One on one
Fallout of Deuba arrest tarnishes successful trip

KUNDAY DIXIT

King Gyanendra’s return on Friday from a week of intense diplomacy at the Afro-Asian Summit in Jakarta and the Boao Asian Forum in China could have been triumphant. His numerous photo opportunities with world leaders went some way in providing his takeover a certain international legitimacy.

The most dramatic breakthrough was his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 24 April after which the king announced that India was resuming arms supplies.

Sinha didn’t deny it, saying the request would be considered in “proper perspective”. Then came a leak from an unnamed Indian official that the prime minister had indeed agreed to “unconditionally” resume military aid to Nepal.

When this news hit headlines in New Delhi papers on Monday morning, all hell broke loose. The CPM, a key ally of Singh’s Congress-led government, lashed out saying there was no question of resuming arms supplies without restoration of democracy in Nepal. The issue became a political hot potato and less about Nepal than internal tensions within India’s left-centre coalition.

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As the defence and foreign policy establishments in New Delhi locked horns there was confusion about who was really directing policy towards Nepal. King Gyanendra came out of this looking like he had run circles around the Indians and exposed their rift. In addition, the Indian about turn on arms blew sizeable hole on the US-UK-India alliance on Nepal.

And that is how his visit would have been seen had it not been for the ham-handed arrest of Sher Bahadur Deuba early Wednesday morning and of five more prominent party leaders that afternoon.

Suddenly, it looked like Kalmunks had no intention of keeping its end of the bargain to allow the political process to resume with a progressive lifting of the emergency.

Deuba’s arrest was a godsend to the foreign policy wallas in India who could now say “we told you so” to the defence wallas. In a pointed statement South Bloc said Deuba’s arrest was “contrary to assurances” the king gave to Singh in Jakarta and even hinted that these matters were no longer viewed as Nepal’s internal affairs. For Nepal Deuba’s arrest has been a case of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

All eyes are now on King Gyanendra’s handling of the emergency which lapses on Sunday, and the “100 days” he pledged on a democracy roadmap to American ambassador James Moriarty which runs out on 11 May.
May Day, May Day!

The state of emergency imposed on 1 February will expire in the next few days. Without a parliament, it will need constitutional compromise to extend it by another three months. But why bother? After all, it was a stick where a carrot would have sufficed.

We think this emergency has outlived its usefulness, been counterproductive to state security and should be lifted as a genuine gesture to steer this country towards national reconciliation and to break our current international isolation. Few would dispute that the country is deep in a political morass, and more precipitously so, after 1990?

This failure is most telling in the case of the United States, where President Barack Obama recently calling for ‘peaceful reversion to democratic reforms in Nepal’. In the post-Christmas period, USAID presided over the ‘integrated development of Rapti Zone, the region which emerged as the epicentre of the Maoist insurgency.

Meanwhile, the ‘five party alliance’, otherwise a loose coalition of pro-people and pro-democracy politicians, came together again recently recovering from its disarray since last July when the UML deserted them to join the Deuba government. However, when its cadres went back to street protests recently there were scores of spectators watching in amusement and only a few courting arrest. This was a very embarrassing display of lack of public support for the agitation.

Junior politicians sent to the street frontlines are aware that the emergence of new parties is threatened. So, in the NC at least, pressures have mounted for ‘reorganising anti-palace and anti-royalist’ factions and getting rid of the ‘corrupt’ from the party. These calls were, as usual, buried under the aegis by party president Girija Koirala. 

Tarnished by the Dhamia and Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Girijabubhun has never committed political suicide by agreeing. His corrupt cohorts, too, wouldn’t like to be sidelined even as he continues to grace the party throne. The wily politician has washed out of the predicament once again under the aub in that it is no time to cause conflict in the party. The paradox is that at a time of such crisis, America, Britain and India, who are the ones to make common cause with such politicians at a time when common citizens are actually breathing a sigh of relief to have got rid of them. The double-standards of these same countries have tolerated dictatorialism and emergency rules everywhere else in the world.

The more-Catholic-than-the-Beer diehards in the donor community should stay by now that widespread poverty and literacy force politicians to buy votes in elections. They then use this as an open license to plunder while in office, wresting governance in the process.

This has been the crux of the problem in our practice of Westminster-style democracy. In contrast, where authority is devolved to the users themselves, transparency of management and accountability of leaders, have prevailed. Such devolution has made Nepal the world leader in pro-people and pro-democracy community at this level. Lirrability is no hindrance for people to define their problems and poverty a deterrence in participation by solving them.

Re-election is the key not only to promote genuine democracy and development but also to end the insurgency once and for all. So, Nepal’s foremost need today is to re-engineer its democracy so that the disadvantaged majority get to effectively participate in decisions that concern them. Restoring the corrupt man’s democracy will amount to setting down the people once again.

Finally, there is India. It made peace with Pakistan ‘irresolvable’ last week, now it should prevent Nepal Maoists from escaping its soil and help repatriate Bhutanese refugees who, having been shoved into Nepal over its territory more than a decade ago, have since been denied return.

The people who have suffered the most at the hands of the Maoists in the past ten years have been ordinary Nepalese, grassroots political cadre and social activists—yet it is these very people who are destroyed by the curtailment of civil liberties post-92. Why are we punishing people who are on our side? 

Just as our Constitution, laid out in the royal proclamation, was that the political class had gone astray and it was undermining the counterinsurgency campaign. Fair enough.

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**MONITORING**

CK Lal has finally written something concrete (‘Mixed messages’, #243). With the help of civil Maitis disguised as human rights advocates, militant Maoists have finally got themselves successfully recognized internationally as an ‘officially established party to the internal conflict’. The international community has also rendered a great service to the Maoists in their efforts to get recognised of having certain areas of Nepal under their control. Bravo! Look at the fate of poor Nepalis: the political parties which they believe represents them are also welcoming the Maoist problem? Human rights will probably only arise for the Maoists when they believe their political and economic interests will be served.

