the cabin is automatically controlled. If the pleasure should fall, oxygen masks will drop, pull the mask towards you, clobber your nose and mouth and bleed normally. Passengers sitting below oval-head rockers should keep their helmets loosely fastened at all times. Rifle jackets are below your seats, unless they have been stolen. In the unlikely event that we have to ditch on water please snitch the one from under the seat next to you."

With the recent changes in Nepal there are a lot more documents to be filled out before landing in Kathmandu which means even more announcements:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your Captain again. We shall be commencing our descent into Kathmandu shortly. The cabin attendants will be moving through the aisles distributing arrival paperwork, which include:

- His Majesty's Government's Disembarkation Cards for those with visas
- Visa-on-Arrival Application Form for those without visas
- Visa Rejection Forms for diplomats declared persona-non-grata
- Customs Declaration Forms for those with nothing to declare at the present time because of curbs on free speech at destination
- Yellow Disembarkation Cards for Nepali citizens
- Red Deportation Cards for Nepali citizens who are unsure whether they will be detained on arrival
- Perambulator Re-registration Forms for passengers carrying more than two of the said contraband item
- Compensation Waiver Forms for Daylight Robbery Airport Taxi Service, Inc"

Right, now that we have the paperwork completed, time for some more arrival information:

"Use of mobile phones is prohibited throughout the flight because it may interfere with aircraft navigation, they are also banned in Nepal because they may be used to destabilise the country and send it totally off course."

"Cabin Crew: doors to manual and ejector seat on automatic for black-listed passenger on seat 11A."

Finally, we touchdown and there is just enough time for one last announcement: "Ladies and Gentlemen, in case you hadn't noticed, we have just landed at Tribhuban Interception Airport in Kathmandu. Please reset your watches back 45 years, and use the emergency exits for disembarkation."



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