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, restating 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.
Finally, the MoU also opens up the possibility of mediating between the two forces. People who have been trapped in the middle of the conflict need to have a voice. The MoU should be a deterrence. It is important that journalists who have been accused as Maoist sympathisers just because they report about Maoists.

You spoke with army, too. What were they saying?

The Brigadier General said that if there was an investigation and molestation towards the security forces, he would rectify that. He said there wouldn’t 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 in addition to other two. They 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. Why, 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 vital work of extremely intimidating situations (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...
Mixed messages

Cautious optimism is all that the Geneva MoU deserves

T he Memorandum of Understanding that Foreign Minister Ramshahi 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 reprieve at Geneva extracted its price. Even though it was 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 recognized side of an armed internal conflict. Such a de facto recognition has given a moral boost to the strike-forming Maoist leadership. No wonder, the 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 cadres that he has achieved one of his main objectives: international recognition. With this, the legitimacy of rebel control over certain unspecified areas within the sovereign territory of Nepal is established. Members of the present cabinet will have to recast 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 whatever they want to, without any regard to what they want to say. Nepal’s human rights sector will probably benefit most from this 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. But the English publications 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 fail 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 deal political parties are once again allowed to get back to the grassroots. Activists of another anti-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 Cameron the miller for the master-bedroom of a house on fire) an ambassadour succeeded in sealing the fate of all parliamentary parties in the country. By consistently calling the Maoists a “political force”, a few western diplomats have now recognised them as such. Enemies are relatively easy to handle, dealing with friends like those in more complex business.

John Reed, a close friend of V 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 exacerbates 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.

SIDHARTHA SHAKYA’S photos in “Jumla’s refugees wait it out in Sukhert” (#242) were wrongly credited.

Correction
The crackdown and after

I

The only voice that
else is.

FM band where informative, independent thought has been
government censorship comes clandestinely and illegally over an
rocked there. No useful information either.

investments they've made in technology and licenses. No boats are

Journalists live in fear or moulder in prison. FM radio plays only
Voices for peace, reconciliation and development are silenced or
Nepali calendar and what do I find? A press and media under siege.

and more confident with time. It was also responsible and by no
popularity.

radio helped Nepali rock, folk and classical music flourish and
capital linked people of all castes and ethnic groups. They kept

Image Channel

Internet servers, they may have thought they were lowering a
Nepal cut telephone lines, switched off mobiles and blocked
is information. So on 1 February 2005, when the authorities in

HERE AND THERE

Daniel Lak

A

470, Hari Prasad Gautam

had to flee from his home

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 labourer at a
kail 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
wretchedly at his wife, Bed Maya.
Until last year, the elderly couple
received 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
dead in his village. His final:
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
head and legs.

Nepal's internally displaced
(IDPs) need no introduction: homeles, 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
fast-tracking mission. Kalin’s
recommendations will be
presented at the 62nd session of the
Commission on Human Rights
and to the Secretary to the
Government.

"Most the families are living
like beggars and starving," said
Gopal Tamang 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 6500 per
day but many failed to provide
even when they had 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,"
Tamang 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
Maysangare taking the risk to
the capital. Most survive on meagre
wages earned in menial
capital. When he couldn’t pay the
Rs 200,000 the Maoists demanded, he
tried 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
adolescent daughters all of
whom have started to sleep at the
bus park.

"We were living in a rented
house but now we’re in a
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
payment till date. "I have been
with political parties
over any compensation.

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

One of the obstacles for the
international relief agencies
to support the IDPs in Nepal is
the lack of an accurate picture or
estimating their number.
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 labourers sheltered in
the camps set up by the
government in Nepalgunj and
Surkhet in west Nepal where the
largest numbers of IDPs live.

A 2004 report by the
Norwegian Refugee Council had
documented the need for
temporary relief organisations for
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 the
IDPs.”
Leaves 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.

Accidental businessman

Karna Sakya’s positive outlook needs to spread

Three years ago, CTIZA Business Service Asdhar started a monthly business forum in Kathmandu. The idea was to invite the Nepal’s leading businesspeople to talk reflectively and candidly about their lives in business. Forty-two young private sector professionals. One invitee was hotelier and conservationist Karna Sakya, 62, who has since expanded his one-man 800-car.

Lines of fortune

Himalayan Times

Nepali companies purchased a common reinsurance pool. After 9/11 most reinsurers withdrew terrorism cover. All options are now on the table. But people used to say the insurance market was saturated. It’s time to think about expanding the cake. We need to see which has profit potential and price it accordingly. Business people need to come up with solutions for the benefit of all. That’s good teamwork. Companies here united and found in solidarity a 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 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

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’s not that we want to grab the whole existing market but we want to increase the cake size 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.