André Joshi, Kathmandu

**THALARA**

Aari Basnyat’s profile of Devendra SJB Rana’s exhibition of photos (‘Thalara’s black and white world’, #243) raises quite a few concerns. Exhibiting the pictures is indeed innovative but it needs to be analysed historically and analogically. Firstly, it seems the photographer was exaggerating Thalara’s neglect and deprivation. There are numerous Thalaras throughout Nepal. But this Thalara is different because it represents the house of Nepal’s feudal lords, the babushah Gins of western Nepal who dominate the area. The attitudes these people have been handed down to commoners which largely impacts the lives of the women and poor. Secondly, trying to draw the poverty of Thalara through the optic of k Cane and famine obscures the exploitative and entrenchment power relations. The k Cane mindset is not only rife among the Thalarais but is pervasive in all human beings. This subjugation mentality cannot be seen in isolation and is not restricted to the life attitude of the poor. Rather, it is a class-based society in which the sociology of famine is also hierarchical. The poor man’s famine can be ascribed to his inability to comprehend the development model from outside, whereas, a city dweller’s famine can be of his inability to secure a place to eat, a bed to sleep, a trip, a discothek in a luxury hotel or a casino. I remember one of the prime ministers of Nepal talking about a tarnish and removing not a swallower’s nest at Balwarlag in the belief that if he did so researchers would find it. The identity of Thalara poverty must not be confined to k Cane and famine. Thalara is the area where hard working people, the toiled social and economic power relations.

Jana Thapa, email

**WRONG TIME**

I do not understand the fulblabheb about Alex Perry’s coverage of the insurgency in Nepal in Time magazine which was so many glaring errors that it undermines the overall credibility of the article. Fake Street is not more ‘the tourist space’, Space Time Today is not down long ago, etc, etc. It is gratifying that Time has finally ‘discovered’ the conflict in Nepal after nearly a decade. We wish it would at least get its facts right.

Dubby Bhagat, Lalitpur

**ORDINANCE**

This is reference to the reported interview ‘Royal rejection’ (From the Nepali Press, #244) translated from the weekly Drish on which contains factually incorrect information stating that royal palace had rejected the Asian Development Bank’s proposal to bring a low through ordinance for the transfer of the management of the Nepal Water Supply Corporation. We would like to point out that Nepal Water Supply Corporation Ordinance–3 Amendment, 2005, Water Supply Management Board Ordinance, 2005 and Water Tariff Fixation Commission Ordinance, 2005 were approved on 18 April 2005. This was published in all the major newspapers on 19 April 2005. With the initiation of these Ordinances, the work of the Kathmandu Valley Water Services Development Program (KWVSSDP) is moving ahead steadily as the management contractors expected to be on board by September 2005.

Seema Rajojina, KWVSSDP

**GOOD JOB**

Generally speaking, Nepali Times is different from other media. But I am not going to thank you because that is your job – to be true to your profession. A journalist must stick to facts and must reflect public opinion and the debates within society, not the views of the state or a particular group only. You are practicing true journalism. Keep it up.

Sameer Ghimire, Sydney

**CORRECTION**

Due to a mix-up in translation in ‘Mission statement’ (From the Nepali Press, #244) Nicholas Hovin was misidentified. He is the Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists.
For the people of this far-flung and neglected region of northwestern Nepal, life has always been a struggle against cold, hunger and disease. For the past six years they have battled another foe—the Maoist insurgency. Indeed, the conflict is just another hurdle in the hard-façade lives of the Himalis. Time has stood still for the people of Daraphai, a village several hours walk away from the headquarters, Simikot. There is no government presence in Daraphai, and it is so impoverished and out of the way that even the Maoists don’t bother. Child mortality here is three times the national average, literacy is three times less. Children are undernourished, gender discrimination is rife, and there is nowhere to go when a person is sick.

“In the way I see it, it will take many generations to improve their lives,” says school principal Buddhi Sagar Neupane from Chitwan who has worked in Humla since 1998, “so many leaders have made so many promises that the people here have lost all hope of things ever getting better. It is so difficult to just stay alive in Humla, that for many villagers, the Maoists are the least of their concern.” It’s the same story in most of Humla’s 27 VDCs stretched across this arid and rugged trans-Himalayan district. While the attention is on those displaced by conflict in Nepalgunj and Kathmandu, the condition of villagers in Daraphai is actually much worse. And they are not even displaced. Humla traditionally migrate to the higher mountain pastures with their livestock as spring sets in. There, they find a fertile patch on land, and weeds and raise animals. Come October, they’re back in their villages. Daraphai’s 160 households are all getting ready to move up to high valleys like Gwale, Khod, Thaya and Naula. They say they don’t need and expect anything from anybody anymore.

“Humla has always been the last place that Kathmandu will think of,” says Jeevan Shahi, a pilot who decided to quit his job so he could raise the living standard of his home district by getting elected DDC chairman. As elsewhere, children are most vulnerable. Raised in the scroty interior of windowless homes for four to six months in a year, four out of 10 never live to be five because of acute respiratory infections. Most of those who survive never go to school. Of those who do, most drop out after six months to help the family at home.

Back in Simikot, the airport is now open after the snowbound runway stopped flights for most of winter. Government employees here depend on the flight for food supplies and sometimes have to live on one meal a day to conserve supplies. They feel 70 million rupees spent on the airport is a giant waste. “The conflict has been an excuse for the government not to undertake any development projects in the villages. So the little that gets done is confined to Simikot.” Food has always been the overriding concern for generations of Humla. From the moment they wake up in the morning, people have to worry about how to find food. The only teacher in Humla’s remote Humla, more than half of that pays the salaries and allowances of the 420 teachers here. Most of that money is due any day, but they disappear for months.” The government has a budget for Rs 70 million in education in Humla, more than half of that pays for food. “The government has to find a way to give something to the people,” says a local teacher.

“Teachers are becoming irresponsible,” agrees Madhu Priyadarshi, a civil servant. “They are not even showing up on time, no one is coming to help them. “I always thought of Humla as the last place that Kathmandu would think of,” says Mahila Illam leader Ram Raja Shahi: “You know how to find food,” says a local teacher. “I always thought of Humla as the last place that Kathmandu would think of,” says Mahila Illam leader Ram Raja Shahi: “You know how to find food,” says a local teacher. “I always thought of Humla as the last place that Kathmandu would think of,” says Mahila Illam leader Ram Raja Shahi: “You know how to find food,” says a local teacher.
The landlord syndrome

A rule-bound competitive market can keep excesses in check

There are many ways to interpret why things are the way they are in this country. But in business terms, it helps to see Nepal struggling between two models of governance: the owner of a ‘landlord model’ and the competitiveness of a market-driven ‘share-holder model’.

Historian Mahesh Chandra Regmi has shown that throughout much of its history, the Nepali state has acted as a landlord. To finance wars and to pay for its indulgences, it collected rents from those who lived within its borders. It rewarded officers by giving them jagir in the form of land. Those who were not absolutely loyal had their properties confiscated and were even ended. Activities of the so-called disloyal sections were banned until 1990. Since the state exercised all-consuming power over their daily lives, Nepalis saw themselves not as citizens but as tenants whose self-interest was to be on the right side of the landlord lest they got punished or thrown out.

