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# AFLOAT


Geneva's fallout is mostly positive but a lot will now depend on how sincerely it is implemented



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Weekly Internet Poll # 243

**Q.Has official corruption been reduced since February First?**




Yes 50%  
No 41%  
Don't know 9%


Total votes:757

Weekly Internet Poll # 244. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

**Q. How will 2062 compare with the year that has just ended?**



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KUNDA DIXIT

The signing by Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey and the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, Louise Arbour, of an MoU on Monday has been hailed as a step towards peace by most activists, the international community, the government and even the Maoists.

The very fact that such a diverse group at last agrees on something is seen by many as a step forward.

But it wasn't smooth sailing. In a weekend of hectic negotiations, there were veiled threats, intercontinental lobbying, hard bargains and stonewalling. But in the end, the compromise provided a face-saving way for everyone to declare victory.

The government was happy it had avoided the ignominy of being put in the same category as Burma and North Korea. The Swiss and their 'like-minded Europeans' hinted they had

hoped for this outcome all along. International human rights organisations like Amnesty, ICJ and Human Rights Watch called it a 'step forward'. Even the Maoists in a statement responded positively to the MoU and said monitors were welcome to their areas.

The Europeans who had been lobbying to table a much stricter Agenda Item 9 resolution said they were satisfied with the MoU. "Better this than a grandstanding condemnation which would put Nepal at par with Burma and not really make any difference," said one Geneva-based activist.

Although the government put on a brave face, saying it was happy not to be in the same league as other human rights pariahs it did concede a lot. Early last week, the government sent a letter to Arbour, reiterating commitments and saying it was willing to consider a monitoring mission. This clearly didn't go

far enough and that message was delivered to Shital Nibas. With the clock ticking towards the Monday deadline, Pandey finally agreed to sign the MoU and fax it. But the Swiss wanted an original signed hardcopy handed to its aid mission in Kathmandu.

The Nepali delegation in Geneva lobbied strongly among Asian, African and other delegations to get the Agenda 9 resolution scuttled. Officials said the Swiss backed down because they knew they didn't have the numbers.

Some activists say there are still some loopholes that the state could use to dillydally on provisions for surprise visits of prisons and military bases without prior consent or information. They say the MoU could be an attempt by the king to legitimise his 1 February move, and add it won't make a difference as long as the emergency is still in place.

But a continuous monitoring

process will provide relief to Nepali civilians caught in the crossfire of conflict for the past nine years. The 50-member mission is mandated not just to monitor human rights through a field office and sub-offices but also to investigate and verify violations. And if major atrocities are uncovered, war crimes trials are not ruled out.

The only people unhappy with the signing of the MoU seem to be groups like the New Delhi-based Asian Centre for Human Rights, which blamed the "the ambivalent attitude" of India, America and Britain for the failure of the Agenda 9 resolution.

The Swiss will table a softer consensus resolution backing monitoring next week. A high-level technical mission is already in Kathmandu to prepare for the arrival of the monitoring group by early next month. ●

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**Time to do something**



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## UNDERSTANDING THE MEMORANDUM

A memorandum of understanding between the government and the UN on establishing a human rights monitoring field office in Kathmandu was signed on Monday. There has been a mixed reaction to this from various quarters but there can be only one criteria under which we should judge it: will it reduce the suffering of the Nepali people? If the UN is allowed to do its job, we think it will.

Just about everybody is patting themselves on the back. The Europeans who lead the charge in Geneva are happy even though the last-minute compromise allowed Nepal to wriggle out of an Agenda Item 9 resolution that would have put us in the same league as pariahs like Burma and Sudan.

The Foreign Ministry is painting this as a victory for Nepal even though by allowing permanent international observers to monitor and investigate human rights violations it tacitly acknowledged a group it considers terrorists and set a precedence for future external mediation.

The UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, must be extremely pleased. The UN thinks this is the most effective MoU it has ever signed and is planning to immediately deploy a 50-member field office with branches across the country. Human rights activists are ecstatic that their intense lobbying has paid off. The Maoists fell over themselves to immediately welcome the signing.

After getting away with a slap on the wrist last year, the government was expecting this year's UN session in Geneva to be difficult because of lack of progress on commitments made last year. But what magnified the focus was February First—the royal move turned Nepal into an outcast for dismantling democracy. Signing the MoU was quick footwork to stave off even more severe opprobrium and contain the damage. But this must not be just a time-buying gesture and yet another international commitment that the government fails to live up to.

Even so, the terms of the MoU make it harder for state security and the rebels to get away with impunity and violations of international humanitarian law. The possibility that investigated violators can face punishment at the International Court of Justice should be a further deterrence. The Maoist threat to close schools in the new year will be seen as a massive human rights violation. All this offers a ray of hope for long-suffering Nepali people who have been trapped in the middle between the two forces. Finally, the MoU also opens up the possibility of outside mediation to the conflict that could lead to closure of this sad and wasted chapter of our nation's history.



# “One of the biggest freedom crises in the

**Anne Cooper, executive director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) was in Nepal this week on a fact-finding mission. She spoke to Nepali Times about her impressions.**

**Nepali Times:** In your meetings here this week did you see any hint that press freedom will be restored?

**Ann Cooper:** The government is beginning to see the mistake it has made, partly because of international pressure and criticism and also what its actions have done to the Nepali people. This is a country that had a very vibrant media. It is important for people to know about human rights abuses by Maoists. It seems ridiculous that journalists have been accused as Maoist sympathisers just because they report about Maoists.

**You spoke with army, too. What was their take?**

The Brigadier General said that if there was an investigation and misbehaviour towards the security forces, he would rectify that. He said there would be an investigation if CPJ were to bring complaints about harassment of journalists.

**Did you raise the issue of curbs on radio journalism?**

Broadcasting is all in the state's hands. In some areas, you can get state broadcasting while in other areas you can also get these clandestine illegal Maoist radio broadcasts. There is

nothing independent in between to give people a more objective view about what is going on. I hope the government is beginning to realise that by these restrictions they are really hurting themselves.

FM radio stations are very important in rural areas and now they are told not to broadcast any news at all. They had local discussion programs where people could talk about very local issues like clean water, women and children's health and environment. All of that is being taken away from them.

**CPJ has been following events here since February First, do you see signs of relaxation?**

The fact that the government has allowed UN monitors is a sign that they listen to the international community and realise there is serious criticism out there. I think that is the important step to bring in the monitors and have them make sure that press freedom is allowed according to the mandate they are looking at. The very visible and extremely intimidating situation (soldiers stationed in newsrooms) is now gone, but many restrictions remain and worst of all, the ban on news reporting by FM radio stations.

**Will UN human rights monitoring help press freedom?**

The monitors will be living in the field and they will be living

## LETTERS

### ULBAEK

I believe that when Susan Ulbaek refers to 'revival of democracy and restoration of civil liberties' she does not mean Maoist democracy and liberties for the Maoists to organise and destroy the establishment. ('Democratisation through peace', #242) There are only three groups in Nepal which are not happy with the efforts of the monarch to eliminate terrorism and ensure peace and the rule of law: the Maoists, Indian intelligence and the corrupt politicians. While the first two are intertwined in their efforts to destabilise Nepal, the third one is worried about its own well-being in the system of the rule of law being revived. The rest of the people in Nepal are with the king and they expect that the king will handover the executive power that he seized to the legitimate government elected after cleaning up the corrupt politicians and destroying the Maoist war against the parliamentary system.

Civil liberties are of course important but they can be progressively protected only after everybody who has stake in

democracy cooperates with the government. Do you think that they will be protected just by issuing press releases the way the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Nepal and communist NGOs nurtured by the west are doing? Are they ready to team up with the army and work with them to check violations? You can hire dozens of foreign human rights advisers, issue press statements against the government, call for international rapporteurs to check it, you cannot change the situation on the ground, until you build a relationship of trust with the machinery of the government and develop a working relationship. None of them want to do it because they are ill-motivated and their real agenda is different.

Susan Ulbaek and many others who are concerned must learn why the ICRC and WFP in Nepal have more human rights achievements than these fly-by-night human rights groups.

**Sriram Chaudhary, email**

● Thanks for the Scandinavian rub in the Susan Ulbaek's opinion. I am glad that despite the efforts of India to demoralise Nepal by creating a strong anti-Nepal syndicate of western countries, the poorly

informed human rights organisations, and revengeful and dirty media propaganda, Nepal is still making breakthroughs in its efforts to contain terrorism, clean up corruption and restore the rule of law.

The king has shown that Nepal is not a failed state, its arms are still muscular and our destiny as a nation need not be hostage to the conspiracy of foreign security interests. The ability of the Royal Nepali Army to enforce human rights has increased significantly since the king has taken charge of the nation. The army has shown that it is moving, and fighting for values that are basic for the survival of a nation. The increasing number of people in detention centres show that the special courts dealing with the Maoists will be active very soon, which the so-called democratic parties had never been able to do. The king knows he can't sideline democracy and the constitution against the currents of history. He has been trying his best to make things right. He also needs active support of party leaders like GP Koirala and Madhab Kumar Nepal in this fight which he is waging alone. Peace is the precondition for democracy. Had the politicians been sincere to this country, this situation would never have come. They still have time to cooperate with the

king. I am glad Ulbaek is not completely carried away by the Indian propaganda that the king is leading his people towards hell.

**Kishor Karki, email**

● Reading your editorial ('2062', #242) I got the feeling that if peace is indeed as easy as you make it sound and if the reward to anyone who restores peace is so great then it is difficult to understand why they aren't doing it. The answer, which you hint at, is that this is a power struggle between the monarchy and the Maoists. And both sides regard this as a win-lose situation: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose everything. As long as that attitude persists we will never have peace, no matter how many editorials you write. It is only when the two armed factions (the unarmed political parties on the streets are just a sideshow to all this) decide that they have to go for a win-win compromise will we have a glimmer of hope. But history is a cruel reminder of the greed and lust of power of rulers and revolutionaries. We Nepalis better be prepared for a long, hard war as these two fight to the bitter end. Not such a positive thought to begin the new year with, but a much more realistic one than your feel-good leader.

**Niren Singh, email**



# press world

in those areas, watching on a day-to-day basis and reporting on abuses. If there are abuses of press freedom we will ask the government to respond. This monitoring is an important step because the UN monitors will come in the name of UN and all countries around the world. That potentially carries a lot of weight. When you defend press freedom you are really

defending the public's right to know and be informed.

