KANAK MANI DIXIT

T
here has been such a flurry of international activity on Nepal over the last month that one would think—as with development, peacemaking and conflict resolution—the return to democracy too has been fanned out to overseas friends and next-door neighbours. Fortunately, the past week saw the beginning of coordinated activity by political parties, on whom rests the responsibility of bringing the country back to civilised, democratic rule based on primacy of law, constitutional evolution and representative government.

Given that democracy brokered by anyone other than the representatives of the people is bound to be more conservative than liberal, amidst their concern and activism it is important for special representatives, ambassadors, diplomats and Nepal desk-officers everywhere to pay heed to what is happening on ground level in the country they want to save. Given that only three individuals of the 205 members of the disbanded Third Parliament were still in detention. But the news is that the political parties are beginning to coordinate, particularly since the release of NC President Girija Prasad Koirala last month and UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal at midnight on Sunday. The plan apparently is to announce a common agenda (which is what NC’s Ram Sharman Mahal and UML’s Subhas Nembang were working on when they were arrested on 27 April) that is to lead to a unified movement not only of the five parties but the ‘seven parties’ including the Deuba Congress.

The political parties are hopefully chastened by the criticism of their past behaviour in parliament and public life while fighting regression. Actively watched by an alert public, they are the ones to chart the course back to pluralism. The world, having stood firm by the Nepali people in the hour of need, must regard the politicians and their parties as representing the aspirations of the population. Unfortunately, the reported comments of US Ambassador James Moriarty at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC last Friday, including reference to the February First action being popular among ordinary Nepalis, at the very least, does not inspire confidence in the intentions of the superpower.

not hard to understand why the diplomats tend to be one step removed from the political movement on the ground. This demographic distance is a definite factor of Nepali politics because of the weight the internationals pull on national affairs due to geopolitics and control of the purse strings of development and arms delivery.

Three weeks ago, the United Nations decided in Geneva that the protection of human rights of Nepali citizens vis-à-vis the rebels and the security forces required an international presence of more than 50 international monitors. Ian Martin, the much-heralded head of the Nepal Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, is due to arrive on Friday. On Tuesday, the UN system in Nepal, in unprecedented action, called for full respect by the government for the principles of press freedom.

At a time when the government willingly has its head-in-sand, it is the United Nations and bilateral donors which have taken a stand on emergency, humanitarian and development assistance to the people at risk. As we speak, there is a high-level meeting to discuss Nepal developments among Delhi-based ambassadors arriving from Kathmandu and the Indian Foreign Office. Issuing a joint statement on Tuesday, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists called for a rollback of fundamental rights.

The activism of the world community in favour of human rights and democracy is today matched by the silence emanating from the erstwhile (pre-February First) civil society. What the royal takeover of 1 February has done is started a process where civil society wheat is separating from the chaff and we find no more than a handful of those who have dared to speak up for the fundamental principles of governance. Among a particular category, it is almost as if they believe there could be development in the absence of democracy. The silence of civil society, however, is compensated by the growing activism of the political parties, which were initially impacted by the shock-and-awe of 1 February. The late blooming growing activism of the political parties is also explained by the internal contradictions within them on matters of personality and principle and the attempts at restructuring while the top men were still in detention. But the large number of people at risk. As we speak, there is a high-level meeting to discuss Nepal developments among Delhi-based ambassadors arriving from Kathmandu and the Indian Foreign Office. Issuing a joint statement on Tuesday, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists called for a rollback of fundamental rights.

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THE EUROPEAN

Eduardo Lechugu Jimenes is acting head of Delegation of the European Commission in Nepal. In the run-up to Europe Day on 9 May, he spoke to Nepali Times about the challenges faced by European Union and the EU’s reaction to events in Nepal.

Long and winding road

The removal of emergency has been greeted with a sigh of relief by the UML, the major party in the opposition, as well as the government and the ethnic groups. But already, serious questions are being raised about the road ahead. By Sushree Avadhani

Nepali Times: You added 10 members last year, Romania and Bulgaria are next. Is there a feeling the EU growing too fast?

Eduardo Lechugu Jimenes: Yes, this week there was another step forward with the enlargement agreement of the EU for Romania and Bulgaria which means that in a very short time, in 2007, we will have 27 members. Also, there is a question of new countries negotiating membership. We have Croatia, other Balkan countries and in the medium term, Turkey. My guess is that by the end of this decade there will be around 30 countries in the EU. The speed could be seen as fast, that is why already a debate within the EU about what extent we can continue on this path. It is clear that one year after the enlargement of 10 new members in May 2004 the EU is working surprisingly well. The basic thing is to maintain economic and social cohesion and for that obviously funds have to be distributed within the EU. The euro takes place. But you are right, as we expand we have to keep revising our procedures so that the homogenous we are, the easier it will be for the EU to move in the right direction. This has been proven when you look at achievements like the Euro, as of today the strongest currency in the world, and technological and commercial project as the Airbus 380, the largest aircraft in the globe and so forth.

How are you going to resolve this crisis over the European constitution?

I would not call it a crisis. No doubt, the EU Constitution is one of the big aims to be achieved. For the first time in the EU we have a chance for the people to have a say in the things that concern our countries. Six members have already approved it but we are aware that in the next few months other EU members will have a say about it. So far, the referendums about this EU constitution have been positive for its members and if it is approved there is no doubt it will mean that the European project is moving ahead.

Nothing stops Ujeli: #245, wow, more power to her for her courage and determination! Humla (and Nepal) could do with more people like her. Sheila Mapson, Nepal Trust

It was sad reading the articles 'Cry, beloved country'. Humla’s class struggle' and 'Kasial’s plight'. The arson and slaughter by Maoist radicals of innocent villagers proves that the ideology and principle with which they first began has disappeared. On the other hand, teachers using the Maoists as an excuse to abandon villages and go on holiday has destroyed the plight of many students. At a time when Kasial was playing with his friends and studying, he has to carry 15 kg of rice and consider himself lucky to get it and carry it up those steep hill tracks for three hours on an empty stomach. I don’t know who is to blame for the plight of these innocent people but I want to ask the Maoists: how can we understand that you’re fighting for the people? Or is the people’s war a means to an end? Or has the Maoists done the same? I don’t know, it will be for the EU to move in the right direction. This has been proven when you look at achievements like the Euro, as of today the strongest currency in the world, and technological and commercial project as the Airbus 380, the largest aircraft in the globe and so forth.