In theory, the Jana Andolan of 1990 gave the tenants a stab at becoming citizens to finally press for the ‘share-holder model’ through freely elected political representatives. There were fragments of hope in, say, the achievements of community forestry, diversity of FM radio news broadcasts and bits of economic reforms. But over time, it became clear that the representatives too had disappointingly degenerated into neo-landlords, accountable only to the myopic interests of party leaders. As they fought with one another for money and power in a continual haze of finger-pointing suspicions, they collected disgust, lost public support and eventually ended their landlord status. Looking back, their greatest failure lay in not pushing for more competition-oriented market reforms, which would have quietly made the emergence of any other landlord difficult in the future.

Take something abstract like press freedom, for instance. They are gone because the new landlord has decided that the tenants don’t need them. And activists are now reduced to either championing the ideals of press freedom or going on a global road trip to take grievances to audiences abroad. But consider an alternative. Had there been a more direct and diverse foreign investment in the businesses of radio, television and print media, chances are that no landlord would have been able to squash the press. After all, it’s easy to make arbitrary rules to inflict harm on purely Nepali-owned businesses. But the more such businesses are bound by globally accepted business practices through a horde of foreign investors and domestic shareholders, the more difficult it becomes for any landlord to act in ways which could harm that majority’s interest. If that should happen, the investors would signal their anger by pulling money out of the country in no time.

Take telecom as another example. At a time when even vegetable farmers in Bangladesh have the luxury of choosing from eight competing phone service providers, Nepali businesspeople have none. But again, consider the alternative. Had the elected governments thought of their constituents, let go of their greed to keep on milking the state-run telecom provider and promoted private and joint-venture telecom competitors to come on board faster, not only would millions of Nepalis be connected to one another at cheaper rates today but future landlords would have been allowed a free market here and coordination-wise—to seize the control of all phone lines in one day.

Some Nepali democrats argue for decentralisation of power while professing a knee-jerk distrust of markets. It’s time they started appreciating how a rule-bound competitive market acts as an instrument that decentralizes power, checks against the excesses of a capricious landlord and makes citizens’ voices count through the transparency model of governance.

Sunlight in Humla

“It is better to light one lamp than curse the darkness”

BHARAB RISAL

The Light Up Humla Campaign in 2004 started off as a ‘crude idea’ between some of our Humla friends over tea. The plan was simple: provide light to all residents of Nepal’s remote and least-developed district through solar power. How to do it? We felt it would be easy to find 7,000 good souls in the country. The Campaign’s strategy was to enthuse one Nepali who enjoys the benefits of modern electricity to support another who is living in darkness.

Sure enough, support poured in, first from a network of friends, then as word spread from Nepal to India and all over the world. By the end of five months of 2004, 50 households already had light—46 of them belonged to Dalit families and the rest were underprivileged households. By the end of 2005 an additional 500 households will get electric lamps and by 2006, another 5,000 households will be added.

“The light from the sun has made life much easier,” says Karma Damai of Simikot, one of the first beneficiaries of the light system. “I used to go to Bista’s house to sew clothes all day, now I can work late into the night and earn wages during the day. It’s much easier to feed my family.”

Indeed, it does look like a simple nine watt neon lamp in the house is all that’s needed to reduce poverty in some cases. In others, children can do their homework without tiring their eyes and mothers find others, children can do their homework.

Some parts of Humla have electricity from micro-hydro projects but the power is erratic. And although the Hydro powerplant is scheduled to be completed by July 2005, it will take time for the power to reach outlying villages. In the meantime, the Light Up Humla Campaign is gaining popularity. Even in the district headquarters of Simikot, most people have now come to rely on solar electricity.

It costs Rs 4,000 to provide a set of solar cells, battery and neon lights for each household and this is donated by Nepal. Through the campaign, it is estimated that in 1,000 Humla households, 12 percent of the total can afford the Rs 4,000 and another 900 households already benefit from micro-hydro projects. The campaign thus targeted 50 priority households in 2004, 500 in 2005 and 5,000 in 2006.

Journalist Bharab Risal is the co-founder of the Light Up Humla Campaign. 01-4230952, 01-4280317

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

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Baburam's salvo to Prachanda

Letter from Baburam Bhattarai to Prachanda Nepal, 29 April

Respected Chairman Comrade Prachanda
CPN (Maoist), Central Office

Expecting necessary cooperation from the central office, I am going to inform you and register my opinion on some issues.

During our last central committee meeting, I and some other comrades had opposed the concept of a two-line struggle within our party, which is against our great people’s war and Ma-Le-Ma-im and Prachandapath. The two-line struggle has been conducted in a very unhealthy way, promoting groupism. But considering the complexities of class struggles in the past, we thought those issues should be set aside that are potentially so divisive and serious.

Despite this, in certain circles, an internal struggle has been carried out in an unhealthy way, there have been violations of accepted norms, responsible comrades are spreading Illusions and there have been activities that are against the well-being of the revolution. Raising serious concerns about all these, I demand that the central office control such activities.

The discussions and presentations on Prachandapath during the central committee meeting were against its (Prachandapath’s) main spirit. All honest comrades during the central committee meeting were against its central office control such activities. Being violations of accepted norms, responsible comrades have been carried out in an unhealthy way, there have been divisive and serious.

We should set aside issues that are potentially so complex. But considering the complexities of class struggles in the past, we thought those issues should be set aside that are potentially so divisive and serious.

I forwarded my solid opinion during the central committee meeting. Since there were serious differences and doubts in the leadership and mainly after my resignation episode, I had an informal talk with comrades chairman outside the meeting hall.

During the meeting, we had an agreement that for now there would be an understanding on a simple principle that the party, army and the front will have integrated and centralised leadership of the proletariat. In line with that understanding, both of us made presentations during the meeting.

But contrary to this, the minutes of the meeting contained sentences that have double meanings implying that the party, army and the front has a single leadership. And such information has been forwarded down into the party’s rank and files in different ways. These things I have come to know very recently. If that is the case, I do criticise myself for not hearing, looking and reading the minutes carefully after the meeting. I state my differences with such a decision and would like to register a note of dissent through the central office. I am taking these decisions because the idea of having a single leadership in the party, army and the front is against the consensus of our party’s second national convention and the development of the republican system of the 21st century.