## Globally, how do you rate the media situation here?

It is definitely one of the worst in the world. It's been very difficult for journalists as things got much worse after February First. This is one of the biggest press freedom crises in the world right now.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Mixed messages

## Cautious optimism is all that the Geneva MoU deserves

The Memorandum of Understanding that Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey signed with the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Monday has saved his government from the doom of Agenda Item 9 strictures. But the diplomatic respite at

### STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



Geneva extracted its price. Even though for the limited purpose of monitoring human rights, Nepal has accepted a 'third party' involvement between the government and the insurgents.

The MoU has now transformed Maoists into a recognised side of an armed internal conflict. Such a de facto recognition has given a moral boost to strife-torn Maoist leadership. No wonder, its supremo welcomed the development almost immediately. UN mediation has been the consistent rallying cry of the rebels. Chairman Prachanda can now credibly boast to his cadre that he has achieved one of his main objectives: international recognition.

With this, the legitimacy of rebel's control over certain unspecified areas within the sovereign territory of Nepal is established. Members of the present cabinet will have to reorient themselves to the new political reality. Tulsi Giri and his ilk will now have to accept that the Maoists have become more than a 'brand name' for a gang of armed troublemakers.

Political parties too have welcomed the development at Geneva for their own reasons.

They probably think that the presence of UN monitors will somehow deter the newly appointed Regional and Zonal Administrators from acting too rashly. But this is the optimism of the desperate. If the experience of other conflict-afflicted countries is anything to go by, unelected officials are never too concerned with their international image. They aren't accountable to anyone, so they do what they have to do while others go on saying what they want to say.

Nepal's human rights sector will probably benefit most from the new arrangement. Instead of looking for indifferent journalists they can now narrate tales of woe to some of their own kind of different nationalities. The coalition of 25 human rights activists has welcomed the decision most enthusiastically.

For the media, the presence of UN human rights monitors is unlikely to make much of a difference. The English papers (like this one) will undoubtedly acquire some additional readers who will religiously peruse these op-ed pages and appreciate the subtleties of editorials on the importance of socks and trees. But international observers have almost no effect on the array of measures that a determined government can use to make mass media fall in line.

For the majority of Nepalis, the more things change in the capital Valley, the more their lot remains the same. It's quite unlikely that an international agency empowered merely to observe and authenticate will affect ground realities in any meaningful way. The rest of us

in the country will have to wait for the day political parties are once again allowed to get back to the grassroots. Aidocrats of another supra-national body in their air-conditioned SUVs with conspicuous antennas will be seen racing across the kingdom as bemused citizens look on.

Perhaps our expectations from the international community are rather too high, if not downright unrealistic. International interventions complicate rather than facilitate conflict resolution. With one manufactured metaphor (comparing political leaders to contenders jostling for the master-bedroom of a house on fire) an ambassador succeeded in sealing the fate of all parliamentary parties in the country. By consistently calling the Maoists a 'political force', a few other western diplomats have now recognised them as such. Enemies are relatively easy to handle, dealing with friends like these is more complex business.

John Reed, a close friend of V I Lenin and an eyewitness to the 1917 October revolution, observed about the penultimate days of Old Order in Russia, "In the relations of a weak government and a rebellious people, there comes a time when every act of the authorities exasperates the masses, and every refusal to act excites their contempt."

Our unelected government seems to have fallen into a trap in Geneva but all of us will have to bear its unintended consequences. Cautious optimism is all that the Geneva accord deserves. ●

### AIDOCRATS

Thanks to CK Lal for introducing a new debate on aidocrats ('Meddling along'). Aid and campaign groups or NGOs matter more and more in our country's affairs. But they are becoming corrupt, political and often far from being as independent as they claim. And they are not always a force for good. Most of them are Maoist mouthpieces and have no commitment for charities. They are now a big business. By the way, who are the three monkeys?

*H D Baral, New Delhi*

● Dhanlal Buda's case ('Jumla's refugees wait it out in Surkhet', #242) is an example of agony that many internally-displaced Nepalis are presently facing. His family is getting no help from the state and so-called proponents of human rights. Apart from a couple of NGOs, none have rendered him a helping hand. It is dispiriting to find that the present vociferous government has also failed to help thousands of people like Buda whose lives have been destroyed by terrorism. If the government doesn't help, they may go over to the other side. This is the time for all so-called 'activists' to actually do something.

*Bikendra Shamsher Thapa, Kathmandu*

● Thanks to Rita Thapa for that heart-wrenching story of the plight of the internally displaced families from Jumla in Surkhet. What outraged us more than the brutality of the Maoists for chasing these hard-working dignified people from their homes in Jumla was the callousness and disinterest shown by the district administration, relief organisations and community groups. A government that can't even win the hearts and minds of people who have suffered at the hands of the Maoists will find it much more difficult to win over the general public.

*Jit Gurung, Kathmandu*

### ARTHA BEED

I feel compelled to write after reading Artha Beed's very pertinent Economic Sense column ('The aid haemorrhage', #242). There is a need for serious rethinking about our dependence on aid. How much of it does really trickle down to the needy? What are the measures that need to be in place to make sure that it is indeed used in the larger interest of the people? Because of economies of scale, larger projects are approved even though smaller, more cost efficient projects, are shelved. Some recipient countries themselves have started dictating the terms of aid. For a country like

Nepal, it may not be that easy to do without it but we must start. I also agree with the Beed about the brain drain from government institutions. Donors love to complain about how inefficient the government is. How can the government perform when they have lured away the brightest and the best? This is not to say that civil servants don't deserve a better career but the government has to give serious thought to retaining its most experienced and efficient bureaucrats. Honest and accountable managers have no option but to leave the government because of the way they are treated.

*Name withheld, United Nations, Pulchok*

### IRONIC TIMES

It must be quite difficult for Kunda Dixit to keep up his Under My hat column in these times of censorship, but I'm glad that he has kept his wit about him.

*Jayesh Pradhan, email*

● The sarcasm and irony on the e-edition of *Nepali Times* (especially the one by Kunda Dixit) are great. In these times of

uncertainty, it's refreshing to read ironic things about Nepal. I have been following the news in Nepal closely and its good to see that at least you have taken some light in the situation (although it must be quite hard).

*Suvecha Pant, Australia*



### CORRECTION

Siddhartha Shakya's photos in 'Jumla's refugees wait it out in Surkhet' (#242) was wrongly credited.



# The crackdown and after

In this connected, globalised world, everything is shared, trafficked, exposed. Borders are meaningless when almost all communication is carried by fibre optics or radio waves. Not even armed soldiers can stop an FM signal. No customs officer can search a VSAT beam or cut off a satellite television signal. You can try to block the Internet but you won't succeed. The challenge before nation states is to use this force to strengthen sovereignty and national prosperity. Isolation is not an option.

Perhaps the greatest shared commodity in this wireless world is information. So on 1 February 2005, when the authorities in Nepal cut telephone lines, switched off mobiles and blocked Internet servers, they may have thought they were lowering a contemporary version of Churchill's Iron Curtain. But they were not.

Those of us on the far side of the world leapt to our keyboards

**HERE AND THERE**  
**Daniel Lak**



and found the cracks in the new Berlin Wall. Information leaked out—at first a trickle but later in great torrents on web logs and international media. Journalists

from the regional and global press filled in the blanks within days. Satellite telephone calls and emails from secure uplink points provided reassurances and eventually, a full picture emerged.

It was only within the country that information was prevented from flowing, as was the intention. This may have been a temporary setback to the Maoist rebels but, if so, only at the most tactical level.

Stolen two-way radios crackled in jungle glades and along terraced hillsides, clandestine and illegal FM transmitters spread the words of the leadership, unfettered by the military and civil administration crackdown in Kathmandu and other places. It was largely law-abiding Nepalis who felt the effects of the first week.

Thankfully, the telephones now ring in the PCOs and the Internet once again hums in cybercafes from Khakarbhitta to Kailali. Some day, the mobiles may be switched back on, now that the innocent have been fingerprinted.

## The only voice that speaks without government censorship comes clandestinely and illegally over an FM band

broadcasters for any of the woes of the past 14 years? On the contrary, the media in Nepal is a blazing success story at every level: journalistic, economic and otherwise.

Newspapers have flourished along with a burgeoning private sector, in stark contrast to the feudal days before the 1990 democratic changes where only a few families dominated the business life of the nation and state media produced turgid sycophancy in place of real information. *Kantipur* will soon celebrate its 13th birthday, this paper is five years old and countless other journals have helped create a growing market of literate, informed readers.

Satellite television news had just begun to take off in Nepal. Started in part as a counterweight to an ever-growing plethora of Indian television, the likes of *Kantipur Television*, *Space Time* and *Image Channel* were acquiring talent and technology with the joint aim of earning a profit and informing the public.

Most strikingly, the FM radio dial was growing ever more crowded. Community stations in the tiniest of towns and in the capital linked people of all castes and ethnic groups. They kept politicians and traders honest. They provided information on health, education and, yes, the insurgency. In Kathmandu, commercial radio helped Nepali rock, folk and classical music flourish and pushed Bollywood and western pop into niches of limited popularity.

In short, despite the undeniable excesses of the political parties and the horror of civil insurgency, Nepal had at least one thing to be proud of. The independent media was world class and getting better and more confident with time. It was also responsible and by no means interested in encouraging totalitarianism or violence of any sort.

So I arrive in Kathmandu at the dawn of a new year on the Nepali calendar and what do I find? A press and media under siege. Voices for peace, reconciliation and development are silenced or forced into cat-and-mouse games with capricious authority. Journalists live in fear or moulder in prison. FM radio plays only music, largely from across the border. Private tv presents a mirror of Nepal television as station owners look nervously to the huge investments they've made in technology and licenses. No boats are rocked there. No useful information either.

In the tarai and midhills, the only voice that speaks without government censorship comes clandestinely and illegally over an FM band where informative, independent thought has been banished. The Maoists are free to speak their minds. No one else is. ●

Daniel Lak recently visited Nepal to assess press freedom for the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

# Time to do something

## The time for talk is gone, let's start helping people displaced by the conflict



NARESH NEWAR

**NARESH NEWAR**

At 70, Hari Prasad Gautam had to flee from his home in Lohanpur, Ramechhap, because of Maoist attacks.

Living in a one-room run down house in the Valley, Gautam is forced even at his age to work as a wage labourer at a kiln carrying bricks on his back. He is weak and his health is deteriorating.

"I don't know how long I will live," says Gautam, looking worriedly at his wife, Bed Maya. Until last year, the elderly couple were receiving a monthly allowance of Rs 2,500 from the government but now that has stopped. When Gautam runs out of cash, he and his wife go door-to-door begging for food and clothes.