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perspective

Has EU policy on foreign aid changed with enlargement? We are one of the biggest donors in the world and we are increasing the volume of our aid and streamlining it. However, we are currently giving new thoughts to aid. For example assistance we give to countries like Nepal and to countries like Brazil and China can't be the same. Our cooperation will be reviewed, my guess is that there will be new rules about how to work with recently industrialised countries on the one hand and less recently industralised countries like Brazil and China give to countries like Nepal and to other countries. Nevertheless the EU's principles on the one hand and less recently industralised countries rules about how to work with democratic principles as the basis for cooperation between the parties. As you know we believe in multi-party democracy systems, therefore, we would like to see in Nepal a return to a democratic situation soon and the re-establishment of fundamental rights, in particular the right to association, freedom of expression, rights of the media etc., in short, a political program aimed at the re-establishment of a multiparty democracy.

The argument justifying February First is that the political parties made a mess of it but you say the EU will only resume aid if the same parties are restored to power. This is an issue that should be dealt with internally. But once again, we maintain we want to work with democratic governments. Therefore, the sooner Nepal returns to democracy the better for both sides and we will in that framework be able to ameliorate our cooperation.

Have you offered any help to facilitate a peace process or mediation role? During the last EC-Nepal Joint Commission in September and Treif's visit in December 2004 to Nepal we have manifested that possibility. The EU has always envisaged the possible use of mechanism oriented to help solve the conflict problem. We are still committed to that offer but in the context I mentioned before.

And has this policy towards Nepal changed after February First? There is a long tradition of cooperation with Nepal. It goes back to the 1970s. We are currently following the guidelines embedded within the EU-Nepal Cooperation Agreement signed in 1996. What has changed after February First is that due to the new political situation we are reviewing our cooperation. Which, in a pragmatic way, means ongoing projects will continue but pipeline projects for the time being will be on hold. For future cooperation we will make an assessment soon and act accordingly.

And what are the conditions that need to be fulfilled for you to resume aid in the pipeline? As I said before, we have not stopped it but in order to improve our current and future cooperation we will have to work in line with our EU-Nepal Cooperation Agreement where both sides accept respect for human rights and democratic principles as the basis for cooperation between the parties. As you know we believe in multi-party democracy systems, therefore, we would like to see in Nepal a return to a democratic situation soon and the re-establishment of fundamental rights, in particular the right to association, freedom of expression, rights of the media etc., in short, a political program aimed at the re-establishment of a multiparty democracy.

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal decided to lay low. Democrats thought that the yellow fever of the 80s was over. They were so sanguine that not even the sudden dissolution of parliament in May 2002 could wrench them up. After 4 October 2002 all that the dismised premier Sher Bahadur Deuba could think of was his reinstatement. Eventually he was quite happy to be a nominated premier of a government with nominal powers. The first birth of the Nepali Congress-Dhadhani wasn't just swallowed, he had actually yellowed.

By consenting to accept the decisive leadership of the king, the Deuba coalition endorsed the royal takeover of October Fourth by default. This is the reason victims of February First appear to be willing collaborators of constructive monarchy.

Twenty-five years after the referendum the NC is once more threat at the front line of anti-royal peacefult struggle. But this time the colour scheme of the political game has the third shade—blood red of the armed Maoists whose true colours aren't yet clear. Maoists moud virulent anti-monarchy but their actions have always resulted in strengthening the hands of palace. No politician with a panchayat background was touched by Maoists in the initial stages of insurgency. UML activists were similarly spared their wrath. It seemed as if eliminating the NC in the countryside was the sole aim of the armed insurgency. Now that the centre has crumbled and extremists of the left and right face each other menacingly, it's only the centrist NC that still has the political strength to save them from each other.

In the coming days, a lot will depend upon the proclivities of popular politicos under a blue banner. Far from being a spent force, mainstream parties will decide the future course of Nepali politics.

The international community would like to see twin pillars of 1990 constitution work in harmony. An accommodation between yellow and blue to create a green hue of constitutional monarchy is still the best possible option. But looking at the belligence of former panchayats dreaming about absolute monarchy patterned after panchayat, the chances of Girija Prasad Koirala discussing absolute democracy with the likes of Tulti Giri are dim.

At the other extremes, even though Comrade Madhub Neplap and Chairman Prachanda wave the same hammer-and-sickle flag, their political bases are too similar to allow these two ambitious leaders to work together. Panchangs can't tolerate Baburam Bhattarai and Madhub Nepal barely tolerates KP Oli in the UML politburo. Were the pink communists of Baliki to join forces with the yellow storm troopers of the palace to fight the Maoist menace, an orange-tinged politics of monarchists and monarchoists may emerge. Recently freed Madhub Nepal has ruled out all such possibilities but he is known to change his stand at any hint of power. If this marriage of convenience is solemnized, it may force NC to open lines of communication with the Maoists thus transforming the political landscape. It may appear far-fetched at the moment but this country has seen its share of surprises. The time to think the unthinkable may be nigh. Purple power will transform the socio-cultural landscape of Nepal forever.  

Yellow + blue = green

When will our political hues be a harmony of colour?

In the referendum of 1990, political choice was colour-coded to simplify voting: yellow for continuation of the system and blue for a change to multiparty democracy. Results went in the favour of ‘improved’ panchayat, democratic aspirations of nearly half the voters were left unaddressed for a decade.

When the People’s Movement of 1990 upturned the verdict of 1980, most panchays dyed their bandanas blue. A few hardcore yellow hearts like Marich Man Singh refused and in the referendum of 1990, political choice was colour-coded to simplify voting: yellow for continuation of the system and blue for a change to multiparty democracy. Results went in the favour of ‘improved’ panchayat, democratic aspirations of nearly half the voters were left unaddressed for a decade.

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Transforming Nepali industry

Quietly, a Nepali electrical component manufacturer shows what hard work and perseverance can achieve

AARTI BASNYAT

When Nepal Ekarat Engineering Company (NEEK) was established as the first Nepal-Thailand joint venture company in 1980, only seven percent of Nepalis had access to electricity. For many that would have been a hurdle but NEEK saw it as an opportunity.

Kush Kumar Joshi and Ajay Mulchibari were electrical engineers and they immediately realised that with democracy and liberal economic policy, there would be new investments in hydropower. As Nepal electrified, the demand for transformers would zoom.

And so it did. NEEK laid emphasis on quality and competitiveness through productivity. Soon the plant in Hetauda couldn’t produce transformers fast enough for the domestic market and today meets 90 percent of the domestic demand.

When Joshi was doing contract work on transmission lines he used to import transformers from Thailand. Through research and market study he found transformers from Bhutan. His first order was in 1991.

Managing Director of the Nepal Ekarat Engineering Company, Kush Kumar Joshi talked to Nepal Times about transformers, joint ventures and exporting products in the region during this difficult period.

Nepal Times: Why transformers?

Kush Kumar Joshi: We started business in the electrical line, constructing electrical things like transmission lines, so when we were procuring transformers we found that transformers from Thailand which was of good quality and available at a great price. The electrification ratio at that time was only seven percent, there was a huge demand in the market for transformers so we jumped right in.

Did you really need a joint venture partner? Couldn’t you go it alone?