Some circles in the party have forwarded the argument that without such single leadership, the enemy will get room to play and that such leadership will make the plan ofategic counter attack successful. Such an argument has no weight and is not based on any principle. If such a concept is spread further, we will have to bid farewell to the sovereign committee system of the party. Such an argument will not make the plan of setting of collective leadership. If we choose that option, it is clear that it will be very dangerous and counterproductive.

Viewing the arrests that took place in New Delhi, Siligur and Patna as part of a series and with all bad intentions implicating a layer of the party. As being behind them will not only make the internal struggle unhealthier, it will also intensify factionalism. There are sinister indications that this is happening.

That is why I request for the necessary initiative of the central office to stop the efforts of linking the arrests in India with the internal struggles in the party.

With revolutionary regards,
Laidhoj

Unnecessary

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 April

The police initiation at the UML office has created havoc in Nepal’s political circles. This will only widen the ever-growing gap between the government and democratic political parties. Such an incident will intensify the existing negative image of the government. There was really no need to view the gathering of UML leaders and workers as negative because they were all assembled only to mourn the death of their late leader Man Mohan Adhikari’s widow.

The way police took illegal action—entering the office without a warrant, kicking office doors, asking for keys to the accountant’s office—only shame the government, which has been making commitments in international forums towards respecting democracy, protection of human rights and respecting press freedom. Democracy will be jeopardised if people are not allowed to gather peacefully. This will only provoke more criticism towards the government at a time when international community has been condemning the political events following February First.

Vampires

Rajbansi, 26 April

Some drug addicts in the Boudha area are sucking human blood in the worst way possible. They are trying to kill children who have been victimised. Nil Kantha Sedai (name changed) is one of them. He says, “Where they are overclosed and have nothing to eat, they suck blood from our bodies.” Showing his ched that has been pierced with a blade, Sedai said the addicts sucked from his wound for 10 minutes.

Sedai named addict ‘Naran’ and others as the culprits. A narcotics control official thinks the addicts turn to being vampires to get a high when they can’t find drugs. Addicts extort money from street children who earn from selling plastic and glass for recycling.

No emergency

Editorial in Samast, 26 April

The king said in his February First royal proclamation that he had to take over and declare a state of emergency to restore peace and strengthen democracy. Three months later, is the country closer to this goal? The answer doesn’t look positive.

The gap between the king and the political parties has widened since February First. This is unfortunate for peace and democracy and was created by the king seizing power and declaring a state of emergency. A way out of this situation would be to lift the state of emergency, an agreement between the parties and the king from child victims, and the release of all political prisoners. Internationally and especially in the eyes of democratic nations, the country has become a pariah state. It is clear that half a dozen advisers are telling the king that he can ride out this international criticism by ignoring it. But even they must be aware of the international ramifications of this isolation and that their advice is harmful for the long-term future of the country and for constitutional monarchy. But they are giving it anyway.

By using emergency provisions, the royal commission is pushing legal boundaries for politically-motivated character assassination. On the other hand, bringing in ex-pawankhas into the governance structure has introduced unaccountability and sycophancy back into the system.

An end to this three-month political exercise will bring a program-based system that can take us towards resolution. Since the king has taken all power in his hands, it is up to him to take this step.

Going alone

Shambhu Shrestha in Dristi, 26 April

A king never makes mistakes. That is what they say but all that changed after February First. The king’s move sparked protests from America, Britain and India and several European nations, resulting in aid cuts and suspension of military shipments. The events that followed made it easier for the king to assume the role of ruler.

Recently, at an international forum, the king justified his move to curb terrorism but the reality is that Nepal’s image in the eyes of the international community will never be positive until democracy, freedom of press and civil liberties are restored. The international call for guaranteeing these values cannot be seen as interference in our internal affairs. Commitment to democracy expressed whether in Jakarta or Baku will mean little unless they are put into practice for the good

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The (Indian) suspension of regular supply of arms to Nepal has been removed without any condition.”

India’s External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh in Rajbansi, 26 April

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the Afro-Asian conference and his municipal elections, his speech at the following events: appointment of automatic Rana rule, 30 years of partyless Panchayat regime and multiparty democratic system were unable to solve these problems, consequently leading to the Maoist rebellion. It wasn’t just caused by 14 years of multi-party democracy though it is true that the political parties were unable to seriously address these aforementioned causes.

This is where the parties proved themselves failures. But no politics can be considered democratic by sidelining political parties. The king himself believes that the only alternative to democracy is democracy. Nowhere in the world has peace been restored by suspending democratic processes to eliminate terrorists. After February First, we have experienced a ‘directed democracy’ that has deprived the nation of political rights, human rights, civil liberties and press freedom. So far, the king is moving along with his roadmap without any consensus or dialogue. We don’t know where this will lead Nepal.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Bhattacharya, 27 April

Directly by Maoist leaders has created a rift among Prachanda and pro-Prachanda groups. The praxis of the Maoist camp is at a disadvantage and the Prachanda faction has already declared the areas in Gandaki under control by Baburam as ‘Zone of Traitor’. They are also holding the Balkamp camp responsible for the arrest of leaders took place soon after Pant bid them farewell and put for Patna. Bhattarai is believed to have expressed disappointment over the action taken by the Maoists against his wife, adding to the disharmony in the leadership.

Maoist disunity

Bhattacharya, 27 April

Discord between Maoist leaders has created a rift among Prachanda and pro-Prachanda groups. The praxis of the Maoist camp is at a disadvantage and the Prachanda faction has already declared the areas in Gandaki under control by Baburam as ‘Zone of Traitor’. They are also holding the Balkamp camp responsible for the arrest of leaders took place soon after Pant bid them farewell and put for Patna. Bhattarai is believed to have expressed disappointment over the action taken by the Maoists against his wife, adding to the disharmony in the leadership.

India’s role

Jana Astha, 27 April

Even after the Indian government announced it was reviewing its suspension of military support to Nepal following the king’s February First move, it was quietly supporting the RNA. On the day of the announcement, three RNA aircraft engineers and a pilot were on their way to a training program as part of Indian military support. It is true that the guns and bullets were not supplied after the date but by then, RNA had already received enough ammunition. Prior to the king’s move, the RNA had actually already made its stance not to buy India-made INSAS (Infantry Small Arms System) rifles (pc) unless they were provided free. Regardless of this, those who know India well were not surprised to hear the change in India’s attitude in just three months about its Nepal policy. India definitely wants to modernise the RNA but for its own vested interest: Indian INSAS rifles are considered of such low quality that its own army doesn’t want to use it in Kashmir. Even the Indian army assigned in UN peacekeeping tasks don’t use the 5.56 calibre INSAS rifles and instead carry AK47s though it doesn’t necessarily comply with NATO standards. Nepal has so far bought between 15-15,000 INSAS rifles.