After he was unable to pay the Rs 50,000 extortion demand two years ago he was shot and attacked with swords by Maoists and left for dead in his village. His fault: the inability to pay Rs 50,000 as demanded by the rebels. They killed all his cattle, burned down his house and attacked him at night.

The police saved his life by arranging a rescue flight to Kathmandu where he was in hospital for almost six months. "It still hurts a lot," says Gautam, showing the scars on his chest and legs.

Nepal's internally displaced (IDPs) need no introduction: homeless and penniless, sick and hungry in their own country (see: 'Jumla's refugees wait it out in Surkhet', #242). Ever since 1

February, even reporting on the refugees has dried up. The curbs on media have stopped stories on Maoist atrocities because reporters are not allowed to file independent stories on the security situation from the field.

There is now hope that help is on the way. A high-level team led by the representative of the UN secretary general, Walter Kalin is in Nepal this week on a fact-finding mission. Kalin's recommendations will be presented at the 62nd session of the Commission on Human Rights and to the Secretary General.

"Most the families are living like beggars and starving," said Gopal Tamauli of the Maoist Victims' Association. The group is staging a 'refugee camp' at Tundikhel this week to highlight the plight of IDPs.

The government did establish the Victims of Conflict Fund under which the IDP families were entitled to nearly Rs 85 per day but many failed to provide evidence that they were IDPs and were excluded from state support. In 2004, the government announced that it had disbursed Rs 70 million to IDP families but the fund was so haphazardly distributed that the truly needy never got any of it. "As far as I know, less than 50 people received about Rs 1,500," Tamauli recalls. The government finally formed a task force to provide relief to IDPs after a 20-day hunger strike earlier this year, but again nothing

happened. A study by the Community Study and Welfare Centre (CSWC) estimates that the Maoists are responsible for the displacement of between 300,000-400,000 Nepalis.

While a majority of IDPs have migrated to India, over 60,000 villagers like Gautam and Bed Maya are taking refuge in the capital. Most survive on meagre earnings working as menial labourers. Because of their desperation, they are cruelly exploited and most are willing to work just for food. CSWC says it is the young women and girls who are most vulnerable.

"It was a mistake to come to Kathmandu, there is nothing here for us," says 52-year old Buddhi Singh Bista who fled Debasthal village in Salyan with 13 family members after the Maoists seized all his property and house worth Rs 5 million. When he couldn't pay the Rs 200,000 the Maoists demanded, he had to flee for his life.

Buddhi's family members are now scattered all over the country. He lives in Kathmandu with his wife and two teenage daughters all of whom have started to sleep at the bus park.

"We were living in a rented house but now we've run out cash. I have sold all my wife's jewelry, there is nothing left now," said Bista who came to the capital hoping to get the promised compensation for Maoist victims. He did not get a paisa. Only a few families with political links ever received any compensation.

"The IDPs face a humanitarian crisis and now there is hope the international community will offer some support," feels Dilli Ram Dhakal of CSWC, "the time to just talk about it is gone, we have to provide actual help."

One of the key obstacles for the international relief agencies to support the IDPs in Nepal is the lack of an accurate picture or estimate of their number. Their population keeps fluctuating as most IDPs migrate to India. Few relief agencies like World Food Program (WFP) and the Red Cross are helping provide interim relief like food and clothes for displaced families sheltered in the camps set up by the government in Nepalganj and Surkhet in west Nepal where the largest numbers of IDPs live.

A 2004 report by the Norwegian Refugee Council had sharply criticised international relief organisations for not providing enough support to IDPs in Nepal. It said: 'Many UN agencies and international NGOs have been in Nepal for numerous years providing development-oriented assistance but almost none provide humanitarian relief or target their assistance to IDPs.' ●



### Leave schools alone

On the occasion of the new school year that begins 15 April, the United Nations in Kathmandu has urged all groups to create a safe environment where children can be enrolled without fear and disruption. “Schools should remain free of any political or military activity,” said the UN statement. It has asked all parties to ensure that the Nepali new year 2062 is a year of peace in Nepali schools. It states that there should be no obstacle under any situation, to allow children to study and teachers to fulfill their duties towards their students. “All schools and school grounds should remain free of weapons and explosive devices,” added the statement. It also said that children should not be taken for political indoctrination or recruitment nor should they be harassed as suspected insurgents or placed in preventive detention. Activists say the Maoists’ support for the UN’s human rights monitoring mission will make it difficult for them to justify the threats against schools making new enrollments.

### Winners take it all

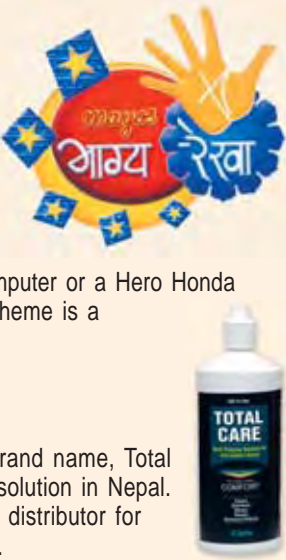
**boss** Four months ago, *the boss* magazine started a joint campaign with Philips. Subscribers would qualify for a lucky draw to win a set of Philips speakers. Bima Chitrakar of Nepal Investment Bank, KR Iyer of Union Finance, Suresh Raj Maharjan of Nabil Bank, each won a 25-inch flat Philips tv. Kshitij Khadka of Laxmi Bank, Ravin Lama of *The Himalayan Times* and Manisha Rajbhandari of Nepal Investment Bank won a DVD player each and Reshma Pradhananga of KUSOM, Surya Gopal Nyachhon of Deluxe Radio Service and Pramita Malakar of Nabil Bank each won a Philips CD player.

### Lines of fortune

Himalayan Instant Noodles has launched a new marketing campaign Mayos Bhagya Rekha to sell Mayos instant noodles. Every packet of Mayos instant noodles has a picture of a palm with the lines of fortune. Consumers who find the right matches can win various gold ornaments, P4 computer or a Hero Honda motorcycle. The bumper prize of this scheme is a Maruti 800 car.

### NEW PRODUCT

EYE CONTACT: Cipla’s multipurpose brand name, Total Care, is launching its soft contact lens solution in Nepal. Instyle Trading Concern, the authorised distributor for Cipla medicines, will market Total Care.



# Accidental businessman

## Karna Sakya’s positive outlook needs to spread

Three years ago, GTZ’s Business Service Aadhar started a monthly business forum in Kathmandu. The idea was to invite Nepal’s leading businesspeople to talk reflectively and candidly about their lives in business with about 60 young private sector professionals. One invitee was hotelier and conservationist Karna Sakya, 62, who has since expanded his one-

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
**Ashutosh Tiwari**



hour talk into a 286-page self-published book called *Soch*. Written in conversational Nepali with an upbeat tone, *Soch* (meaning: ‘thought’) is a collage of autobiography, travelogue, advice for young entrepreneurs, thoughts on progress that Nepal has made and suggestions about how Nepal can further live up to its potential.

Reading the book, Sakya’s life has been an extraordinary one. When most of his contemporaries were happy to retire Sakya had at least three different careers: a government technocrat, a businessman and a conservationist. Born in an upper class yet traditional Newari family, he eschewed family jewelry business to study forestry in Dehradun. A job as a wildlife officer at the Department of Forests allowed this young man from Kathmandu’s Asan to travel

far and wide across Nepal in the 1960s, from the unexplored jungles of the tarai to the hills and the mountains of Dolpo and the Annapurna region. His innate love for nature, together with his work to start conservation parks, showed him that when it came to tourism in Nepal, ‘plenty of opportunities were always around us’.

That realisation emboldened him to enter the hospitality business. He turned his home into Kathmandu Guest House, which served ‘non-hippie guests’ in the 1970s and eventually became the catalyst that accelerated the transformation of sleepy Thamel into a bustling tourist hub. What is remarkable today is not that Sakya is a successful hotelier, it is that his entrepreneurship was in being able to leave behind the familiarity of family business and the security of a government job to chase a potential and, in the process, help start Nepal’s tourism industry from scratch. (See also: ‘Karna’s karma’, #137)

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sakya used his growing profile to advance social causes. After losing wife and daughter to cancer, he translated grief into action to raise money through walkathons, ball dances, concerts and cigarette taxes to help build a cancer hospital in Bhaktapur. He convinced the government to set aside the year 1998 as *Visit Nepal Year* and oversaw co-

ordinated nationwide efforts to upgrade tourism-related infrastructure. In both instances, Sakya played the role of a master salesman: someone who persuaded a wide variety of people about the merits of his ideas, won over sceptics through a combination of hard work, hustle and enthusiasm and used influence to mobilise resources to come up with solutions to public problems. Indeed, what comes through clearly in the book is Sakya’s penchant for coming up with problems to solve—a desire that has not ended now that he has beaten prostate cancer to submission.

*Soch* suffers from three flaws. First, it could have been better edited for language. Second, by painting a cloyingly sunny outlook about Nepal’s possible future, it fails to tell us just how Sakya himself overcame specific administrative and logistical difficulties that hobble most enterprises in Nepal. And third, most of his suggestions can sound irritatingly preachy at least to the younger generation which has grown both wary and weary of naive romancing of this country’s unlimited potential in, well, everything. These quibbles aside, I would recommend this book for the window it provides us to see what drives one of our most restless corporate citizens to do things that he does for himself and for us. ●

# “Insurance business moves with the times”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**Dip Prakash Panday, general manager of Shikhar Insurance, has blazed into Nepal’s insurance market like a meteor. He talked to *Nepali Times* about the future of the business in these troubled times.**

**Nepali Times:** Has your aggressive launch campaign paid off?

**Dip Prakash Panday:** Yes, we completed 100 working days and it has paid off very well. Aviation is our highest premium generating sector and insuring motor vehicles has really gone up.

**But people used to say the insurance market was saturated.** That’s true, but we had a good chance at the market share. It is not that we want to grab the whole existing market but we want to increase the cake size also by introducing products and developing manpower. We are trying to secure reinsurance support from new reinsurance companies to build market capacity so we can accept reinsurance from other companies and give them reinsurance. This way, with reinsurance within the country, the money stays here.

**How professional is the insurance business in Nepal?** Insurance business is not being run the way it should and is not professionally managed here. There is a shortage of technical manpower. Because of lack of awareness and education, people feel that money paid for insurance is a waste. We need to create an image that tells the people insurance is a must, that’s the challenge.