To design and manufacture a transformer is not such a big thing but the quality and experience we gained proved to be a major advantage. Also the chairman of our mother company Ekarat Thailand wanted to do something for Nepal because they were Buddhists. On one hand, there was the business opportunity and on the other, they wanted to help Nepal develop.

Nepal Times: How does your domestic market compare with exports?

There is tremendous scope for growth for electrical components in the domestic market because only 15 percent of Nepalis have access to electricity. There is still 81 percent to tap and a huge transformer requirement exists. So far we have made 7,000 transformers. We are very competitive, technically competent and confident about exporting. We can bid in the international market, but we are focusing more on the regional market due to transportation problems. Our focus is Bhutan, Bangladesh and now, India.

Nepal Times: How important was your breakthrough in bagging the Bhutan order?

The Bhutan order was very important for us. Their interest was not only the price but also quality and this boosts our reputation. There were restrictions on commercial transactions between Bhutan and Nepal because of the currency but that hurdle was crossed with the help of both governments, which allowed us to deal in Indian currency instead of dollars. It was good for business and the economies of both Nepal and Bhutan. This has opened the door for trade between Bhutan and Nepal. It is a milestone.

How was the political situation affecting your business?

We receive a lot of inquiries for big numbers of transformers from both India and Bangladesh but we chose Bhutan because it was a small order. We are living in uncertain times with bandas and blockades. Our factory is in Hetauda and for the past three years, the curfew there has prevented us from working after 7 PM. We can’t operate our factory at full capacity even if we had an order. If we had more orders and weren’t able to fulfill them, it would create problems with new customers and our reliability would be questioned. If there was political stability the business would be growing much faster and perhaps we would have diversified into more sophisticated electrical components.
The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation said that tourist arrivals by air declined 38 percent in April this year as compared to the same month of the previous year. NTB’s tally for April shows 18,879 tourists arriving by air compared to 30,402 tourists last April. Some 5,058 of them were Indian this year while 7,511 Indian tourists visited in April last year. Tourist arrivals from the UK, USA, Germany, Japan and Australia were down by 29, 33, 40, 45 and 30 percent respectively. The decline is attributed to the unstable political situation in the country. NTB also says that since September First, tourist arrivals had seen a continuous decline. The industry believes that until a strong national carrier and competitive packages are not floated in markets, revival of tourist numbers will be difficult despite relentless efforts. Even then, industry experts are optimistic that the arrival trends will go up now that the emergency has been lifted.

Tourists plummet again

Hi-TECH: LG Electronics in association with the Chaudhary Group has unveiled its latest NEW PRODUCT.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Anita Bhandari

Before 300 have arrived. Proud mothers of brides and brides-to-be talk of 51 sars and 101 sars for their daughters. It does not matter if each one cost a hundred or a thousand or tens of thousands. Bands are judged by the number of members in the group or the number of hours they were engaged. It doesn’t matter if they weren’t playing music but just plain noise. Catering companies have clients with the number of items on their menu, perhaps people ignore the fact that only a few of them are prepared for the feast. Our quest for growing numbers is never ending. Perhaps it is our agrarian background that has led to this incessant obsession with numbers, where prosperity is judged by the number of cattles, goat or chicken you own and not by how healthy they are. Government officials love to bring about the number of banks and financial institutions we have even if the same set of people own them. We have more airlines than any of our neighbouring countries. We like to talk about the 50+ FM stations and the number of civil society organisations in the same way and politicians are judged on the number of people they ‘feed-in’ to a rally. Our own parliament has 250 members while a billion people in India have just above 540. Judging by our parliamentarian to population ratio, India should have a parliament with 8,000+ members.

We have more committees than we can count and people represent more committees than we can remember. Even our Rotarian friends in Nepal have caught the number bug. If you throw a stone, it might just hit a Rotarian.

Our development plans too, focus on quantity. It is about providing health to all and education to all rather than improving the quality of health and education. We go by the number of schools that are built, not considering if they have enough teachers or if classes are conducted at all. Tax officials talk of the number of people they ‘feed-in’ to a rally. Our own parliament has 250 members while a billion people in India have just above 540. Judging by our parliamentarian to population ratio, India should have a parliament with 8,000+ members.

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Vigilante justice

JB Pun Magar in Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 April 15 May

BARGADAWA—The vigilantes that started with the intention of fighting injustice at the hands of the Maoists, is now following their lead by torturing, looting and killing innocent civilians. Unarmed villagers are now forming groups to defend themselves against the gun-toting vigilantes led by the notorious Muna Khan. The vigilantes have subjected many villagers to interrogation, house search, extortion and even forced them to join their retaliation committee and buy arms from them. On 21 March, committee members including Radhe Mukiya Yadav and eight others beat up Rajendra Maia, a small trader, during the village market day at Rupaulia when they did not get the money demanded to buy alcohol. “They were drunk and armed when they beat me up with the butt of their guns,” said Maia. They had been going around the marketplace shooting in the air and raising false alarm by shouting that the Maoists had come. More than a dozen people were injured while trying to escape, some were children, women and elderly citizens. The vigilantes forced 15-year-old girls Bimala Chaudhary and Parbati Chaudhary to take off their clothes. “There were about 20-25 of them, we had to run for our lives,” said Malla. On 23 March, a group of 300 villagers from Rupaula took a delegation to the district administration office in Somaini to pursue the perpetrators and to request security. Despite assurance from Police Officer Ram Kumar Khanal to control the vigilantes, the violence is getting out of hand. On 27 March, the vigilantes mercilessly thrashed shopkeeper Keshab Raj Sharma for failing to pay the money demanded. Almost 60 of the vigilantes came and ransacked his house, plundered his belongings and beat him up badly. “They even took my wife’s jewelry. Even now when they come everyday and threaten to kill us if we don’t pay,” said Sharma. The vigilantes beat up 82-year-old Saraswati Chapagain and broke her arm. Many villagers south of Navapansari have become prey to the vigilantes atrocities. On 26 March, they forcefully amputated Soman’s 40-year-old Ram Kishor Chamar’s arm and made him eat it before shooting him in cold blood. On 31 March, they beat up teachers Shambhu Prajapati and Satyadev in the school compound and on the same day, thrashed dozens of villagers for protesting their activities. Now, the vigilantes have started to spark like the Maoists, justifying extortion.

“Why should the public complain about helping those fighting for the people?” said Murari Pahalman, president of Navalparaisi Pratikar Samiti. There are over 150 youths involved in the committee, whose advisory team is led by Muna Khan. Almost all members carry guns and bullets. “We still don’t have enough arms. The administration should aid us,” said Bhagwan Chaudhary, president of the Somani Committee. The local administration still does not acknowledge the vigilante group walking armed in broad daylight but the people see them accompanied by the security force, also carrying guns. But Police Officer Sharma denies this saying, “We would have taken action against those carrying arms.”