Ultimately, India will lose by cutting off military relations with Nepal. This is why New Delhi, which had forcefully set rollback of February First as its condition, suddenly changed its mind to resume military support without conditions. This happened as a Nepali military team headed to China to discuss purchasing of helicopters, planes and other weapons. India needs to export military hardware for this it has already established Nepal as a market. India’s main intention of military support to Nepal is to ensure that it has the kingdom’s support during times of India’s need. Long ago, when Nepal asked India to remove its checkpoints from the border, the Indian response was that Nepal would not be able to stop the Chinese if they crossed the border. According to a military expert, India is modernising Nepal’s army to be a buffer against the Chinese. India has not changed its policy towards Nepal since 1947: as long as its interests are met it will support any regime as is evident from its support to the Panchayat government. In the last three months there have been protests against India by the so-called nationalists of Nepal. Now that India’s support will resume and we will have to see whether these same people who often talk about nationalism will also change their position towards India.
Kanchenjunga and Makalu

**Many Mountains:**

Makalu and Kanchenjunga on the far horizon as seen from the southeast ridge of Chomolungma (above). The awesome north face of Kanchenjunga from the site of the 1955 British expedition (right); Kanchenjunga first-timer George Band and Norman Hardie arriving in Kathmandu on Wednesday for the celebrations (below).

**ABHA ELI PHOBOO**

Chamlingzampa has logged all the headlines. The first ascent of Mt Everest was top news and so was its celebrity-packed golden jubilee celebration in Kathmandu in May 2003. The ascents of Makalu and Kanchenjunga were no mean feat and some would argue those ascents in the spring of 1955 were even more difficult than the South Col route up to the top of Everest.

Lionel Terray and Jean Couzy of a French expedition led by Jean Franco were the first to summit Makalu on 15 May 1955 after they had to turn back a year earlier. France and the other members of the expedition conquered it the next day along the north ridge.

Ten days later, a British expedition led by Charles Evans reached the summit of Kanchenjunga. But having promised to respect the religious belief of the Sikkimese, they stopped a few metres short of the peak. The Sikkimese believe that the deity of the mountain is throned at the summit. Currently, there are two Spanish expeditions on Makalu and a Swiss team on Kanchenjunga.

Kanchenjunga (8,586 m) is the third highest mountain in the world and the second highest in Nepal. Its name means five treasures of snow, referring to its five summits, all over 8,000 m. The Sikkimese believe that the deity of the mountain is throned at the peak and therefore, it is consecrated ground. The Sikkim government has banned expeditions to Kanchenjunga main peak and all climbs have to be carried out from the north face on the Nepali side of the border.

The fifth highest mountain in Makalu (8,463 m) a monolithic peak of pink granite with sheer unclimbed faces on all sides. Located on the Nepal-Tibet border, all ascents have been carried out through the easier southeast and north ridges. The two mountains are separated by the Arun gorge in eastern Nepal.

George Band and Norman Hardie of Charles Evans’ and members of Jean Franco’s expedition team are in Kathmandu to take part in the golden jubilee celebrations. Other famous climbers and mountain experts will also be in town as the city comes alive next week.

On 15 May and 25 May, Kathmandu will host a civic felicitation at Tundikhel for the summitteers. All gathered people will then proceed to Darbar Square for the charity procession.

The famous chariot procession at Hanuman Dhoka during the Chomolungma celebration in 2003 was such a hit that an encore was planned. “We did it for Everest, Cho Oyu and since it has become a norm we’ll also do it for Makalu and Kanchenjunga,” says Jurita Gurung of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA). All this will be followed by a seminar, formal felicitation of summiteers by the government and a dinner reception.

“The NMA’s President, Ang Tsering Sherpa says: “Makalu and Kanchenjunga are special mountains plus right now we need to promote Nepal and help people that expedition teams don’t face problems.”

Nepal Tourism Board is also all geared up to use the anniversary to highlight Nepal. “We will do all we can to promote Makalu and Kanchenjunga,” says Aditya Baral of NTB. “these mountains are, after all, two of Nepal’s biggest icons.”

Purna Tandrah of the Mountaineering Section at the Ministry of Tourism believes slashing fees by half for the two mountains will help boost tourism. “It’s part of our effort to make climbing in Nepal more attractive,” he says. “we regard mountaineering and trekking as important elements in injecting income to remote areas.”

Since 1995, the areas surrounding both mountains have prospered although not as much as Khumbu: “The impact is obvious, the villagers have developed because of the tourism multiplier effect,” says Ang Rita Sherpa who worked for the Makalu Barun National Park. Lakpa Sherpa from the foothills of Makalu used to be a goatherd but went on to become the second Nepali woman to have climbed Mt Everest after Purna Chhazu Sherpa.

If only the conflict could be resolved, the Makalu Barun National Park and the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area would be major draws for trekkers since they are relatively unspoilt and more isolated. But even with the conflict, there are plenty of mountaineers and trekkers visiting these areas. The trekkers leave climbers alone as long as they pay a Rs 5,000 tax.

“The base camp areas are perfectly safe,” says Ang Tsering Sherpa, “and the increased frequency of domestic flights have made things better for tourists.”

The garbage problem of the Himalayas is now a thing of the past as expeditions are required to bring back their trash.

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Alan Hinkes began his Challenge 8,000 mission of the Big 14 mountains in 1989. One by one, he has conquered 13 of the mountains; Chomolungma, K2, Lhoste, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Dhaulagiri, Manaslu, Nanga Parbat, Annapurna, Gasherbrum, Broad Peak, Shisha Pangma and Gasherbrum II. Though he attempted Kanchenjunga last year, health problems made him turn back from the summit.

Last week he set out again to conquer the peak and spoke to us before departure from Kathmandu. “Kanchenjunga is a tough one but I hope to succeed this time,” he said. Hinkes climbed Makalu in 1998 and saw a lot of oxygen cylinders with 1955 printed on them in tiny letters along the way. They were leftovers of the first French expedition 50 years ago. Says Hinkes: “I wanted to take one as a souvenir but they were too heavy. They are not garbage just landmarks of time on the mountain.”
This month is the 50th anniversary of the first ascents of the world’s third and fifth highest mountains.
Two Himalayan travelogues

Michael Palin and Deb Mukharji go walkabout in the hills

Michael Palin (top) and Deb Mukharji. Picture of Kangtega floating on clouds.