**So how do you expand the cake?** The market is huge but the stagnant economy of the country has affected it. Another factor is the purchasing power. These are long-term social securities where if something happens tomorrow, you can be rescued.

**Where do you want to see the sector headed?** Personalised products, old products will be modified and new products developed. Some will be just products repackaged but right now, I see tremendous potential in tourism and aviation related insurance. We can provide security to tourists from the day they enter to the day they leave. All through customer services.

**How about the overseas migrant worker market?** Nepalis going abroad are learning the benefits of insurance.

There is a provision with which they can insure for a certain time period while abroad. The government and Insurance Committee are also deciding on this issue. They plan to sell insurance with more coverage and benefits, even for natural death.

**With the insurgency and street violence, how easy is it to claim insurance?** We move with the times. The traditional procedure is lengthy, monotonous and tedious. Customers get frustrated and have a negative image of the market. If you can justify yourself, why ask for police claims? We don’t ask for them except for legal claims when third party is involved or a case is registered in court. For motor vehicles, we have appointed different garages in the Valley.

**What about reinsurance against damages due to conflict?** After 9/11 most reinsurers withdrew terrorism cover. All Nepali companies purchased a common reinsurance that is still continuing. This has become the Nepal Terrorism Pool. Some things still need to be tackled but we have very good internal support. This makes it functional. Each company pays a certain percentage and if there’s a loss, the pool pays. This way, political instability does not directly affect a company’s performance. At least for one segment, all the companies here united and found in solidarity a solution for the benefit of all. That’s good teamwork display from all the companies.

**What is the biggest problem you face?** Undercutting, rate undercutting is the biggest problem here. As an insurance company, we want to have a common understanding, go to the regulators and discuss the problem. Let’s hope it is just a passing phase. The intention should not be to form a cartel and charge clients more but we need to study the products and see which has profit potential and price it accordingly. After all, insurance is fund management.



# Police donates blood to wounded Maoist



SHANKHAR KHANAL

*Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-30 April

**Maoist section commander for Mamling in Sankhuwasabha, Prem Kumar Pariyar (Comrade Tufan) had lobbed a socket bomb at police on patrol at Barabise and was trying to run away when he was shot**

and wounded by the police. Tufan was rushed in critical condition to the district hospital in Khandbari, a day's walk away, and had lost a lot of blood by the time he got there. Policeman Dambar Bahadur Chhetri found he had the same blood group as the wounded Maoist and decided on the spot to donate his blood to save the

Tufan's life. The police had also paid Rs 700 for a porter to carry the wounded Tufan to hospital. "They could have killed me but instead, he gave me his own blood to save my life," Tufan told *Himal* from his hospital bed, "I will never make this mistake again."

## “It’s an internal matter”

Interview with Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara on *BBC Nepali Service*, 10 April



**What is Baburam Bhattarai’s status in your party now?**  
The change in anyone's status and their responsibilities is our party's internal matter. We don't make them public.

**How come, then, you used his position and status in previous press statements?**  
After our last politburo meeting, there have been changes in the responsibilities of our comrades belonging to all ranks and files. So it is natural to have changes and when that happens there is also an adjustment in policies.

**What is Bhattarai’s position after the change?**  
He is still with us. He is devoted to the movement. There is no truth in the rumour that there are differences between Comrade Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, that actions have been taken against Bhattarai and he has been ousted. The truth is he and the others are still working with Comrade Prachanda.

**But you have still not answered my question: what is Bhattarai’s present position in the party?**  
We don't reveal everyone's position within the party. We do so only of those we find necessary. That is our internal matter.

**If an issue such as this is an internal matter, then how can the people trust you when you talk about democracy for instance?**  
We have never lied to the people about our political mission, the ongoing war and our principles.

**But wasn’t it on these very principles that Bhattarai had differences with Prachanda?**  
I don't say that there is no difference in the party. But they are not as (serious) as they have been projected outside.

**If these differences are not serious, why has Bhattarai been detained by what you call the People’s**

**Liberation Army?**  
It is not true that he has been detained as such. Even Bhattarai's own statement has made it clear that he has not been kept under detention. To keep our leaders safe from enemies, they are provided with security.

**That means Bhattarai was just talking off the top of his head when he said he was ‘surrounded’ by the liberation army?**  
He has only said that he is with the people's liberation army. Even Prachanda is with the liberation army and so are all the leaders. The fact is that there is a healthy debate on principles related to the progress of our party and movement.

**You call it healthy but in the 13-point disagreement Bhattarai submitted to the party’s plenum, he argued that a wrong, unhealthy and opportunist trend was emerging.**  
The issues mentioned in the 13-point or any other such points do not mean that there is unhealthy criticism within the party. The views and differences are being discussed, and all that Bhattarai has said does not prove that the disagreement is actually unhealthy.

**Bhattarai says groupism and not political thoughts or principles, is deeply rooted in the party.**  
We have not said that our party has no problem at all. There are many problems but we have been solving them one by one.

**In that case, would you allow us to talk with Bhattarai?**  
Yes, there is nothing barring us from that. We don't side with any person in the party.

**Does that mean Bhattarai and Hisila Yami are undergoing corrective measures now?**  
We are all committed to corrections because we have a very big mission to accomplish and there is nothing surprising about it.

## Holier than thou

Narayan Wagle in *Kantipur*, 8 April

क्रान्तिपुर

“I don’t believe in democracy, the king does,” said Tulsi Giri, first vice-chairman of the council of ministers to a western diplomat who was paying him a courtesy call last week. The international community has stressed that the absence of democracy would weaken the struggle against the Maoists and Giri was delivering the government’s response.

Senior officials are doing everything to prove that the commitment for democracy expressed in the royal proclamation is just lip service. They are spreading doubts among the people about whether the king’s move was aimed at restoring peace and democracy in the country. They view peace and democracy as separate issues. These government representatives are the reason why the international community is still sceptical about the king’s reiterated commitment to democracy.

Giri has ruled that the political parties can only talk to the king through him. At this rate, there will never be harmony between the king and the parties. At a time when unity and trust is needed between constitutional forces, this is a serious problem.

Two months ago, the Chinese Ambassador Sun Heping said the king’s move was Nepal’s internal affair. He is now saying that it is important to “unite and work together”. Government officials are making it difficult not only for the ambassadors but also the political leaders to get an audience with the king.

But officials are doing everything to oppose democracy in the name of nationalism. This isolates the king from the democratic forces. Even royalists and former Panchayat leaders like Surya Bahadur Thapa, Pashupati Shamsher Rana and Lokendra Bahadur Chand are asking for unity and consensus with the democratic forces. They have not supported activities to destroy national unity or to create a gap between the king and the people because they have to face voters in future elections. But even Chand, who was always regarded as being close to the king, was under house arrest for seven days and has not been able to get his telephone connection back yet.

The behaviour of the king’s supporters contradicts the king’s avowed commitment to democracy. While the king says that he supports an independent media, the Ministry of Information and Communication is doing its best to curb the media. They are making every effort to take the country back to the days of autocracy and isolation. They are narrowing the options for the monarch and they don’t realise that one day they have to face the public. It is sad to have such people represent the government that believes the people’s desire for democracy will diminish by provoking public hatred towards the political parties. Now, even the judiciary seems to be involved in shattering the true essence of the royal proclamation. Chief Justice Hari Prasad Sharma appeared as a government spokesperson during an international conference of Asian chief justices in the Australian Gold Coast.

If the international community feels that Nepal lacks an independent judiciary, then Sharma deserves a share of the blame. It seems clear that the so-called royalists are doing everything to ridicule the king’s commitment to democracy. This is what one western diplomat observed and said, “Above anyone else, it is the royalists who are contradicting the king.”



Bag: Press

समय Samaya, 14 April

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

There should be no delay in activating the democratic process.

King Gyanendra in *Kantipur*, 14 April



# Facing the music

Radio Sagarmatha's Ghamaraj Luitel in Kantipur, 9 April

कान्तिपुर

For over two months, FM radio has been bottled up within the confinements of entertainment. With the country's 41 radio stations broadcasting just entertainment, there seems to be no limit in how this trend has ridiculed the real essence of radio journalism. The country is in the midst of crisis and conflict but whenever we tune on to any FM station today all it offers is escapist entertainment not relevant information. As per the National Broadcasting Act introduced in 1993, the state gave the private sector permission and authority to launch FM stations and broadcast news. This was as per the constitution which effectively said that the electromagnetic spectrum was in the public domain. Post February First, the Ministry of Information and Communication issued a directive citing the state of emergency as the legal reason to stop news on FM. Those who defied the order would be subject to one year imprisonment and fined Rs 10,000, or both. This is unfair and discriminatory towards FM radio stations and the vast listening public. Especially since private television stations are still allowed to broadcast news. Such severe censorship against FM radio is not just counterproductive it goes against the spirit of the independent press mentioned in the royal proclamation— "Independent information is the medium for creating awareness of democracy. It plays a special role in preserving national integrity." So, why is the government acting in dissonance with the royal proclamation? It would be wise on the part of the government to lift the restriction on FMs and permit them to broadcast news. The government is reportedly planning to amend the National Broadcast Act and introduce any law permanently clipping the wings of free radio journalism. The information minister hasn't stopped peddling the untruth that no FM radio station in the world broadcasts news.



USHA TITIKSHU

In the Netherlands, community FM radio stations broadcast news and also programs pertaining to political debates and such programs are allowed to get advertisements. In South Africa, community radio stations have earned popularity among the masses for its news and other socially oriented news programs. There are similar trends in Ecuador and Ghana where FM radio stations are popular among the local people because of its accessibility to news and current affairs. In the Philippines, people constantly tune their radio sets for updated and latest news aired through the grassroots FM broadcasters. In Canada, the government has arranged for FM radio stations to broadcast news and informative programs besides entertainment so citizens become aware of many important issues. Most of these countries envied Nepal's successes with community radio and emulated us. FM news had already become an indispensable part of the lives of Nepali citizens.

It may be understandable to impose restrictions on broadcast or printing of news during a state of emergency but the ruling should not be discriminatory. Why are only FM stations being unfairly singled out for control? Radio stations have contributed huge revenues to the government through licences and advertisements. Without exception they were broadcasting news in line with the rules stipulated in the license. Radio journalists were responsible and professional and had the well-being of the nation at heart. What the government has to realise is that in a country where the literacy rate is low, FM radio stations was informing and educating nearly 70 percent of the population. Radio journalism cannot fulfil its responsibility being restricted to music.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

# “The alternative to democracy is democracy”

Unofficial translation of King Gyanendra's speech at the Royal Nepali Army Academy graduation parade Nispakshya, 5 April

निष्पक्ष

Newly appointed officers, we would like to congratulate all newly appointed officers in the proud Royal Nepali Army, which has continuously devoted itself to duty since the national unification campaign begun by His Majesty King Prithbi Narayan Shah.