Get up! Emergency has been lifted
Drum: Emergency
Shackle: Bondage

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The king has been in a crisis since he closed doors for national reconciliation, he has to find a way out himself. No king has ever become strong by leaving the public behind.

Nepali Congress Leader Girija Prasad Koirala in Kantipur, 5 May

Irresponsible

Editorial in Nepal Saracharapasti, 2 May

On Friday evening in Janajyoti Campus in Mahendranagar, the security forces opened fire at student protesters, terrorizing villagers and causing students to rise in revolt. According to the details of the incident, members of ANFNSU were discussing preparations for their inaugural committee and district level inspection program on the quadrangle. Suddenly, a hail of volley burst into the room. The students began to run in fear when they saw armed security personnel and were shot at on suspicion of being Maoists.

Local residents who witnessed the incident had told the security forces that the students were not Maoists. The security forces did not listen to them and went ahead, causing serious injury to some of the students. ANFNSU’s Central Committee Member Nar Bahadur Bhandari, District level Committee’s Assistant Secretary Mahesh Pant and Janajyoti Campus’ student Kisan Chetri were shot in the leg. This incident casts a shadow on the credibility of the security force that is supposed to look after the security of the nation. They claim that they were forced to open fire because they had only received information about a Maoist meeting and the students had not informed them about theirs. Their evidence began to shoot at the students on suspicion of being Maoists because they began to run is irrational. Can you shoot at unarmed people just because you think they are Maoists? This is a serious question. First, the informer gave wrong information about the security forces. Second, responsible security personnel opened fire without verifying facts. Besides, there were a number of grave mistakes made. To shoot at a non-violent crowd of unarmed innocent students is against human rights and the Geneva Convention. Even if they were Maoists, according to the law of the security personnel, they could have been arrested or treated as prisoners but they were students discussing their association’s programs. A few of them were meeting for a simple discussion at the campus they attended and they thought it was safe. Student associations have protested this act of violence creating difficulties in the educational calendar again. For students to live in terror of the state is to confuse hundreds of young people. It is important that the guilty party be brought to justice. The security force must also understand that they cannot act on suspicion alone, to do so is to violate human rights and the law.

People’s interest

Putnna Sundar Lawoti in Nepal Times, 26 April

The king’s February First move made many Nepalis happy because it was the step he took portraying the real picture of the country. However, the implementation part of the royal declaration appears not to be as serious as it should have been. If appointments in the ministers’ council and other political positions who are from where and how those are decided are made on the basis of gaining power, then it would perhaps have yielded effective and early results. But, of course, there has been improvement in some aspects of the government. People have been able to carry on with their lives they were living and the situation is slowly improving in other areas as well. The people’s feeling and the situation of the country is one side, the other is the opinion of foreigners and adaman political parties. This is wrong. The leaders of political parties should at least be practical. If they look at the ground reality and analyse the aspirations of the people, nothing will stop them from working together with the king. The monarch has made it clear that the parties must be loyal towards the people and democracy. If the parties give up their vested interests, they will have no reason to protest. They have been protesting only because their interests are not being met. The king has repeatedly expressed his commitment to constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. If we do not get back on the right track, then who can believe us? The parties have only been making certain quarters happy to profit themselves. Outside of aside some parties, a few of the leaders are remote-controlled and others have their own political goals. These politicians are worried because they have no way of indulging in corruption while often being questioned about being prosecuted for their involvement in such cases in the past. In the national and international scenario, the Maoists will have to come to terms with the government. If they continue to protest just for the sake of protesting, the people will oust them. Yes, it’s true that they’ve targeted me. They rubbed two of my houses and burnt...
In Rolpa and Rukum, the local villagers maintain that both government and Maoist news on radio, hearing two versions of the same story is very different. By Radio Nepal and Maoist FM, it confuses them. “The government radio says one thing and the Maoists report it differently. We don’t know whose report is genuine,” said an ex-Indian army soldier in Giriganj. While most of the villagers do not believe everything that the Maoist radio broadcasts, they are incredulous about certain reports aired by the government radio especially when they hear reports of certain incidents that never actually occurred or is isolated from the events of security forces” Operation Khan in April when the Maoists were reported to have suffered a heavy blow at the hands of the Royal Nepali Army (RNA), which attacked them both from the air and the ground. The government media reported the killing of over 113 militants and the capture of over 50 government personnel. On the contrary, the Maoist radio reported the death of 22 RNA soldiers and 18 Maoists. Three days after the Khara incident, the government radio said that 60 Maoists had been killed. “We were really surprised to hear their reports,” said Prem Budha of Kotuma, referring to the news last week about his village in which the government claimed to have killed 22 Maoists while the rebels reported the killing of 65 army personnel. “We neither see the killing of 65 Maoists nor see security personnel, unlike the news broadcasts (both by the government and the Maoists),” said Prem Budha. Many villagers like him claim that only three security personnel and six Maoists had been killed. There is no way to verify the reports independently.

Why English?

Column by Ritubichar in Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 April

Katrin Hagen is the daughter of late Toni Hagen, the great Swiss geologist who travelled across the length and breadth of Nepal. As a young girl, Katrin accompanied her father on many of these treks since 1953 and grew to love Nepal. She has lost count of how many times she has been here. Being a surgeon, she volunteers to perform operations in hospitals in Nepal whenever she is here. Recently, at a ceremony she presented the Tribhuvan University Central Library with her father’s meticulous geological wall map of Nepal. At the ceremony, she said that ever since the war was the only non-Maoist, every speech was in English and even the MG was written in English. It has lost this function, at every ceremony in Nepal even if there is only one foreigner present we will have the MG in English, Why can’t we just get an interpreter to translate for those who can’t understand Nepali and go ahead and speak in our own mother tongue? Will the concerned authorities please pay attention to this?

Land grab

Nepal & May

The influx of Nepali migrants to bordering Indian states is a boon to Indian landowners. Many Nepalis from the western tari district of Dang, Mustang, Rupandehi and Kapilastu are moving to India for permanent residence. This has led to an increase in land demand and Indian landowners have been hiking up the prices. “Even since Nepalis began buying land and houses here, the real estate prices have sky rocketed,” said Mahendra Joshi of Gorkha. Most of the new settlers belong to middle and high-class families. A majority of them moved to India out of fear of the Maoists. Some of them own industries and large businesses firms in Bhairawa and Butwal. In Sunauli’s Nautanwa, the price of land has increased tenfold and as many as 500 Nepali landowners are now plotting their lands to sell. At Nautanwa’s bypass, the houses of the local Nepali migrants are being constructed but many will not be able to register the houses in their names due to legal complications. Nepal has also been investing in Siddhthanagpur district of India.
Celebration of Europe

On 9 May Europeans worldwide will celebrate Europe.