Y ou saw the movie, now here is the book. For those who have watched Michael Palin’s latest travel documentary series on the BBC, Himalaya, here is an opportunity to retrace his footsteps through the pages of a book of the same name.

This hero of the Munty Python and A Pint Called Wanda has in his retirement taken to epics

...travels which are turned into travelogues: with Around the World in 80 Days and Pole to Pole. This time he has travelled across the Himalaya arcs from the Pakistan-Afghan border right across Nepal, India, Tibet and Yunnan to backtrack into Assam, Bhutan and then into Bangladesh. Along the way, he milled a yak and bathed an elephant, flew an ultralight past the Annapurnas, his team got briefly kidnapped by Maoists near Pokhara and he huffed and puffed his way up the Rongbuk Glacier to Chomolungma Base Camp.

But even in the most gruelling stretches, like when he is wheezing through altitude sickness at Annapurna Base Camp, Palin seems to be having fun and shares it with his viewers and now his readers. In Nepal, his guides are the multi-sumiteering Wongsu Sherpa who shows him around the mountains, Pritam Punke who takes him to get dasani tika from King Gyanendra and Komita Didi who is quoted as telling Palin in probably the most notable instances of famous last words: “Nepal’s press has never been free.” Palin’s irreverence to royalty comes clearly and some of his rude remarks about the Namaste tika ceremony are unprintable in this review because Nepal’s press is no longer as free as Dixic

Now we know why Mukharji was so eager to get out. The former ambassador is a keen photographer and some of the pictures he has reproduced in The Magic of Nepal are works of art. The book itself is a labour of love, and this was one Indian ambassador who had fallen in love with the serenity and grandeur of Nepal the other was his successor, Shyam Sam. “There is no other place in the world where a room with a bed and warm dinner room awaits the visitor at over 15,000 ft,” Mukharji writes. Since the produce to the book is written by Stan (Lonely Planet) Armington, Mukharji can be forgiven for sometimes sounding like a trekking guidebook. And you wish he had written less and blown up his pictures more.

Pictures like the one of the mountains from the north while in a speeding jeep on the Tibetan plateau and be muses: “Besides being the source of life, giving water and being the abode of the Gods, the majesty and mystery of the Himalaya also have something to do with their remoteness, the valleys and gorges to be traversed. Sometime later, the Nepal Himalayas will be crisscrossed by highways too and these mountains will never be the same again.

The fabulous stage design, imaginative props and costumes (only Mangal could think of using a trowel for the divorse headgear) and smooth transitions between scenes have always been Studio 7’s hallmarks. But they lend well to Brecht’s “alienation” effect on stage. As intended, the audience retains critical detachment. Brecht evokes theatre to create a forum for social debate and Sabine has justified this essence, moulding to create a forum for social debate and critical detachment. Brecht evokes theatre to create a forum for social debate and Sabine has justified this essence, moulding...
NAWALPARASI—It has been three weeks since the women of Somani in Parsa district are immobilized. The terror is vivid, the pain of loss of loved ones still tearing. They are unable to sleep, eat or speak. It was two days after the Nepali new year on 16 April and the villagers of this hamlet 20 km southeast of Butwal were attacked by the Maoists of the anti-Maoist committee, killing 30 and injuring 700. Somani in Parsa district are still in shock and mourning. They have not even eaten or slept in three weeks but the women of Somani are extremely patriotic. They have formed a pratikar committee to protect the nation. They have met many who hadn’t heard of the.Connecticut. Casualties were 43 but the women of Somani are still in shock and mourning. They have not even eaten or slept in three weeks but the women of Somani are extremely patriotic. They have formed a pratikar committee to protect the nation. They have met many who hadn’t heard of the.
France’s ‘Non’?

GENEVA—If public opinion polls are to be believed, on 29 May the French will reject the European Union’s draft constitutional treaty. Because all EU member countries must ratify the constitution, a French ‘Non’ will, in effect, kill it. Amazing as this turn of events seems, it has been long in the making. France is not just a founding member of the European Community but has also been the driving force behind all major steps toward ‘ever closer union’. But French opposition was also predictable, as one more challenge, at a time when France has veered away from Europe and now finds itself increasingly isolated. Europe has also moved away from France through successive enlargements but the main roots of the estrangement lie in France itself.

China’s Premier Wen Jiabao went on a four-day visit to India during which 11 agreements were signed including a comprehensive five-year strategic cooperation pact. In addition, Wen announced that China would support India’s bid for a permanent seat on an expanded UN Security Council and opposed the inclusion of Japan, which the United States supports for a Council seat. With over a third of the world’s population and two of the globe’s highest economic growth rates, an alliance between China and India could be a serious factor in world politics. While both are developing countries—many of whose people remain impoverished—they also boast impressive capabilities in information age technologies both for civilian and military purposes. An Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh put it during Wen’s visit, “India and China can together reshape the world order.”

The two countries’ recent rapprochement marks a huge change from the hostility that bedevilled their relations following their 1962 war over a disputed border in the Himalayas. In 1996, when India tested its nuclear weapons, the defence minister referred to China, and then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke of its neighbouring country as India’s number one enemy. By contrast, India is now referring to the need to learn from China. Trade between the two giants has grown from $100 million in 1994 to nearly $14 billion last year and India’s minister of commerce and industry has predicted that it will double by this decade’s end. One agreement signed during Wen’s visit was a new set of guiding principles on how to handle boundary disputes between the two countries. While improved relations and diminished prospects for conflict are welcome, relations between India and China are more complex than they appear at first. Not long before the visit of the Chinese premier, India hosted US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Ever since President Bill Clinton’s visit to India, last especially under President George W Bush, the US has moved from relative indifference to India to the development of a strong strategic relationship. Secretary Rice made this plain during her March visit, including a willingness to consider trade in high technology, nuclear energy and co-production of fighter aircraft such as F-16s and F-18s. Shortly after Rice’s visit, the US announced that it would honour a long-standing promise to sell F-16s to Pakistan. Rhetoric about ‘the world’s two largest democracies’ is not new but fits with the Bush administration’s new emphasis on promoting democracy. The increasing role of the Indian diaspora in the US, particularly in the information industries, also had an influence, as has the rise in India’s surging economic growth. Equally important are strategic concerns about terrorism, regional power and the rise of Chinese power.