The reflection of loyalty for the motherland and the realisation of responsibility on the faces of all those who took part in the passing out parade of the Royal Nepali Army Academy shows that there is adequate enthusiasm and self confidence to face any challenge. We believe that instilling in oneself this academy's motto—knowledge, service and leadership—and the professional knowledge and capability acquired by this basic training will help substantially in one's duty.

For the defence of national unity, indivisibility and non-obstructed sovereignty, the qualities of being loyal, dutiful and true to one's job have always been alive in every patriotic Nepali's blood. It is because of these universal qualities that we are able to say 'Nepal' today, and are proud to be Nepalis. Therefore, it is necessary for all patriots to be devoted to the national interest and to execute

responsibilities entrusted in them.

The responsibility, discipline and honesty of the Royal Nepali Army, guided by the military tradition of moving ahead with bravery that has no vested interest and no blemish, are exemplary at the national and international level. The leadership, knowing these proud traditions and concepts, should set examples for their juniors. And this is how you deal with any challenge.

All patriots are aware that the law and order situation has been complicated by terrorism. Terrorism has no boundaries. The alternative to democracy is democracy, not terrorism. The Royal Nepali Army has been mobilised for the safety of all citizens who have suffered from terrorism and for the defence of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. In this mission, the army's junior leadership has a crucial role to play. One must promise to fulfil the entrusted responsibilities under all circumstances, taking to heart the trust and belief of Nepal and the Nepali people.

Finally, we wish the best to all the newly appointed officers so they can serve Nepal and Nepalis wholeheartedly and be bright luminaries signifying patriotism. May Lord Pashupatinath take care of us all. Jai Nepal.

5th HIMALAYAN

BEETLE RALLY

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The Rally will raise fund for:

**Maya Foundation, Antenna Foundation & Single Women Group**

*Beetles for Peace in Nepal and Around the World*



# Trekking in the time of

The east is red with rhododendron and re



ALL PICS: DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA



**DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA**  
in GUPHA POKHARI



## RED TAX: (top to bottom)

A Swiss trekker takes pictures of rhododendrons in full bloom at snowbound Gupha Pokhari last week.

A Maoist receipt for Rs 5,000 from individual trekkers.

Trekking guide and his clients negotiate with Maoists along the trail for their 'tax'.

Gupha Pokhari's jewel-like lake in eastern Nepal.

Until two years ago, the trail from Terathum to Milke Danda and Jaljale Himal in the rhododendron season would be one long line of trekkers and porters.

This year, the mountains are ablaze again with Nepal's national flower. The trees are sagging a bit under the weight of late spring snow here in eastern Nepal and it's not just red, there are blossoms of every shade from pure white to deep red. But there are few trekkers here to enjoy the sight.

This is also the route to Kangchenjunga Base Camp via Taplejung and where rafters used to come to raft down the Tamur and Arun. But this spring there has been only a sprinkling of

mountaineers headed up the mountains.

"This time of year, there wouldn't be a lodge empty around here, this year we haven't seen trekkers for months on end," says Donga Sherpa who runs Yak Hotel in Gupha Pokhari.

Last week, there was a rare Swiss-German group with 12 ecstatic trekkers who had timed their arrival here with the peak of the rhododendron season. They spent time birdwatching at Kosi Tappu, travelled up to Taplejung and will be flying back to Kathmandu from Tumlingtar.

Sixty-year-old Swiss, Peter Schmidt, is a Nepal veteran having come to trek here 17 times. Many in the group are repeat visitors who have come

here in the past and this time brought their friends to see the rhododendrons. What's different this year is the Maoist trekking tax which has gone up to Rs 5,000. "It's a bit steep," says Schmidt, but otherwise isn't that bothered about paying it, "we run into them but if you pay they don't make a fuss."

However, having already been forced to pay Rs 3,000 in Mangalbare a few days before, the group ran out of rupees to pay the rebels. So they scrounged around for all the euros and dollars they could find.

The local commissar, Comrade Himal, explains to the tourists that they only have to pay once and promises to refund the Rs 3,000 justifying

## Khaobadi terror

Ever since two businessmen from Jiri-Khimti in Terathum were robbed and killed by khaobadis on the trail to Basantapur in January, there have been a spate of armed robberies in Sankhuwasabha district by a gang of five ex-Maoists. Local rebels are now patrolling the trails on the lookout not for soldiers but for their renegade comrades who have taken to robbery.

"There are at least 30 of our comrades who have stolen money and left the party in this district," admits a Maoist who calls himself Harka. Those who have deserted with a lot of money have gone to India or to cities in the tarai, he adds, but others hang around in the district and pretend to be Maoists and extort money or rob travellers.

A local teashop owner asks the Maoists how he's supposed to know if the people coming to collect 'donations' are genuine Maoists, but Harka doesn't have a convincing answer. "Take pictures of them," he says. Although the khaobadis will be severely punished, says Harka, his patrols have not yet caught a single renegade Maoist. Local farmers are victimised from multiple sources: soldiers on patrol who think they are Maoists, Maoists who think they are spies for the army, and criminals pretending to be Maoists. The rebels are also brutally punishing people they suspect of sheltering khaobadis. Villagers have locked up the health posts. After 1 February, there has been no qualitative



change in ground reality here. In fact, the Maoists seem to have been emboldened. Maoist cadre of Taplejung's Sanghu area, Comrade Nikhil says, "Now, the people and the political parties will support us." The bunker building campaign in schools appears to have ended. The Maoists are now capturing food caravans headed toward outlying villages and recently started taking 25 percent of all medicines supplied to health posts. Rather than face reprisals from the army, the villagers have locked up the health posts. Gopal Dahal in Sankhuwasabha



# terrorism

## evolution

the tax saying it is to protect visitors from robbers along the trail. "It's no different than the visa fee you pay to enter Nepal, you are paying this to enter our territory," he tells the sceptical looking foreigners. That day, the Maoists collected Rs 55,000 from the group.

The trekkers have no illusions that they are being made to pay at the point of a gun. The Maoists are all menacingly armed with SLRs and one German woman is not impressed, saying: "We didn't come here to look at guns, we want to help Nepal's economy with tourism not give money to people to buy guns."

Local lodge owners say news of the conflict has killed tourism, and even the few people who still come to this remote part of Nepal will stop coming if the extortion terrorism continues. Teashop owners also have to pay a part of their meagre earnings to the rebels. Dondu Sherpa used to be very busy this time of year running her lodge in Basantapur. These days she doesn't have much to do. "It's fear of the Maoists, their extortion, bandas and blockades

that have affected tourism," she says.

"We had a lot of cancellations this year because of negative news of Nepal," says Explorer Nepal's trekking guide Narayan Shrestha, who is leading the group. But even after being told about the extortion, many still come. "I guess it is part of Nepal's attraction as a trekking and adventure destination," says Shrestha, adding that no trekker has ever been directly harmed in Nepal.

Commissar Himal hangs around to chat up the trekkers. He says he will pass their comment about Rs 5,000 being too much up the rebel hierarchy. Despite the 11-day strike, Himal allowed the trekkers to pass, saying the ban on travel was only aimed at the "old regime".

British journalist, Peter Patson, who was travelling in the area, said he wasn't really harassed by either the Maoists or the army. As a journalist, he was even exempted from the revolutionary tax. He told us: "It's natural to be a bit nervous before you come but once you pay their tax they leave you alone." ●

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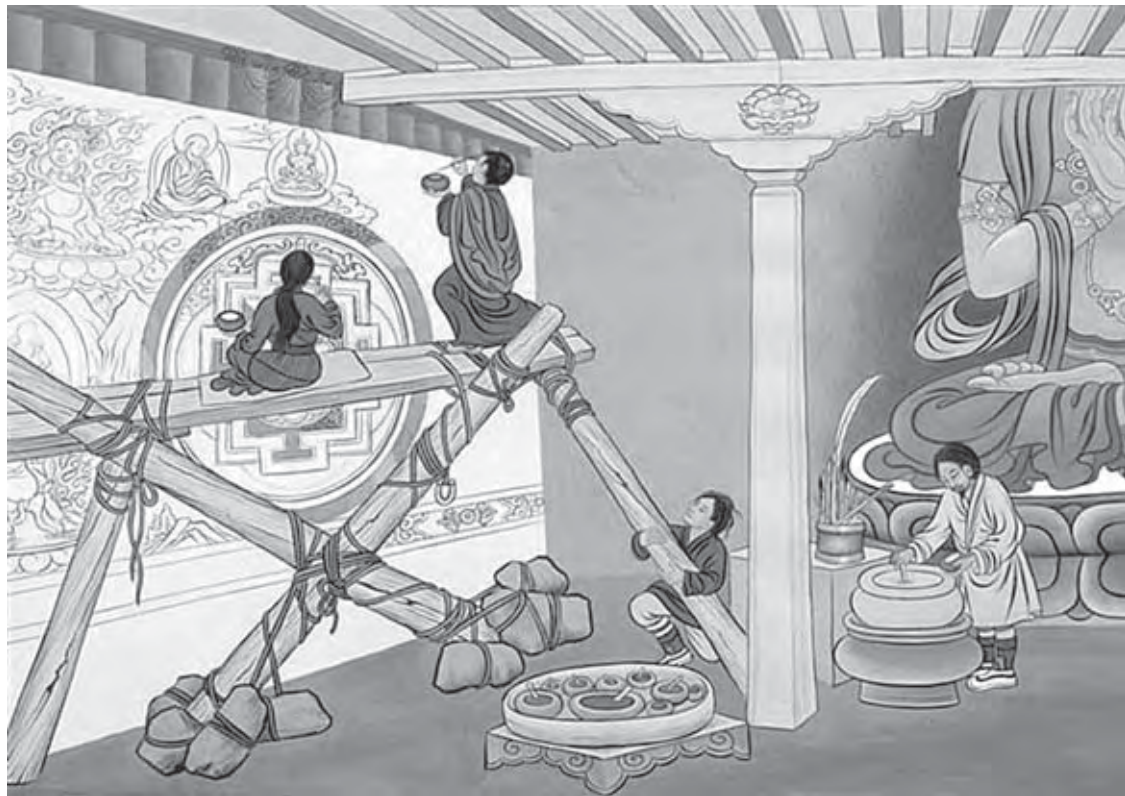
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# The girl from Dolpo

A classic fairy tale of triumph over social obstacles, mysterious creativity and the intervention of royalty



This illustrated book is the charming tale of Namsel, a young girl from Dolpo who exhibits an unusual artistic talent and succeeds in realising her dreams. Entirely suitable for adults but targeted at children aged seven and upwards, *Clear Sky, Red Earth* has all the makings of a classic fairy tale rooted in historical events such as the triumph over social obstacles, mysterious creativity

and the intervention of royalty.