On 9 May 2005, it will be 55 years since the former French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman delivered his famous speech in which he proposed the idea of European Integration. This idea was born in the aftermath of numerous European wars culminating with the Second World War (1939-45) in which most European countries suffered terrible losses.

Schuman recognised that any lasting peace in Europe would require that France and Germany together with their respective allies set aside their age old differences and disputes. Accordingly, he proposed a plan whereby Germany and France joined efforts to improve their industrial productions in close collaboration with other European countries. Due to the importance of coal and steel industries for their national economies, and being a major input in any weapons and war industry, Schuman knew that solidarity in this sector would make war between France and Germany not only unthinkable but practically impossible.

It took less than a year before Schuman’s idea was translated into a binding legal document. On 18 April 1951, six countries—Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands—signed the Treaty of Paris establishing the European Coal and Steel Community. Six years on, in 1957, the same countries signed up for closer cooperation in the Treaty of Rome by which the European Economic Community was established. Later, this merged into the European Community and what is now known as the European Union (EU).

Europe Day has been celebrated on 9 May since 1985, where European leaders at a high-level meeting decided to celebrate European integration and Robert Schuman’s vision.

Continuous growth

In 2004, the EU reached a major milestone in terms of enlarging the cooperation with 10 Central and Eastern European countries reaching a total of 25 member states. In only two years time, in 2007, a new enlargement is envisaged with Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and membership negotiations with Croatia, the Balkan countries and Turkey should begin later this year.

Recent EU achievements

In 2005, 55 years after the first initiative, European cooperation has gradually expanded and evolved. Today, the EU brings together 450 million people from 25 individual member states that cooperate and consult each other on almost all thinkable issues. In addition to the enlargement with 10 new member states in May 2004, the EU has made other great achievements in recent years.

In January 2002, the single currency, the Euro, was introduced in 12 member states and in 2004 the EU member states agreed on a new European Constitutional Treaty, which will now have to be ratified by the EU member states. In several countries, the European people will be consulted directly in national referendums. The constitution will in particular have an impact on the ability of the European Union to speak with a coherent voice in international affairs.

Many of the challenges that Europe and the rest of the world face in the age of globalisation can differ from traditions and languages but also with shared values such as democracy, freedom and social justice, the EU motto is ‘United in Diversity’. The EU and its institutions have a common flag that is used inside and outside Europe as a symbol of European Unity—the flag is blue with a circle of 12 yellow stars.

The European motto

Due to the fact that Europe is not only a continent with many
European integration Day, recalling achievements and looking to the future

only be dealt with on an international level. Europe will continue to push for multilateral responses and promoting our core values—democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

The EU institutions

The three core European Union institutions are the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The Council consists of ministers from the national governments of all 25 EU member states. The Council shares with the European Parliament the responsibility for passing laws and taking policy decisions. The presidency of the European Union rotates among the member states on a six-month basis. In 2005, Luxembourg holds the EU presidency from January-June, to be taken over by United Kingdom from July-December.

The European Parliament is elected every five years by the European people. The present parliament was elected in June 2004 and has 732 members from all EU member states grouped in Europe-wide political groups. Nearly one-third (222) are women. The main job of the parliament is to pass European laws—a responsibility shared with the Council. In addition, the parliament approves the EU annual budget and oversees the work of the European Commission.

The European Commission represents the interest of Europe as a whole and it works independently from national governments. The Commission consists of 25 Commissioners—one from each EU member state. The current Commission President José Manuel Barroso and his 24 Commissioners were appointed in November 2004. The Commission headquarters in Brussels prepares European laws and policies. Once laws, policies and programmes are approved, the Commission takes responsibility for their implementation in member states and in countries outside Europe, such as the development portfolio managed by the EC Delegation to Nepal.

The EU in the world

It is not only Europeans that benefit from the EU. Given the success of European integration, the EU is committed to spread peace, stability and prosperity beyond its borders. The best way to prevent conflict from arising is to create prosperity and opportunities worldwide. As the world’s largest trading power, the EU uses its influence to establish fair rules for world trade so poorer countries benefit from globalisation. As development partners, individual EU member states and the European Commission are committed to remain the world’s largest donor.

The EU provides development programs and humanitarian assistance that benefit millions of people every day. The EU has also taken a lead in fighting pollution and promoting sustainable development worldwide. When it comes to promotion and protection of civil and political rights, the EU engages and provides advice and assistance to support democracy, human rights defenders, free media and respect for rule of law.

The EU in Nepal

Several EU member states are long-standing development partners with Nepal and currently five member states have their individual diplomatic missions in Kathmandu alongside the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal. As an institution, EU established diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1975 and an EU-Kingdom of Nepal Co-operation Agreement was signed in June 1998. Within this co-operation framework high-level consultations—the so-called ‘Joint Commission’ takes place on an annual basis. The European Commission opened a Technical Office in Nepal in 1992. This presence was developed into the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal in 2002. The current European Commission Strategy Paper for Nepal 2002-2006 identifies rural development, trade facilitation and conflict mitigation as priority sectors. In addition, the EC implements a significant human rights and democracy portfolio as well as humanitarian and Asia-wide assistance programs in Nepal.

For more information visit www.delnpl.cec.eu.int

EU members and when they joined

1952: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands
1973: Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom
1981: Greece
1986: Portugal, Spain
1995: Austria, Finland and Sweden
2004: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

MIN BAJRACHARYA
Looking up to the mountains

A centre for Himalayan studies located in the plains

MARK TURIN in SIQUIRI

I t is always heartening to find a group of good scholars working on interesting topics and better still if they are doing so together.

On a recent research trip to Darjeeling and Sikkim, I twice happened to come across occasional papers of the Documentation Call of the Centre for Himalayan Studies at North Bengal University in my local archives and libraries. Some of the publications were press digests and news clippings from dailies in South Asia, while others were indices of parliamentary proceedings pertaining to relations between India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim (before the mid-1970s) and China. This corpus of data exemplifies a kind of stochastic documentation that few scholars have the time to do these days, so I set myself the task of tracking down the elusive centre.

Even in the hub of urban Darjeeling, the first point of call for learning anything about anything is naturally Google, and sure enough it delivered: a single entry with a telephone number and email address of the Centre for Himalayan Studies. I got in touch and resolved to pay the centre a visit in Raja Ram Mohan Pur, just outside of Siliguri and strategically located on the road to the Nepali border.

Nestled in the tree-lined campus of North Bengal University (NBU), with a Himalayan backdrop truly to its name, lies the Centre for Himalayan Studies (CHS). Directed by the dynamic and welcoming Karubshi Datta, and populated by a range of scholars and support staff, this interdisciplinary research centre falls under the Area Studies Program of the university. It was established in December 1978 and is treated as a fully-fledged department of NBU. In the past 27 years, the Centre has had eight directors and a number of impressive resident research scholars, including two who are particularly well-known to the Nepali-speaking academy: NC Sinha and T B Bribha.