So how do you expand the cake?

The market is a huge one and the economy of the country has affected it. Another factor is the purchasing power. These are long-term social securities where if something happens tomorrow, the right thing will happen. We are trying to see which has profit potential and price it accordingly.

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 aviation and insurance related aviation. We can provide security to the tourists 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 write new 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 complaints? 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 options are now on the table. But people used to say the insurance market was saturated. It’s time to think about expanding the cake. We need to see which has profit potential and price it accordingly. Business people need to come up with solutions for the benefit of all. That’s good teamwork. Companies here united and found in solidarity a 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 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

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

hour talk into a 290 page self-published book called Soch. Written in conversational Nepali with an upbeat tone, Such (meaning conversation) is a collage of autobiography, travelogue, advice for young entrepreneurs, thoughts on progress that Nepal has made and suggestions on how Nepal can further live up to its potential. Reading the book, Sakya’s life has been an upbeat trajectory for a government technician, a businessman and a conservationist. Born in an upper class traditional Newari family, he eschewed family jewellery 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 far-west to the hills and the mountain ranges of Dolpo and the Annapurna region. His innate love for nature, together with his work to start conservation parks, showed him that Nepal was indeed the country of sheep. “Thamel was 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 a terrorist attack, he translated grief into action to raise money through walkathons, ball dances, concerts and cigarette taxes to help build Kathmandu’s general hospital.

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. “Selling” through a combination of hard work, hustle and enthusiasm and used influence to mobilize 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. Such suffers from three flaws. First, it could have been better edited for language. Second, by painting a closely drawn outlook about Nepal’s possible future, it fails to tell us just how Sakya managed to persuade a conservative, administerial and logistical difficulties that baffle most enterprises in Nepal. And third, making his influence to mobilise resources and drive and enthusiasm and used influence to mobilize 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. Such suffers from three flaws. First, it could have been better edited for language. Second, by painting a closely drawn outlook about Nepal’s possible future, it fails to tell us just how Sakya managed to persuade a conservative, administerial and logistical difficulties that baffle most enterprises in Nepal. And third, making his
Police donates blood to wounded Maoist

Interview with Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara on BBC Nepal 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 are bind 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 truth is he and the others are still working with Comrade Prachanda.

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.

Disagreement is actually unhealthy. 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 party. The views and differences are being discussed.

You call it healthy but in the 13-point disagreement Bhattarai submitted to the party’s plenum, he argued that a wrong, unhealthy and opportunistic trend was emerging.

The issues 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.

Now, even the judiciary seems to be involved in shattering the true government that believes the people’s desire for democracy will diminish by provoking public hatred towards the political parties. 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 royals and former Panchayat leaders like Surya Bahadur Thapa, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 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 censor 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 said 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 royals 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 royals who are contradicting the king.”

Himal Khabarparka, 14-30 April

Select section commander for Manmiling in Sankhuwasabha, Prem Kumar Pariyar (Comrade Tufan) had lobbed a rocket 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 him. Indeed, he gave me his own blood to save my life,” Tufan told Hind from his hospital bed, “I will never make this mistake again.”

“Holier than thou”

Naryan Wagle in Kantipur, 8 April

“I don’t believe in democracy, the king does,” said Tulsi Giri, first vice-chairman of the council of ministers. The 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.

But weren’t it on these very principles that Bhattarai had 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.

The changes are only of those we find necessary. That is our internal matter.

But you have still not answered my question: what is Bhattarai’s position after the change?

Bhattarai submitted to the party’s plenum, he argued that a wrong, unhealthy and opportunistic trend was emerging. 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.

There should be no delay in activating the democratic process.

King Gyawindru in Kantipur, 14 April
Facing the music

Radio Sagarmatha’s Ghamaraj Luitel in Kantipur, 9 April

For over two months, FM radio has been bottled up within the confines 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 FM and permit them to broadcast news. The government is reportedly planning to amend the National Broadcasting 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.

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

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 began by His Majesty King Prithvi 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, knowledge 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 uphold these 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”

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

Please email us at info@beeterally.net

The Rally will raise funds for:
Maya Foundation, Antenna Foundation & Single Women Group
Beetles for Peace in Nepal and Around the World
TOURISM

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.

“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 Mangalbazar 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

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 are not yet catching 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 are afraid to talk but tell us that they are fed up of it all.

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.

Treking in the time of

The east is red with rhododendron and red taxa.

Khaobadi terror

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
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 it 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 Namgyal Sherpa, 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 Sherpa, 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 to 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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The girl from Dolpo

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

T his illustrated book is the charming tale of Namsel, a young girl from Dolpo who exhibits her natural 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 hone s her skills as she travels with him to the court of neighbouring Mustang.