Born to a modest family in Dolpo, the young Namsel Wangmo is a village girl who loves horses. After a death in the family, she moves in with her Aunt Dechen and Uncle Thondrup to help out in their house. Uncle Thondrup is an accomplished painter, as well as the village lama, and lets Namsel watch him as he works on his thangka paintings. Namsel

eventually becomes his apprentice and hones her skills as she travels with him to the court of neighbouring Mustang.

*Clear Sky, Red Earth* may also

**BOOK**  
Mark Turin



be read as an allegory of a different nature. As compelling as the story itself is, the book is also

an example of the strength of collaboration between two individuals from vastly different cultures: an American woman and a Dolpo man. The writer is Sienna Craig, who has been travelling to Nepal and Tibet since 1993, and has spent several years living in remote villages of Dolpo and Mustang. She has worked a freelance writer, translator, development consultant and educator, and is currently completing her PhD in medical and cultural anthropology at Cornell University. The illustrations are by Tenzin Norbu, an artist whose work is featured in museums and private collections around the world as well as several in international publications including *Caravans of the Himalaya*, *National Geographic*, and the feature film *Himalaya*, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1999.

The text is engaging and joyful, full of gentle humour and cultural insight, not to mention a small dose of feminine victory: after all, the protagonist is a young woman. The illustrations are splendid, combining fiery reds with muted and natural earthy browns. Tenzin Norbu's precision to detail, be it the saddle-bags on the horses or snow leopard's spots, makes the experience all the more immersive. His paintings are at once cartoon-like and photographic, blending impressionist pointillism with a powerful sense of perspective.

The book is rounded off with a helpful, if slightly quirky, glossary and pronunciation guide, not a standard feature of children's books but one which

will satisfy the appetites of culturally-interested readers.

It is pleasing to note that a portion of the profits from the sale of *Clear Sky, Red Earth* will help support projects in Dolpo and Mustang, funded by DROKPA, a non-profit organisation whose mission is to partner with pastoral communities in the Himalaya and Tibet to implement grassroots development and catalyse social entrepreneurship. This socially-responsible children's tale suffers from only one drawback: its price. At Rs 950, averaging around Rs 20 a page, most Nepali families with suitably-aged children and Nepal's English medium primary schools won't be able to afford it. We can only hope for a more economical edition of this delightful tale in the years to come. ●



**Clear Sky, Red Earth:**  
A Himalayan Story  
Text by Sienna Craig,  
Illustrations by Tenzin Norbu  
Mera Publications, Kathmandu,  
2004, Price Rs 950,  
pp 48, 20 colour illustrations and  
eight line drawings.

Mark Turin is Director of the Digital Himalaya Project at the University of Cambridge.  
[www.digitalhimalaya.com](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com)

# Thalara's black and white world

AARTI BASNYAT

The visual history of a village in western Nepal that is frozen in time

They are stark and beautiful, almost unreal. The fine details like a hole in the skirt or patchwork clothes and heart-warming smiles make Devendra SJB Rana's exhibition of black and white photographs "Thalara Framed" at Siddhartha Art Gallery, remarkable.

Devendra was brought up and educated in England. He wanted to know his country better, to understand life beyond the Valley. On a visit to a village, he saw the people drink water, wash clothes and defecate in the same river. Shocked by the poverty, he decided to do something in a small way. With his background in agriculture development, Devendra started a project for rural development. He chose Thalara in farwestern Nepal.

Far removed from the bubble reality of Kathmandu, Thalara is in that part of Nepal which is most neglected, most deprived and most marginalised. The disparity between the upper and lower caste dominates social interactions, and the status of women in the community and even within the family is medieval. The women do all the household work—fetching water, fodder, firewood and they are still treated like dirt. Poverty was intense and all-pervasive.

Devendra lived in Thalara for five years 1991-96 and fought daily to change the *ke garne* mindset of the local menfolk. Thalara was also Devendra's mother's home but



KIRAN PANDAY

even his own relatives failed to understand his desire to eat and live with people from the lower castes. He saw poverty face-to-face and understood what drove some into the Maoist fold later on. "People were so poor that they didn't care anymore," he says quietly, "they had nothing to lose but their lives, which they could barely sustain anyway."

Fatalism was rife in Thalara and Devendra discovered that here more than anywhere else, many felt fate is written on their foreheads. People were content to sit back and let things take their course. "It is



often easier to overcome poverty than change that attitude," says Devendra.

Devendra documented his stay in Thalara with black and white photography, a wonder he discovered at the age of eight. Now he is ready to exhibit some of this photographs. "I want to raise awareness among the people of Kathmandu, to gauge their reaction to these stark pictures of life in the villages and the desolation even before the Maoists," he says.

Devendra hasn't returned to Thalara since 1996, the year that the Maoist 'people's war' began in nearby Rolpa.

Today, the area is a conflict zone, even the few development projects have stopped, and Thalara has become more remote than ever before. But we see into the souls of its inhabitants from these pictures taken 10 years ago. In black and white, shorn of photogenic glamour, the struggle and grinding poverty is more poignant.

The exhibition is supported by the Bank of Kathmandu and Devendra plans to take it to the Netherlands also. ●

Thalara Framed at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 15-30 April. 4218048





# Adjusting Nepali time

We may be a century ahead of the Gregorian calendar but we are a month behind the sun

ABHA ELI PHOBOO

There is more to ‘Nepali time’ than just being an excuse for turning up an hour late. The new Nepali year 2062 on Thursday reminded astrologers and astronomers of the looming crisis in the Bikram Era (BE) calendar which is slipping behind the sun by more than a month.

How did that happen? Calendars are based on the earth’s motions: around its own axis, and around the sun in its orbit. But the axis has a slight wobble. In relation to the stars, the earth takes 365 days, six hours, nine minutes and 10 seconds to complete one revolution. This is the

sidereal year. With respect to its orbit, the earth takes 365 days, five hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds to complete one tropical year. This difference of 20 minutes and 24 seconds every year is caused by the earth’s wobble.

“There is a precession of the equinoxes as time goes by,” explains Rishi Shah of the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, “and every 2,000

years we have to bring our calendars forward by a month.”

In most South Asian countries, the sidereal year is called the Nirayana and the tropical is called the Sayana. Their difference is called Ayanamsa, which increases about 50.33 arc seconds every year, so every 2,150 years, equinoxes come one month ahead. The BE is based on sidereal year, which needs to be updated by one day every 70 years.

“The Ayanamsa difference is already about 24 days,” says Kedar Badu, president of Galileo Astronomical Society in Pokhara, “the difference has accumulated because the calendar hasn’t been

adjusted in 2,000 years.”

That is why Nepali new year on 1 Baisakh, which is supposed to herald the beginning of spring now falls 24 days later.

The Gregorian calendar is constantly updated though it accumulates an error of one day in about 2,500 years. And there are several ideas to get that fixed too. But as most calendars mark religious dates based on seasonal changes, astrologers and astronomers are debating on what should be done to restore the relevance of the BE calendar.

“Moving our calendar forward by a month is the only way we see of setting things right,” says Hari Narayan Malla of the Calendar Setting Committee, “it will be difficult to accept at first but people will get used to it.”

While the astronomers have done their calculations, it is the astrologers who are starting to get a bit worried about the debate. “This problem first cropped up in India 150 years ago but no one has figured out how to go about it,” says astrologer, Mangal Raj Pradhananga.

solution.”

Vedic astrology has foreseen the earth’s oscillations and concludes that in the cosmic scheme of things it balances itself out, and doesn’t see anything to get worked up about. But astronomers, being more precise, see the wobbling accumulates and conclude something needs to be done. Even if the astrologers and astronomers were to agree, the question remains: who in Nepal has the authority to update the calendar? The last time there was some tinkering needs in 1930, Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere Rana did it by edict.

The confusion has helped those who always wanted to dump the unscientific Bikram Calendar and switch once and for all to the Gregorian. On this, astrologers and astronomers seem to be in rare agreement. “Out of question,” says Malla, “that would mean resetting our fiscal year, administrative processes and where would our festivals go?” Could the Newari Nepal Sambat then be an option? “They do update their calendar but it would complicate things further because it is specific to only one community,” Malla adds.

Proponents of switching to Gregorian cite many advantages for business, tourism industry and the education system. Besides, they say there is no reason why the Dasain Tika date can’t just be referred to as 12 October instead of 26 Asoj or Ghode Jatra as 8 April instead of 26 Chait.

Badu and others think switching to Gregorian may be too radical a move for now. “What we need to do is identify the government body that will decide, otherwise correcting the Bikram calendar is a fairly simple procedure.” ●



## No royal astrologer

Since Mangal Raj Joshi died in March at age 85 Nepal has been without a royal astrologer.

“There is no royal astrologer right now,” palace sources admitted to us, “anyway, it was not a formal title so there is no procedure or anything for the appointment of the next.” No one really seems to know the rules of succession for the post of royal astrologer. “It’s definitely not hereditary,” said Ananda Raj Joshi, an environmentalist and the eldest of Mangal Raj’s five sons. “Who will advise the king on appropriate dates for major decisions is for the palace to decide.”

But the absence of a royal astrologer has also made it more difficult for a decision on what to do with the solar shift in the Bikram calendar. The

Nepal Rajkiya Panchanga Nirnayak Samiti chaired by Madhab Bhattarai oversees and controls the setting of dates and *tithis* in the calendar. Bhattarai admits calendars with wrong dates for festivals are being sold in the market, but says it is not his committee’s fault. “Publishers and distributors should have waited until the approved panchanga was out or they should have been more alert,” he told us.

Bhattarai recommends that consumers buy only those panchangas that has the Samiti’s statement and signature of approval. Mangal Raj Joshi, who chaired the six-member committee, had approved 12 panchangas for this year before he died.



# Shush Bush

## Democracy begins at home

The Bush administration has put expansion of democracy at the centre of its foreign policy. The question is, does Bush really mean it and does he genuinely understand what democracy means?