The activities of the centre range from research projects, seminars and publications, to guidance and supervision of graduate students. Collaborative research projects include a profile of the Eastern Himalayas, while individual scholars are presently investigating topics as diverse as the women of Blutum, the carrying capacity of the Terai basin of Sikkim, the growth of Kalimpong as an urban centre and others are compiling a resource planning atlas of the eastern Himalayan Region. Twenty-nine MPhil dissertations and 14 PhD theses have been completed by students of the centre, largely in the social sciences and during my short visit, I witnessed a group of graduates upcoming to make use of the library and documentation cell.

A specific project worthy of mention is the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) settlement information for Sikkim based on maps and statistical information from the Indian census, spear-headed by the cartographer DB Boot. The publication is viewing the documentation call to which the centre deserves special attention. Along with seminar proceedings and special lectures, the centre publishes a useful annual journal entitled Himalayan Miscellany which is regretfully not subscribed to by many university libraries in the west, while the documentation cell focuses its attention on producing the irregular digests of events that transpire in the eastern Himalayas. The library is well-run and contains a set of standard texts along with some delightfully rare volumes and the staff are nudge more scholars to pass through, avail themselves of the resources and perhaps gives a lecture or two. I would encourage any researcher, should they travel through the area, to pay a visit.

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Germany’s zero hour

Looking back at 8 May 1945 in sorrow and anger

RALF DAHRENDORF

The Eight of May always brings back memories of 1945 because for me the end of the war in Europe really was a zero hour.

When the first Soviet soldiers came up our little street in the western suburbs of Berlin, we knew that the great slaughter was over; it was over for the father of our family who had been in the resistance would come back from Brandenburg prison. I no longer needed to hide as I had done after my release from a Gestapo camp at the beginning of February. Somehow a new life would begin.

First, however, was the chaos. The Nazis were gone and the occupation powers had not yet set up any kind of administration. We all went looting the local shops; I still have the slim volumes of romantic poetry which my 16-year-old self took from a bookshop. The occupation troops went on a rampage. Food was hard to find. My father was taken from prison and transported straight to central Berlin, where he was told to set up the office for Berlin’s energy supply, a task that had to be done literally from nothing. There was no power, no transport, no organised life of any kind for a period.

Was it defeat or liberation? For Germans this question was not easily answered though clearly our family was liberated in every sense. The question then was: liberated for what? Where do we go from here?

“You must help,” my mother said to me. So I offered my services to the local Soviet administration. We all went looting the local shops. Five weeks later, however, I was back at school. I carried a district of Zehlendorf. Five weeks later, however, I was back at school. I carried a

Germany’s Nazi past is uniquely horrible, so comparisons with other countries’ histories are fraught with misunderstanding. Still, in its own way Poland has followed a similar path after 1989: first the new, then the old, then the present. It seems that Poland has much to learn from the past. On balance this is a better method of dealing with a nation’s zero hour than doing nothing or other ways.

In Europe then, 8 May 2005 is an occasion to look back in sorrow and anger. It is also an occasion to look forward with pride in the achievements of recent decades and therefore for hope.

Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist based at the University of Cambridge and directs the Digital Himalaya Project www.digitalhimalaya.com

Ralf Dahrendorf is a member of the British House of Lords.
A lull in the mountains
The midhills of eastern Nepal are tense but quiet

A
fter February First, and especially after the Maoist defeat at Khara and Rolpa in western Nepal, here in the east there is an unusual lull.

The RNA has been establishing new base camps near strategic passes that the Maoists need to move down to the plains, while the rebels have been pushed up into remote villages in the hills and jungle hamlets along the East-West Highway and seem to be avoiding a confrontation.

“They aren’t in a capacity to challenge us frontal anymore, if they do they know they will suffer even bigger casualties than in Khana and Rolpa,” says a confident Major General Om Bahadur Pun, who took over two months ago, has visited his Kosi and Sagarmatha Zones.

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The army has started setting up base camps on strategic passes like Aiselukharka near Khotang which links the eastern midhills to the tarai highway and Letang which links the eastern midhills to the Valley air.

There has been a decrease in Maoist activities since we set up the camps, meanwhile the morale of the soldiers is up after February First,” says Major Raj Ranjan of the RNA’s 2nd Brigade at Hill. At Aiselukharka, the RNA contingent were also having a march past and showed a dug-in contingent were also having a march past and showed a dug-in

CAT AND MOUSE:
Soldiers test an 81 mm mortar used to defend the town’s defences, the Maoists suffered heavy casualties. The rebels deny any split in the party but admit suffering losses due to the capture or deaths of its senior leaders, Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) has taken over the rebel eastern command after the Indian Police arrested of Mohan Baidya in Siliguri last year.

Desertions appear to be a serious problem. The party has tried to rely on ethnic-based Kinai, Limbu and Tharu fronts to extend its presence in the east but suffered setbacks after the Khumbuwa Mokli Morcha and the Madhumati Mokli Morcha not just split off but also took up arms against the Maoists. Despite this, Commissioner Hiralal of the Maoists’ 18th Battalion claims to control most of the countryside and says his forces feel safe in the villages because of his group’s good communications that gives early warning of approaching patrols.

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Desertions appear to be a serious problem. The party has tried to rely on ethnic-based Kinai, Limbu and Tharu fronts to extend its presence in the east but suffered setbacks after the Khumbuwa Mokli Morcha and the Madhumati Mokli Morcha not just split off but also took up arms against the Maoists. Despite this, Commissioner Hiralal of the Maoists’ 18th Battalion claims to control most of the countryside and says his forces feel safe in the villages because of his group’s good communications that gives early warning of approaching patrols.

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base camp after the Indian Police arrested of Mohan Baidya in Siliguri last year.
Bol! Speak up!

What Faiz wrote against the British in his India resonates in Kathmandu today

In the Southasia beyond India, Mahatma Gandhi is increasingly regarded as ‘Indian’. For many a Nepali citizen, the Sakyamuni Buddha is by now a ‘Nepali’. By the same logic, Lalitavistara would be restricted to being a Bangladeshi and Rabindramati’s Tagores an Indian.

Borders that delineate the countries of Southasia also have taken on the function of assigning civilizational figures to individual nation-states, even though the personalities who inhabited Undivided India, for example, should be part of the humanistic heritage of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka as well as the post-colonial, present-day Bharat.

Development theorist and practitioner Akhtar Haris Khan, who moved from Comilla to Karachi to organise the people of the Orangi slum, should be regarded as our common mentor. The same for Eqbal Ahmed, the great humanist and scholar born in Bihar and domiciled in Islamabad.

Noor Jahan was ‘the pride of Pakistan’ but also of the rest of us. MS Subbulakshmi was ‘the nightingale of India’ but also of the rest of us. MS Subbulakshmi was ‘the nightingale of India’. India born in Bihar and domiciled in Multan.