The rise of China is a major factor in the politics of the twenty-first century. China has tripled the size of its economy in the past two decades and has been increasing its military strength. While both India and the US seek trade and good relations with China, both are aware, and wary, of China’s growing strength. Thus, both seek to hedge their bets and what better way to do so than by improving their strategic relationship?

As one Indian strategist put it, “By 2050, we envisage the US, China and India as the three largest powers in world politics. We don’t want a China or a US dominated world but if we had to choose, it would be easier for us to live with the latter.”

While improvement in India-China relations is welcome, it is unlikely to herald the beginning of an India-China alliance against the US. It is more likely represents another move in India’s age-old tradition of managing regional balances of power. • Project Syndicate

Joseph S Nye is Distinguished Service Professor at Harvard and author of The Power Game.
High on low

Managing minimum score is the way to go

When you start playing golf, you dream of getting the ball to fly. Once that is done and a little consistency maintained, you will find yourself on the golf course more and more. From there on, your focus becomes a never-ending journey of trying to score lower and lower.

I have been watching quite a few rounds of golf with weekend golfers. One common phenomenon among them and even intermediate players was that on most rounds they play, their score cards are usually spoilt by occasional 8s and 9s (triple and quadruple bogeys), running what may have been a decent scorecard.

How and why does this happen so often? In most cases, it is not lack of ability but a dreadful lack of course management. And what exactly is course management?

When running a business, good managers need to have both vision and skills to take their company ahead step-by-step. They must also have the ability to make the right decisions in a given situation by first analysing and then charting out possible consequences based more on facts than on emotions. Just as you would do this in business, you do it in golf too. You need to make the right emotional decision when planning your round and choosing the shot you wish to attempt.

For example, you are faced with a tee shot on a par five to a reasonably wide fairway where there is OB (Out of Bounds) on the right side and rough on the left. Emotionally, you feel like ripping it down the fairway, even if you feel like ripping it down the centre, even though you know you might not make it. However, it is wiser to aim left of centre and accept the consequences of a slightly errant shot ending up in the rough. The alternate possibility of slicing out of bounds is too severe a consequence to entertain.

Another example: most short par fours have fairways that narrow down and are designed to discourage a long tee shot. Yet most amateurs take out their driver without thinking and end up in deep trouble. Often, they don’t even consider using their much more accurate five-wood or a long iron that would land them in the safest part of the fairway, keeping them ‘alive’ in the short grass with a greater attacking chance at the green.

Similarly when hitting towards the green, if the cup is cut out on the right edge, instead of attacking the flag with a chance of missing the green on the right, it is better to take the centre part of the green or even miss the green on the left. A longer putter or a chip with plenty of green to play with is less daunting than a short chip with no place for the ball to stop rolling.

If there is trouble behind the green then play short of the hole. If there is a water hazard before the green, ensure you are not playing for the front edge. Even watched Tiger Woods or other top players teeing off with an iron on a par four? What they are doing is simply driving the shot. The greens is that the right side of the green. Instead of attacking the flag, the approach is to play it a little away from the cup and then chip it in short of the green.

Players need to be aware of their individual shot-making ability, plan and play accordingly. All these are a part of good course management. Sounds rational when you read it but it is amazing how often it is forgotten or ignored on the course.

Sensible course management always brings your scores down. Schedule a lesson with your favourite professional and ask him to explain each shot from the perspective of managing the course better. You will be surprised at how much you can learn.

Our boys bring home the cup

Determination, dedication and discipline: Coach Dias

A time when there is so little to cheer about, every little victory helps. The resident Nepalis of Abu Dhabi who had packed the Sheikh Zayed Stadium for the finals of the Asian Cricket Council’s U-15 Asia Cup on 22 April went wild. There were young Nepali boys thrashing Afghanistan by six wickets.

On the field, the boys had gone geographically crazy taking laps around the stadium waving the Nepali double triangle proudly. They rolled on the ground, jumped and hugged each other. It was a dream come true and a promise kept for the young Nepali boys. They wanted to savour every moment of this victory and seemed reluctant to want to leave the stadium.

“You can only imagine the joy we felt,” recalls captain Sashi Keshari, “an amazing feeling. The Afghans had lost to us earlier in the Group D league-round match and challenged us. They had arrived late that night and said they could do better. We weren’t nervous really, just under a lot of pressure because many thought they would win the second time.”

The pressure increased when the opposing team opened well and Nepal’s coach Roy Dias, who is from Sri Lanka, says. “After Afghanistan lost to our team the first time, they had been improving with each game. Our edge was that we had a good plan and luck on our side.”

The night before the match, our boys had been planning a game strategy, working out their opponent’s strengths and weaknesses while identifying their own. If their game plan worked as they had hoped, they knew they would win. And they did.

“Our team was very strong and we had quite a few all-rounders. We had great batsmen, bowlers and fielders,” says Pradeep Karki, assistant manager of the team and assistant secretary of Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN). “CAN has steadily been increasing the standard of Nepali cricket players. This U-15 cricket team was chosen after nearly nine months of selection matches with players from various cricket development regions.”

CAN has divided Nepal into six cricket development regions: Biratnagar, Birgunj, Kathmandu, Bhairawa, Nepalganj and Bhaitadi. Each club in the various districts under these regions participated in the district level matches. The winners advanced to the regional level before being gifted against each other for the national team.

Only 33 make it to this stage, out of which 18 are chosen from three triangular matches. The final 14 are then put in closed camp for training.

This U-15 team trained for 20 days, the first phase was conducted in Birgunj and the last 10 days in Kathmandu. “Training in hot and humid Birgunj helped,” says Keshari, “Abu Dhabi wasn’t that bad because we had grown used to playing in the heat. And the many matches we played before we were finally selected boosted our confidence. Each selected player had a special talent and as a team, we were more balanced than before.”

The intensive training included upping the performance of each individual player. They learnt to focus and every time they entered the field, they were mentally and physically prepared. The U-15 team also played against the national team during practice sessions and the seniors, who had played in Abu Dhabi before, generously tipped their juniors on what worked and what didn’t.

“What really worked for them though, according to Dias is their “determination, dedication and discipline”. Anit Thapa was named ‘Man of the Match’ and Anil Mandal was declared the ‘Best Batsman’. Everybody is talking about Nepal’s batting power now and our spinners really bowled over spectators. Says Dias: ‘I’m truly proud of them not just because we won, but we won each match convincingly’.”