The Bush administration praised Saudi Arabia's municipal elections but what about the rights of women—including their voting rights? It welcomed the toppling of Venezuela's democratically elected leader but it continues to support Pakistan's military dictator. It criticises Russian President Vladimir Putin but

**COMMENT**  
**Joseph Stiglitz**



only after he goes against business interests. And it may raise concerns about media concentration in Russia but remains silent about media concentration in Italy.

There is a taint of hypocrisy in a more fundamental sense. The Bush administration is right to emphasise the importance of elections, without which democracy is inconceivable. But democracy entails more than periodic elections and the legitimacy of elections depends on the public's confidence in the electoral process itself. In this respect, the last two American presidential elections have hardly been models for the world.

Former President Jimmy Carter, whose Atlanta centre monitors elections around the globe, has raised questions about whether America's recent election lives up to the standards the US should uphold. Where former President Bill Clinton sought to ensure that all Americans who are entitled to vote are registered to vote, the Republicans have tried to reverse these advances, putting obstacles in the way both of registration and voting. Modern technology makes it easy to have a paper trail for voting machines, at little cost yet several states chose not to provide this

minimal safeguard.

Beyond elections, citizens can provide an effective check on government only if they are well informed. That is why right-to-know laws are so important. Of course, politicians prefer to work in secrecy without oversight. No one can imagine hiring a worker but allowing him not to inform his employer about what he is doing on the job. Politicians work for the citizenry, which has the right to know what their employees are doing.

Citizens have the right to know how their money is being spent and who is being consulted to form policy. They have the right to know why America and the world, was misled by false claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

The decision to go to war in Iraq is the most dramatic example of this but there have been many others in America under Bush. Providing drug benefits under Medicare, America's health-care program for the aged, may have been the right decision. But restricting government's ability to bargain with the drug companies was a pure giveaway and nothing justifies providing grossly distorted information about the costs—now estimated to be in excess of \$ 1.1 trillion over the next decade. This is three times the amount originally projected by the Bush administration.

Today, the Bush administration is engaged in a disinformation campaign about an impending social security crisis. While something should be done, the magnitude of the problem hardly foreshadows a crisis. On the contrary, the system could almost surely be put on a solid footing for the next 75 years with a fraction of what was spent on the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts.

Good information requires not just the right to know but also the right to tell—a diversified media. There are justified complaints about the lack of diversity in



television broadcasting in Russia, yet Bush has not opposed efforts by America's Federal Communications Commission to weaken laws on media concentration.

Democracy also requires recognising the rights of individuals. Undermining any individual's rights jeopardises everyone's rights. Yet under Bush, the US has undermined basic civil rights, such as habeas corpus, which guarantees individuals recourse to judicial review when the state detains them.

Finally, of what value is the right to vote without recognition of the right to a certain minimal standard of living as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? In countries where much of the population lives below subsistence level, buying votes is all too easy. But the only economic rights the Bush

administration recognises are intellectual property rights, putting the interests of drug companies ahead of those with life threatening diseases and the free mobility of capital, which has had such devastating effects on many countries.

America's democracy remains the envy of much of the world and it is good that the Bush administration now champions the expansion of democracy forcefully. But the administration would be far more credible and have far more success if it took a closer look at home, if it examined its own practices more honestly and if it engaged in a broader discussion of what democracy really means. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is the author of *The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World's Most Prosperous Decade*.



**SUJOY DHAR** in KOLKATA

Tollywood, the eponymous Bengali film industry based in the ill-equipped Tollygunge studios of this eastern Indian metropolis, often rushes where perhaps Hollywood fears to tread.

A new Bengali film is the talk of the town since it is based on the sexist view of essentially judging a woman's beauty and

persona by her cleavage—what men desire in women and how they react when their expectations are not met. *Shunyo E' Buke* (Empty Canvas), the second feature film by art house filmmaker Kaushik Ganguly, boldly explores the indignity suffered by a flat-chested woman.

The film's commercial release is preceded by a teaser poster campaign with the catch

line *Bhara buk na buk bhara bhalobasha* (Full breasts or a heart full of love). "It is pathetic, to judge a woman by her cleavage is horrible. No cinema has ever dealt with such a subject, so I decided to reverse that ingrained concept of external beauty," said Kaushik Ganguly, the director. "The objective of the teaser campaign is to bring this controversial social issue out of the closet. My film is against

# Skin deep

## Bold new Bengali film busts female beauty stereotypes

commoditisation of women. It is a sensitive issue and we have not resorted to vulgarity to trivialise the message," added Ganguly who cast his actress wife Churni Ganguly as the woman who suffers because of her bust line deficiency.

*Shunyo E' Buke* was shot in Khajurao, the famous temple town in Madhya Pradesh, known for its erotic relief works depicting full-breasted female forms. But some women are scathing of the film's subject. According to exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, the poster campaign and the subject of the film reflects the same old way of looking at women through the eyes of men.

"I have not seen the film, so it is not right for me to comment but from the subject I think it is another statement of how men should look at women and not

how women should look at themselves. It is like showing sympathy to women," she said. "It is high time women learned to love themselves and not look up to men for their verdict on beauty."

The protagonist of the film is an artist who discovers that unlike clay or canvas, a real woman cannot be moulded to fit his standards. "Owing to the storyline, my character can be misunderstood and branded insensitive but the director has done a fine job," said Kaushik Sen, who plays the male leading role of painter and husband. After its world premiere in London, *Shunyo E' Buke* will premiere in the US at the Indian Film Festival in Los Angeles on 21 April, the only Bengali entry this year. The film will be commercially released on 15 April in India. ● (IPS)



# Tiger at the top

## Tiger Woods regains glory as the number one golfer

I haven't missed The Masters since 1997 and a light fever wasn't going to stop me from staying up to watch its live telecast till it ended on Sunday.

The Masters is the only major golf championship played on the same golf course every year—the Augusta National Golf Club, Georgia, USA. It's a stunning golf course famous for the sleek greens with tricky contours. Players often suffer severe consequences for missing the green on the wrong side or even just being on the wrong part of the green in relation to the flag's position.

The tournament organisers had a tough time at this year's Masters. The weather caused a few hours' delay on the very first day and almost a total washout on the next. This meant that most players had to play 27 holes on each of the last two days. If you missed the last 18 holes of the four-day tournament, let me try and recreate the drama and excitement between the two golfing greats—Tiger Woods and Chris DiMarco.

After 54 of the 72 holes, Tiger Woods on 11 under was leading Chris DiMarco by three strokes. The rest of the field was far behind. Woods started with a birdie on the first hole (par four) to extend his lead to four. Both then birdied the second (par five). Woods dropped a shot on the par four fifth and both birdied the par four ninth. With nine holes to go, Woods was still leading by three strokes.

On par four 10<sup>th</sup>, both missed the green and Woods failed to make it up and down. The lead was down to two. DiMarco birdied the next and there was just one between them.

TEE BREAK  
Deepak Acharya



Then on the par three 12<sup>th</sup>, DiMarco missed the green and failed to chip and putt for a par. On the 14<sup>th</sup> par four, one of the most difficult holes, DiMarco hit his second shot to two feet from the hole for a tap in birdie. Next on the par five 15<sup>th</sup>, Woods reached the green in two but DiMarco responded from 100 yards hitting to a few feet of the pin. Both made birdies.

Going into the 178 yards par three 16<sup>th</sup>, DiMarco hit the green while Woods' ball ended up over the back. Woods made an exceptional chip from one of the most

difficult positions and DiMarco missed his birdie putt.

So at the 17<sup>th</sup>, Woods had a two-stroke cushion but proceeded to hit a wild drive that left him with no chances of attacking the flag. He failed to make it up and down and dropped a shot.

With just one shot between them on the last hole, Woods put his approach into the right hand bunker and DiMarco was just short of the green. Woods failed to make a sandy by missing an eight-footer whereas DiMarco almost chipped in and safely made his par.

Tied after 72 holes, both Woods and DiMarco had to go into a playoff to decide on a winner. The first playoff hole was a replay of the par four 18<sup>th</sup> and both tee shots found the fairway. But DiMarco was 30 yards behind Woods and his approach shot rolled down a slope and rested on the edge of the green. Woods confidently hit to 12 feet. DiMarco's chip stayed just a foot from the hole for tap in par. Then up stepped Woods who proceeded to sink that birdie putt to win the Augusta Masters for the fourth time (1997, 2001, 2002 and 2005).

Ever since he lost the US Open in 2002, Woods had a 'majors' drought and now the spell is broken. With this year's Masters, he is back as golf's top tiger, toppling Vijay Singh.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

# L'école française

## Growing up in a francophone school in Nepal is possible

AARTI BASNYAT

'B'adaboum' went the children when they fell and this was what the French School was called when it was established in 1987 by expat parents in Kathmandu who wanted a completely francophone environment for their children to study in.

Today, the school has evolved into a multinational school with 10 percent Nepali students, 40 percent French or half-French and 50 percent of other nationalities. With an enrollment of only 40 students, it guarantees a lot more individual care and attention than other international schools.

Interestingly, the school doesn't have grades but divides students into three peer groups—kindergarten (age 2-5), grade 1-5 (age 6-10) and grade 6-12 (age 11-18). This method makes it easier to teach smaller groups and helps the seniors support and assist juniors.

The curriculum here is the same as the one taught in schools in France. Books and other materials are brought from France, and being French the teachers lay a lot of emphasis on art.

"We encourage art, it gives the students a sense of individualism and mixes fun with work. As they grow older we channel this force



into more streamlined courses such as science and maths," says Sebastian Autin, principal.

Autin says his school focuses on nurturing a sense of responsibility and independence in the students. Since the grades are mixed, each child is given assignments to complete on their own. This makes them less dependent on teachers who act as guiding counselors and help rather than dictate and spoon-feed them.

The entire school goes on an annual trek to encourage appreciation of nature and to familiarise students with Nepal.

Though the language of instruction is French, English

and Nepali are also taught and the older students are offered the option of learning a third language, either Spanish or German. It strives to broaden the children's view of the world while living and studying the social, cultural and geographical norms of Nepal.

The French school plans to expand and include more Nepali students into its fold. They have an alliance with a school in Dolpo from where students come to study and interact with the French School's students. Aside from everything else, what attracts most parents is the fees here that is half that of other international schools. ●



# SURYA NEPAL

## GOLF



## Time to move with the Times...

Due to Thursday April 14th, 2005 being a public holiday, this weeks lucky draw for the Nepali Times subscription scheme has been postponed to next week (April 21st, 2005).