Kanak Mani Dixit

Nor are the cultural activists decided that Faiz must be an icon today for Indians, Bangladeshis and Nepalis. His heritage, Faiz should be an icon today for Southasian even while remaining citizens of their own countries.

Mirza Ghalib was a great citizen of undivided India, and is described in a Pakistani website as ‘one of the greatest poets of South Asian history’. Allama Iqbal provided the seed of the idea of Pakistan, but he was also what one could be called an ‘Undivided Indian’. This trajectory brings us to the question of how to regard Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the great poet of love and revolution and inheritor of the legacy of Ghalib and Iqbal. As a passionate writer of ghazals and someone who fought the colonial, present-day Bharat. Development theorist and practitioner Akhtar Haris Khan, who moved from Comilla to Karachi to organise the people of the Orangi slum, should be regarded as our common mentor. The same for Eqbal Ahmed, the great humanist and scholar born in Bihar and domiciled in Islamabad.

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The oldest generation of Kathmandu’s educated would have appreciated Ghalib and read Iqbal. But even they would not have known Faiz. As for the succeeding generations, Faiz might as well not have been born.

This was the logic behind the staging of the program Faiz: Abhibyakti ko Haq (Faiz: The Right to Expression). This being an evening in tribute to an Urdu great, the Pakistani Haq was used in the title instead of the Sanskrit adhikar. The event was organised in a hall whose name—Baghikhana—was Urdu associations. Nepalis, however, have lost even the little ability they once had to understand Urdu. As Bollywood films gradually relinquish Hindustani in favour of Hindi, even that route of access to the Urdu Jaqualas evaporated. The organisers of the Faiz program, hence, had to provide translations of the poems.

And what poems they were, played out from old tapes and new CDs, as sung by Iqbal, Nayar Nour and Tina Sani! Intesab is a poem about a homeland that resembles a deserted forest of yellowing leaves, inhabited by people in need of empathy, including prisoners of conscience, tanguisailas, railwaymen, exploited women, abducted children and the peasant farmers. Han Dekhenge, as sung by Iqbal Bano became the anthem against the dictatorship of Zia-ul Haq, and tells of a time to come when the mook shall inherit the earth, when palaces shall crumble and regal headgear shall slip.

But Bol as rendered by Tina Sani and also sung live to his own music by Kathmandu artiste Aavas (see pic) was the song of the evening, catching the fancy of the audience of writers, poets and journalists at a time when the cultural world of Kathmandu is acting strange in its silence. Those who understood the history of the country and of the neighbourhood, what Faiz wrote against the British in his India (see free translation below), resonated in Kathmandu in the year 2005.

Speak up, for your lips are still your own. Speak, while there is still the time. Speak, while truth still lives. Speak, and say what you have to say.
Golfing glory
Our team leaves to participate in the SAARC Golf Championship

Unlike the Asian Games and the Olympics, the SAF Games do not include golf as an event. Against this backdrop the SAARC Golf Championship was introduced in 1999 to provide a platform for South Asian golf governing bodies and golfers to get together, strengthen mutual relationships and compete at the highest regional levels.

It’s a pity I never had the chance to play at this premier regional amateur event since just the year before I had declared myself a professional. This year the seventh edition of this prestigious event (9-12 May) is being hosted by Sri Lanka for the first time. They have chosen one of the region’s finest golf courses, the Victoria Golf and Country Club located in the beautiful hill station of Kandy. India has hosted the event a few times including the inaugural one in Bangalore. Bangladesh and Pakistan have also played host. The Maldives does not have a golf course or a golf team, so their abstention from the event is understandable. That leaves just the two other remaining SAARC members: Bhutan and us.

Bhutan doesn’t have a full-length 18-hole golf course yet but we are fortunate enough to have one. The big question now is: when will Nepal host the SAARC golf event?

Perhaps our amateur golf’s governing body will get into serious action and reciprocate the many invitations they have accepted these past years. The event used to be a ‘Men Only’ affair but that changed last year in Lahore when ladies were also included.

Last week, the Nepal Golf Association conducted a qualifying event at Royal Nepal Golf Club to select players for the forthcoming event. After 54 grueling holes, Taishi Shresta and CB Bhandari qualified for our three-member men’s team. We have only two ladies that meet the required handicap criteria. Pema Tashi Lama and Shrest占 Shresta qualified by default. For Taishi Teering and Kesang Lama, this is their first appearance in the SAARC Golf Championship. All others have participated in it previously. A special mention should be made for CB Chanderi, who only missed the initial event but has represented us in all the others. So far Nepal’s performance has been quite unsatisfactory. This year, we hope our team will fare better and perhaps bring a medal home.

The team, led by Prachanda Shrestha, joint secretary of Nepal Golf Association, left for the Championship on Thursday and all are geared up for the tournament. Kesang Lama, our new emerging lady golfer, was very excited about her first international appearance and Taishi Teering, who was also a member of our Namura Cup team to Australia 2003, was in high spirits. Every player in the team is capable of shooting low scores any given day and they have our best wishes and total support. We hope they do much better this year.

Golf

Balancing mind and body
Tai Chi may be derived from the martial arts but it is now a great way to relax

The Chinese characters Tai Chi Chuang can be translated to mean ‘the supreme ultimate force’. It is also associated with the ancient Chinese tradition of yin yang, which is the ultimate duality and balance between two complementary forces such as the male and the female and harmony in both.

The Chinese propagator of Tai Chi was Chang San-Feng who once had a vivid dream of a mortal combat between a snake and crane. He was so inspired by their movement that he invented Tai Chi.

It may have once been a form of exercise for martial artists but it has now become a form of relaxation of mind and body for people all over the world in these stressful times. Many of the movements are either derived from the ancient martial arts or from the movements of birds and animals. The gestures are slow, soft and graceful with smooth and even transitions while changing forms. The focus is to circulate the chi or the vital force in the body which is supposed to animate the body.

Tai Chi is taught in a number of places in Nepal. Self-Awakening Centre in Baber Mahal Revisited offers the latest, along with transcendental meditation, yoga, reiki and alternative therapy.

Deepak Shrestha, member of the World United Martial Arts and the Tai Chi Chuan Federation of Nepal, is the instructor there. Earlier he was interested in Kung Fu but health problems prevented him from continuing. It was at this point that his Chinese teacher introduced him to Tai Chi and he was hooked. It restored his sense of well-being and improved his health.

Shrestha now teaches Tai Chi in private sessions too, including at a park in Maharajganj where he teaches students as old as 81. Conducted in collaboration with the Tai Chi Federation, these classes cost Rs 300 a month.


AARTI BASNYAT

Shivili herself suffered from insomnia but with transcendental meditation, she overcame it and today, describes herself as a happier, more optimistic person. The Self-Awakening Centre is a place where people who lead hectic lives and have no time for themselves can go to find their inner selves to heal.