Clear Sky, Red Earth may also 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 Canvans 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 saddles 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 catalyze social entrepreneurship. This socially-responsible children’s tale suffers from only one drawback: its price. At Rs 950, averaging around Rs 20 a page, many 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.

Thalara’s black and white world

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

T hey are stark and beautiful, almost unreal. The fine details like a hole in their foreheads. People were content to sit anywhere else, many felt fate is written on their lives, which they could barely sustain any way.”

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 people, he decided to so something in 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 Canvans of the Himalaya, National Geographic, and the feature film Himalaya, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1999.

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Thalara in farwestern Nepal. Far removed from the bubble reality of Kathmandu, Thalara is in that part of Nepal which is most neglected, most deprieved and most marginalised. The disparity between the upper and lower caste dominates social interactions, and the status of women in the community and most marginalised. The disparity which is most neglected, most deprived and most marginalised.

Devendra lived in Thalara for five years 1991-96 and fought dily to change the intense and all-pervasive. Poverty was still treated like dirt. Poverty was most neglected, most deprived and most marginalised. The disparity which is most neglected, most deprived and most marginalised.

Devendra documented his stay in Thalara in farwestern Nepal. Far removed from the bubble reality of Kathmandu, Thalara is in that part of Nepal which is most neglected, most deprieved 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 is intense and all-pervasive.

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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. #41980
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. “There is a precession of the equinoxes at 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 Ayanamas difference is 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 at 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 Nynayam Mall 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 yet figured out how to go about it,” says astrologer, Mangal Raj Pradhanang. “All this debate is just propaganda,” says Madhab Bhattachari, astrologer and chairman of the Nepal Rajkiya Panchanga Nirnayak Samiti. “How can you guarantee that the change will set things right? Most of South Asia follow the Bikram Era calendar and Hindu share festivals everywhere. If you scrap a month, say around Shiba Ratri, what will you say to all those pilgrims who’ve come so far? You cannot guarantee time change because time changes everything. Places change, people change, time also changes. We are against intellectual debate but before you scare the public, it would be best if together the right people sat down to discuss and reached a 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 Shumsher Rana did it by edict. The confusion has helped those who always wanted to dump the unscientific Bikram Calendar and switch over for all to the Gregorian. On this, the astrologers and astronomers seem to be in rare agreement. “Out of question,” says Malia, “that would mean resetting our fiscal year, administrative processes and where would our festivals go?”

Could the Nepwari 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 Dassain Tikka date can’t just be referred to as 12 October instead of 26 Asij or Ghode Jatra as 8 April instead of 26 Chait.

Both sides 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.”

NAGA ELI PHOBOB

There is 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 is 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 Bhattacharai oversees and controls the setting of dates and tithis in the calendar. Bhattachari 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.

Bhattachari 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.

ABHA ELI PHOBO

Nepali time

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

ABHA ELI PHOBO

Adjusting Nepali time

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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 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 guaranteed 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 fearlessly. 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.

**COMMENT**

**Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is the author of The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade.**
Tiger at the top
Tiger Woods regains glory as the number one golfer

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 organizers 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 18th, 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

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 sixth. With nine holes to go, Woods was still leading by three strokes.

On par four 10th, 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.

Then on the par three 13th DiMarco missed the green and failed to chip and putt for a par. On the 14th 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 15th 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 16th, DiMarco hit the green while Woods' ball ended up over the back. Woods made an easier chip from one of the most difficult positions and DiMarco missed his birdie putt. So at the 17th, 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 16th 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, topping Vijay Singh.

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 48 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 Austin, principal.

Austin 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 familiarize 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.
KATHMANDU VALLEY

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

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

NEPALI WEATHER

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 Matyasguni on the western edge of the Valley saw a 14 percent increase.

Hazardous >425
Harmful 351 to 425
Unhealthy 211 to 350
Good <60

9-3 April 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.

Source: www.mope.gov.np

NOTICE TO TRAVELERS

KATHMANDU AIRPORT

The Kathmandu International Airport is being extended. The new runway will be developed on a 500-meter strip on the eastern end of the current one. The present runway measures 2,500 meters in length. The extension will increase the runway's length to 3,000 meters allowing larger aircraft to operate. The new runway will also have a width of 45 meters.

Bathing facilities will be made available in the newly built bathroom, water supply, drainage system, and other related facilities. An electrical substation will be constructed to power the new runway.

The construction of the new runway will not affect the existing one. The extension will be completed by December 2005.
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.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

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 or 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 Tribhuvan 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
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 some of our peers over the past two months. It’s inexcusable 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 of 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

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.

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.