Thanking You  
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"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

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**...but later, contemplates a more reputable occupation - Kyaram Board Consultant.**



**KE GARNE? WHATEVER.**  
But be a heroji and just go for it.

"True happiness is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose."  
*Helen Keller, blind and deaf Miracle Worker (1880-1968)*

Next Change: Herojig continues *Job Hunting* by visiting various Ministry parking lots and having a smoke with the gate guard.

#64 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Thalara Framed** Black and white photographs by Devendra SJB Rana at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 15-30 April.
- ❖ **Sakar Shrestha's** painting exhibition at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 16-18 April, funds will be donated to Happy Homes orphanage. 4431419
- ❖ **Spirit of the Place** Art wall carpets by Susan's Collection at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel, 16-20 April, 10AM-5PM.
- ❖ **Magic Pencil** Artworks by Britain's best children's illustrators at the British Council, Lainchor. Until 6 May. 4410798



EVENTS

- ❖ **Kamlari** Theatre at Gurukul, Seto Pool, 15-21 April, 5.30 PM. 4466956
- ❖ **Spring Sale** at Mothercare Pre-school, Baluwater on 16 April, 10AM-1PM, [kapi\\_nepal@yahoo.com](mailto:kapi_nepal@yahoo.com), all proceeds to charity.
- ❖ **Chait Dasain** on 17 April.
- ❖ **China Trade Fair** at BICC, New Baneshwor, 15-18 April. 5555888
- ❖ **The Good Person of Szechwan** Staged by Studio 7 at Hotel Vajra, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 22 April-8 May. 4271545
- ❖ **Toyoto Women's Motor Rally** on 23 April. 4478301
- ❖ **Open House** at The International French School of Kathmandu, Lajimpat, on 15 April, 9AM-1PM. 4411203
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Garage sale, pet practices, stalls, food and more. <http://www.extreme-nepal.com/1905sundays.htm>
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat. Rs 499 for adults, Rs 299 for children. 4412999
- ❖ **Art workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Every Saturday. 4435939, [citygymktm@hotmail.com](mailto:citygymktm@hotmail.com)
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Every Saturday at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Rock through the Ages** at New Orleans Café, Thamel featuring Dinesh Rai, Looza and The Ed on 23 April at 7PM, tickets Rs 200. 4700736
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by JCS trio and Peter McTwister, Thursdays at Full Moon Bar, Mondays at New Orleans Café, Thamel. 4700736
- ❖ **Fusion Time** Fusion at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Live Music** Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **The Heart Breakers** at Rum Doodle, Fridays, 7PM. 4701208, 4701107
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Marhaba Mediterranean Cuisine** at Hotel Shangri-la, 15-30 April. 4412999
- ❖ **Sunshine Weekend Brunch** Free swim at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Barbeque lunch** Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Special Combo** Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- ❖ **Sekuwa and Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **LQ Cauldron** at Latin Quarter Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4254260
- ❖ **Arniko Special Lunch** at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 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
- ❖ **Delicacies** Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajrayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. [junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Fun Free Stay** one night get one Night at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742
- ❖ **Wet Wild Summer Splash** Special package with unlimited swimming hours at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Voted world's top room with a view, pure relaxation. 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Cottage** Nature, peace and bird watching at 6,000ft. 4354331
- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** at Nagarkot, special packages. 6680080
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia, special package and prices. [junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)
- ❖ **Malaysia Dream Holidays** Packages starting from Rs 45,500 per person. 4247215 extn 013-14, [malaysiaholidays\\_marco@polo.com.np](mailto:malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np)

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

Aditya (Salman Khan) is the son of an Indian ambassador in an eastern European country. Lucky (Sneha Ullal) is a 17-year-old girl fascinated by Aditya's charms. When a civil war breaks out, Lucky lands in severe trouble and Aditya is her only hope. Enter Colonel Pindidas Kapoor (Mithun Chakraborty) who helps them escape. Directed by debutante director duo Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, the film has been beautifully shot in Russia.

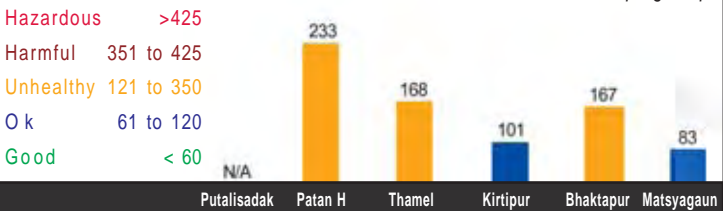
Call 4442220 for show timings  
[www.jainepal.com](http://www.jainepal.com)



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

If you are wondering where all this dust pollution suddenly came from, it is not just the emissions from the brick stacks on the city's outskirts but also wind-blown sand from the Thar desert. Together, they have sent the concentration of fine particles less than 10 microns soaring. Although the air quality in the Patan Hospital area saw slight improvement, the average PM10 concentration is still more than twice the national standard. Even Matsyagaun on the western edge of the Valley saw a 14 percent increase.

3-9 April 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.  
Source: [www.mope.gov.np](http://www.mope.gov.np)



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This dry, desert-like weather has made the daily variation in temperature the widest we have seen in a while, even for this season. On Tuesday, the maximum was 29 celsius while the minimum was only seven degrees. The huge difference will continue as the haze from the Indo-Gangetic plains move in on the westerly wind, filtering solar radiation and keeping the minima down. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows a circulation over central India which may divert the desert dust away from Nepal. This will raise the maximum temperature up to 30 celsius by next week and take the minimum up to double digits.

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

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**HOLY LIGHTS:** Devotees walking with torches around the Balkumari temple in Thimi at 4AM on 14 April to celebrate Bisket Jatra.



**CART WHEELING:** The undercarriage specialist of the Seto Machhindranath tinkers on Wednesday with the wheels as the chariot is readied for the festival next month.



**RING IN THE NEW:** People cheering in the Nepali new year at a party in Hotel de l'Annapurna on Wednesday midnight.



**TRUE TO THEIR SALT:** Dignitaries, including the Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, watch a street play at Hanuman Dhoka on Tuesday to launch Salt Trading Corporation's iodine-fortified salt program.



**GREAT HUNKS:** Mana Kumar Gurung (centre) won the Mr Dharan title at the 11th body building contest in Dharan on Monday.



# Family cycle

**I**t isn't unusual to see Mark and Becky Pickett cycling around Patan with their five children in tow. The Picketts have lived in Nepal for 12 years and they firmly believe in pedal power.

The Briton came to Nepal 20 years ago and loved it so much he returned and settled here with his family. Riding bicycles around town might have been difficult with the five little Picketts but their Australian friends gave them this trailer (pic) and it has made getting them to school much easier.

The trailer seats two children and can be pulled along by a bicycle. Another child seat is attached to the bike so three

children and a parent can ride the bicycle at the same time. Efficient and practical, this is not only an eco-friendly way of getting around but it also keeps your family healthy and fit. (Don't forget the dust mask.)

The trailer is available on various websites such as [www.missioncycles.co.uk](http://www.missioncycles.co.uk) or [www.bicycleoutfitter.com](http://www.bicycleoutfitter.com) and at the rate Mark has become such a visible exponent of pedal power, it is only a matter of time before someone in Balaju Yantra Shala makes a Nepali clone. We watched Mark pedal around with his family and were intrigued by the efficiency and ease with

which he did it.

Why didn't the Picketts just buy a car? "All our friends live around here and our children study at the British School which is down the road. It never made sense to buy a car when we had bicycles," says Mark who speaks Nepali and Newari fluently.

He just received his PhD from Tribhuban University in Nepali history, culture and archaeology and is now working on a book about Jesus Christ called *The King Has Come*. Though Nepal has become a second home, it is time for the Picketts to go back home to Britain. Sorry, the bike's taken. ●


Aarti Basnyat

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# Sasriyakaal !!

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# Forgive us our press passes

The great American philosopher, Spiderman, once said during an unguarded moment: "With absolute power comes absolute responsibility." We couldn't have put it better ourselves.

Being members of the fourth estate it behooves us to respect and follow Spidey's wisdom and exercise utmost restraint while going about our daily businesses and ask the All Mighty to forgive us our press passes.

This is why it pains us to watch colleagues with whom we share our present predicament unnecessarily rocking the boat and showing off. If I may play the devil's ombudsman here for a moment, allow me to apologise to the movers and shakers of the land for the disgraceful and rash behaviour of



that they haven't yet learnt to toe the line like some of us veterans from the Panchayat era. Who do they think they are, the great American investigative journalist, Clark Kent?

By way of illustration, I would like to point out a few items of shameful news that have appeared in the pages our national broadsheets that may demoralise the civil service, not that they aren't thoroughly demoralised already. How are objectionable items of news such as these even allowed to see the light of day?

## Nepal an 'Open Prison': Minister

BY A JAILED SCRIBE  
KATHMANDU – In a significant development in Nepali criminal jurisprudence, the government today adopted the concept of 'open prison' by amending the Prison Act 1962 to give a chance for all citizens to reform and immediately stop making asses of themselves.

As per changed legal provisions, there will be no need for prisons since the whole country will serve more or less as a correctional facility in which

mobiles are not allowed. The ordinance, which was issued to amend the 1962 Act was published in the Nepal Gazette today, and goes into immediate effect.

Inaugurating the program today was the Minister of Jungles who ceremonially unlocked the gates of Nakkhu and allowed all detainees to venture out into our nation's open prison system, but only after they handed back their cell phones. "They won't need them where they are going," he told mediapersons.

The ordinance also states that those convicted for heinous crimes will have the choice of either being remanded under house arrest or cardiac arrest, or both.

## Nepal Not Sudan: UN

NEW YORK—In what foreign policy analysts said was a major victory for Nepal, the United Nations today announced that the situation in Sudan was "somewhat worse" than in the landlocked Himalayan kingdom.

"This is a proud moment for our country that we avoided being lumped together with Sudan, Burma and Turkmenistan by the skin of our teeth," said the leader of the Nepali delegation, "if it hadn't been for our allies Cuba, Zimbabwe and Rwanda who supported us we may well have been voted into the axis of evil."

## Awardees Awarded Awards

BY OUR MULTI-AWARD WINNING CORRESPONDENT  
BIRATNAGAR—Yet more awards were awarded to awardees today as the award-giving epidemic continued unabated throughout the kingdom without let or hindrance despite the emergency situation, according to bureau reports.

However, due to pandemonium in the auditorium during the award-winning ceremony it wasn't clear till press time who the award winners were and for what specific accomplishments they were being awarded plaques and shawls. Speaking at the awards ceremony here today, the Minister for Interior Decorations said Nepal was committed to meet the millennium target of attaining Awards for All by 2015.

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