As Farah Urmiati of UNIWA, who has only recently been taking Tai Chi classes, tells us: “It is really good, it gets you energised while relaxing you at the same time. It loosens your joints and especially if you have a desk job, it provides a break. Also it isn’t very hard to learn, we have been coming for only a week but know the basics already.”

Contact: Self Awakening Centre 4256618, 4256693 Baber Mahal Revisited

The effects of Tai Chi have been known to benefit mind and body. The fluid movements help improve posture and movement while curing various illnesses. The exercises are not strenuous, they are done according to the physical well-being of the person so all age groups can practice it.

Shivili Rana of Self-Awakening Centre says: “People are always complaining about lack of peace, we try to give them peace from within. In today’s world there is no safe haven and if people feel balanced from within, they can tackle any problem.”

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

Prodeepak, Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.
ABOUT TOWN

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FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

Magic Pencil

Artworks by Britain’s best children’s illustrators at the British Council, Lalitpur. Until 6 May 4410196

Bohu Gallery’s First anniversary exhibition. 18 to 10 May 4408889

Samay ChaTra by Ragini Upadhyay-Greta, 10 May-6 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4216044

Mythical Song Eptions by Seema Sharma Shat at Park Gallery, Lajpat, until 28 May 4419350

Asha Nepa! Works by Vas K De Ve at Lajpat Gallery Cafe, until 25 May Proceeds go to SETU Nepal. 4428549

NEPALI CINEMA

FIRST WEEKEND

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The rains cleared up the air last week with the average concentration of PM10 particles in Kathmandu Valley going down by 37 percent. Although areas with heavy traffic had PM10 levels that were twice as high as the national average, the air quality in residential areas and outskirts of the city were much better.

This was due to the rains clearing up the air last week with the average concentration of PM10 particles in Kathmandu Valley going down by 37 percent. Although areas with heavy traffic had PM10 levels that were twice as high as the national average, the air quality in residential areas and outskirts of the city were much better.

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Nepal has many flautists but no one has completed his Masters in flute-playing as has Jeevan Ale, 37. He completed his Masters from the Prayag Institute of Allahabad, India.

Having devoted more than half of his life to classical music, this resident of Mahottari has finally received accolades for his efforts. Though interested in flutes from an early age, Ale says that he only understood the intensity of its music when he started studying it. “Even when I played folk tunes on the flute, I did not reach the level of satisfaction that I get when I play classical tunes,” says Ale. Last year, he was more involved in the academic side of music rather than the practical. He taught at Kathmandu University and also gave private tuitions.

Says Ale to his students: “Do not come to me with high expectations.” And for his own peace of mind, he seems to follow the same philosophy. Ale is always inspiring people to study and practice music, adding, “Very few people have the inherent talent given by God but studying music gives an in-depth understanding to it.”

Ale lost his right leg in an accident while overseeing lumber in Nawalparasi. Though he had only broken his leg in the accident, the carelessness of doctors in Bharatpur hospital resulted in gangrene and later he had to have it amputated. Ale did not let this stop him and with Fr. Gufran’s help, he went to Jaipur in India to get an artificial leg fitted. This incident only spurred him on to explore the intricacies of music and become a better flautist. To make sure that he wasn’t distracted from his love for music, Ale has remained a bachelor. When asked if he ever plans to marry, Ale laughs and says, “I haven’t written it off completely but it seems so far away that I don’t think I will.”

Ustad Ale

Kiran Panday

MIN BAJRACHARYA

DEEPTENDRA BAJRACHARYA

LITTLE GURU: Rinpoche Asanga, one of the most respected gurus of the Sakya lineage, participating in the celebration of his sixth birthday at the Tharling Monastery in Boudha on Sunday.

PLAY ME A TUNE: A classical piano recital by British pianist Anthony Peebles at Hyatt Regency on Tuesday.

FLOWER SHOWERS: Volunteers clearing up the grounds of Dharahara Stadium after helicopters showered it with flowers to celebrate the inauguration of the AFC President’s Cup on Wednesday.

BATTLING THE WAVES: Chinese and Nepali journalists rafting from Kothe to Sukute at a program organized by Nepal Tourism Board on Monday.

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Kiran Panday

YAHOO!: The new elected committee of the Federation of Nepali Journalists celebrating their victory at midnight on Thursday at Royal Nepal Academy.
Throughout human history to the present day, mankind has fantasised about heavenly bodies. So if you are one of those, there is nothing to be embarrassed about.

From the core of our galaxy to the farthest reaches of the universe, the earth’s passage through the cosmos has held deep significance for people on our home planet as we try to make momentous decisions on whether or not, for example, to take the plunge and declare a state of national urgency. The behaviour of the planets and the moon are especially important to prepare compatible horoscope charts to ensure that they are properly aligned with each other as well as with Intelsat 5 which is in geostationary orbit over the Indian Ocean even as we speak. In case the planets are not in harmony with the constellations as is often the case, we have in our country many expert preceptors who can fix that for a fee. And even though they can never seem to agree with each other, they can, if need be, calculate planetary orbits relative to each other and come up with a way to cajole Mars and Venus, for instance, to make a more auspicious configuration and slip in an astronomical baksheesh to Jupiter and Saturn to look away. Those two are real troublemakers.

The problem arises when, like at the present time in which we have no parliament and no prime minister, we also don’t have a royal astrologer. How on earth are we supposed to make important decisions on matters of state if the post of Astrologer General is vacant? How will we ever know when to appoint a prime minister or bring post-paid mobiles back into service?

So, in the public interest and to hasten the decision-making process here is the nation’s horoscope. (Instructions for user read all the zodiacal forecasts and pick the one that is best suited to you.)

Aries: Mistakes can be made if you are too impulsive or don’t think things through. Be patient and let them make the first move.

Taurus: You will be released from house arrest today. Be grateful. You got three months to think.

Gemini: Strong chances of party unity this Friday, if it doesn’t happen now it won’t happen in our lifetime.

Cancer: Auspicious to come above ground and rethink your strategy. Read Sun Tzu.

Leo: Today is not a good day at work. You’ll receive a gift from someone you haven’t seen in a long time. Don’t open it.

Virgo: Go away, I have nothing to say to you.

Libra: An alteration of the home furniture will be beneficial, replace cabinet.

Scorpio: Money is coming your way this week but I wouldn’t put that down in the personal asset declaration form just yet if I were you.

Sagittarius: You can try once more to fly out to New Delhi. This time, try another airline.

Capricorn: Isn’t it embarrassing to be caught actually reading this stuff?

Aquarius: You’ll be meeting a lot of world leaders, so work on your handshake.

Pisces: Your hard work will pay off and you’ll actually get away with another weekly column in which you turn yourself into a complete dork.