15 going on 17

Nepal will host the ACC U-17 Asia Cup this year in June or July. The U-15 boys are more excited than ever about participating. As the cricket scene in Nepal develops, they hope to add to the energy and enthusiasm. “We are already preparing for the U-17 national team,” says the U-15 boys, “and we hope to win that coveted cup too.”
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Although there was a 20 percent drop in the concentration of PM10 (particles that are less than 10 micron in size) in Kathmandu’s air last week, the pollution levels are still high. The PM10 level is above national standards throughout the Valley except in rural areas like Matsyagaon.

The low pressure system that prevailed has relaxed with usicky evenings this week. The centre of this circulation will be over Bhutan by Friday but it has spawned baby troughs all along the Gangetic plains which will inject moisture into the midhills and bring us localised storm systems. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows a frontal system moving into western Nepal which should bring us overcast skies and stormy conditions on Friday. We will observe more isolated storms into next week. Expect humidity to rise, making the heat stickier.

There are mysterious deaths caused by man-eating tigers in Jim Corbett Park. The International Wildlife Welfare appoints ace conservationist Krish Thapar and his wife Riya to investigate. Dev and his friends also set out for a unique adventure during that weekend. Destiny prevents them from going to the farmhouse as planned instead, they end up in India’s biggest jungle. Both groups bond together but at night, the jungle comes alive. Then starts the journey of fear, panic and trauma. They are hunted with death at their heels.

Call 4442220 for show timings

KATHMANDU VALLEY

MAUSAM BEED

There are mysterious deaths caused by man-eating tigers in Jim Corbett Park. The International Wildlife Welfare appoints ace conservationist Krish Thapar and his wife Riya to investigate. Dev and his friends also set out for a unique adventure during that weekend. Destiny prevents them from going to the farmhouse as planned instead, they end up in India’s biggest jungle. Both groups bond together but at night, the jungle comes alive. Then starts the journey of fear, panic and trauma. They are hunted with death at their heels.

Call 4442220 for show timings

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FAREWELL: UML leader Sahana Pradhan paying last respects to Sadhana Adhikari, wife of former Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari whose fifth death anniversary also fell this week.

INTO THE DEEP END: Devotees pull a chariot floating on Gahana Pokhari at the annual Hamligam jatun on Monday.

Nothing stops Ujeli

The men of Tallo Gaun in Simikot love to hate Ujeli Rokaya. They consider her a threat to their patriarchal society, which strongly believes that educating girls is a very bad idea.

Last year, 16-year-old Ujeli shocked her community of Rautes when she left her husband’s house to attend school. UNICEF’s village facilitators were going door-to-door to encourage girls and women to attend the Out of School Program (OSP) and Ujeli just could not resist the offer.

Her husband was in Kathmandu and Ujeli was left at the mercy of in-laws who strongly refused to send her to the program. Her father-in-law is an educated person and the VDC secretary. “They said I would never be allowed to enter the house if I dared to enroll. I just walked off to attend the program,” says Ujeli, recalling the day she left the house and joined the OSP.

It’s been 10 months since and Ujeli has completed her basic education and enrolled in grade five at a government school. “The day I pass my SLC, I will return to my husband’s house,” she says brightly. She is amazed at her own transformation—from a shy, reluctant wife to a confident, outspoken and fearless girl.

“Now I can read and write like any educated man,” says Ujeli and proves it to us by writing her name. “Many girls still have to live under the strict rules of our community but I will change that.”

Once she finishes school, Ujeli wants to be a teacher and educate as many girls and women as possible. Every day as she passes through her village, she has to endure ridicule and insulting remarks from the men and boys.

But this brave girl is unfazed. She says, “All I know is my parents are very happy and that is enough for me. Nothing can stop me now.”

EXPLODING SCHOOLS: A bomb destroyed the Aadarsha Namuna Secondary School in Gaidakot, Nawalparasi, on 22 April. The Maoist student wing on Wednesday lifted its threat to indefinitely close down all private schools in the country.

ART START: Teenagers painting at the two-day teen art workshop Celebrating Colours on Saturday and Sunday at The Bluestar Hotel.

YIIIIIIIIIIIIIII: The Eastern Zone won the Seventh National Kyokushin Karate Championships in Bhann on 23 April. More than 80 martial arts athletes took part.
Feel free to throw up on the Fourth Estate

We must mark World Press Freedom Day on 3 May this year in Nepal by dispelling the malicious rumour doing the rounds that we in the Fourth Estate aren’t free to be sycophantic, hypocritical and unscrupulous liars anymore. As we can see for ourselves this is not the case, all of these aforementioned freedoms are intact.

Anyone with an over-fertile imagination will have noticed that there are no restrictions at all. We members of the media sector have never been free to lick ass or be kicked in the ass. It’s not for nothing that we are proud to call ourselves members of the world’s second-oldest profession.

Nevertheless, we mustn’t rest on our laurels, we shouldn’t take the freedoms we enjoy for granted as we go out of our way to kowtow even though we were only asked to curtsy. May Third therefore is a perfect opportunity for us in the media to take stock of our good fortune to be where we are. (Message from the State Law and Order Council on the Auspicious Occasion of World Press Freedom Day: The following content has been vetted for veracity and has been found to be fit for wide dissemination but the Council takes no legal responsibility if consumers don’t have the intestinal fortitude to read it without throwing up. Signature and Chop.) So, without beating around the bushes let’s proceed to count our blessings from one to 10:

1. There are absolutely no curbs on vowel movements in the state-controlled media which is free to report at great length on all official pronouncements.
2. No one is stopping anyone from singing hosannas at the top of their voices.
3. We can’t help it if newspapermen insist on ignoring repeated warnings not to report that they have been repeatedly warned not to undermine the morality of those calling the shots.
4. We don’t blame messengers anymore. We arrest them.
5. Good thing that more than 65 percent of Nepalis can’t read or write otherwise the public may actually believe what we are saying.
6. The officials’ media is adding supplementary pages to accommodate vast quantities of buck-legged news on new arrests this week that couldn’t be printed because of headline-grabbing events from the Afro-Asian Summit.
7. As a matter of public service, Radio Nepal says it will continue blocking the first 15 minutes of BBC World Service news on 103 FM because it wants to “spare listeners the boredom of having to listen to the same headlines on the hour every hour and replace it with a musical interlude”.
8. It’s not true that Nepal’s media is the least free in Asia. That is a gross national insult to our friendly country, North Korea.
9. The government denies in strongest terms the canard that news is not allowed on FM. Underground stations are allowed to broadcast news unhindered.
10. Humour is now so rife in the media that it has thankfully thrown all insufferable satirists, including this one, out of business.