




GRAND TRUNK ROAD: More 80-year-old eucalyptus trees along Pulchok were mercilessly chopped down on Wednesday. Officials justified the wanton logging on security grounds.




KIRAN PANDAY



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 247

Q. Are you satisfied with the response of the political parties after the lifting of the emergency?



Yes 23%

No 74%

Don't know 3%

Total votes:637

Weekly Internet Poll # 248. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you evaluate the first 100 days of the royal government?

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February fallout: international Nepal policy is crafted in New Delhi

PRASHANT JHA
in NEW DELHI

One fallout of February First is that international policy towards Nepal is now being formulated by the powers in New Delhi.

In what has of late become a tradition for British and American officials, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca, had meetings here before flying on to Kathmandu.

In the previous week, Indian ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shanker Mukherjee, British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield and Britain's special envoy to Nepal Jeffrey James also held joint talks with senior Indian officials. Since this was immediately followed by the Indian decision to resume military assistance, the three powers seem satisfied by the king's post-Jakarta lifting of the state of emergency and release of some political detainees.

A senior official told us that India may have overestimated its own leverage. "We expected that a strong reaction would make the king back off, the other assumption was that political parties would emerge as a strong alternative," he said. A policy review became inevitable when neither happened. The possibility of the Americans stepping in with arms if India didn't may have been a worry here.

India is in a dilemma: it doesn't want the king to get away with dismantling democracy but also wishes to see the Maoists defeated. "Do we support order and stability, or fairness and justice? As a neighbour it becomes difficult to take a pure stand," says C Raja Mohan, a strategic analyst here.

This ambivalence has drawn fire from the Congress' leftist coalition partners which have also been critical of the arms decision. MP Nilotpal Basu of the CPI-M

says, "We shouldn't put all our diplomatic eggs in the basket of the present regime."

The possibility of rethinking India's 'twin pillar' policy of supporting constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy seems remote. "There is no room for reviewing this policy," former Indian ambassador to Nepal, KV Rajan told us.

Some advisers have urged India to open back channel links to the Maoists but this has been opposed by others.


"The terms of engagement is important," says analyst Raja Mohan, "nothing must be done to legitimise them and back their approach."

There is consensus here that a sustainable solution would have to be found within Nepal, and that will depend on the knack of Nepal's political class to work together. ●

p12
The Ugly Indian

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NIP IT IN THE BUD

Two weeks after the lifting of the emergency there isn't a sense that conditions have changed in any meaningful way. In large parts of the country just as there wasn't the expected qualitative difference in the security situation after 1 February, things are similarly unchanged post-1 May. There is an urgent need for a rethink, but the rumoured cabinet reshuffle is unlikely to change the ground reality.

The emergency has been lifted, but it's still an emergency. The media is under a shroud and the sword of the menacing 6 February directive is still hanging over its head. Politicians, lawyers, activists and journalists are under valley arrest, and the only way to find out whether one is on the list is to test it by trying to fly out and see what happens.

One fails to see how such bullying tactics helps the government in controlling dissent or earning support. The foolishly counter productive ban on news on radio actually exposes a deep sense of insecurity. Arbitrary detention, beatings and torture of innocent citizens by security forces on the flimsiest suspicions or faulty intelligence was rife during the emergency. We just couldn't report them.

Because of restrictions on information it is difficult to gauge details of battles like the one in Siraha on Tuesday night. There have been commando offensives like the one into the rebel stronghold of Thawang last month, but the Maoists and villagers had all fled by the time the army got there.

However, there is now a more virulent strain of violence. The murders of popular preacher Pandit Narayan Pokhrel and the execution style killing of Chitwan businessman and cinema producer Bhagwan Das Shrestha are indications that the assassinations are a part of a new Maoist campaign of terror.

Even more sinister is the spread of vigilante terror which is spinning out of control. The targeting by Nawalparasi vigilantes last month of anyone wearing a dhaka topi has ominous ethnic and communal overtones. The execution of six villagers in Pipal Danda of Sindhupalchok earlier this month was carried out by 13-14 year old lads.

What are these children going to grow up to be? Who is fishing in troubled waters in Nawalparasi? How much longer do we have to wait for a peace roadmap? Who benefits from this escalation? Unless we nip in the bud this drift from a class war into a caste war, the last nine years are going to look like a picnic.



The honeymoon period is over. It is at this point that marriages start going rocky. But for the royal regime, relations with the outside world are actually getting easier.

New Delhi set the tone by deciding to resume military supplies that had remained “under review” since February First. Christina Rocca added credence to the softening international stance simply by arriving here via New Delhi. As if the meaning of her private meetings with government officials wasn’t abundantly clear, she publicly asked political parties to make common cause with the king to fight Maoists. Perhaps King Gyanendra’s allusion in his interview to *Time* magazine (“It’s fair to say that those who should have known [what I was planning] knew, and those who should not, simply did not.”) was intentional, and his initial disappointment at the severity of international reaction was

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



quite genuine.

The Maoists contributed to the 100-day celebrations by self-inflicting spectacular defeats in suicidal attacks on Monday night at some of the best-guarded army bases along the East-West Highway.

That the Americans would go soft was predictable. From the Shah to Marcos to Musharraf, the Americans don’t really care as long as strongmen are friendly. Ambassador James Moriarty had dropped ample hint of an American rethink on the royal takeover in his recent talk to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. .

The Indian U-turn was more surprising and seems to have shocked the parties. In what amounts to a sharp rebuke to Girija Prasad Koirala, New Delhi decided to re-open the military pipeline barely a day after the leader of the seven party alliance made a public plea to Nepal’s international friends not to do so in an interview to the BBC Hindi service.

Custom-made injustice

Will we finally have a law that makes solitary confinement of Nepali women illegal?

Of all the cultural practices that suppress Nepali women, none is as degrading as the practice of *chopadi*. It expels women from the home for the duration of their monthly periods, and for 11 days after childbirth.

GUEST COLUMN

Aruna Upreti



Chopadi is still practiced across western Nepal, and because it is so intimately tied with a woman’s body, it is symbolic of female subjugation in patriarchal Nepal. But last week, after activists filed a public interest litigation the Supreme Court finally declared the practice illegal and directed the government to promulgate necessary laws to ban the custom. It may take a few more years to actually pass the law, but at least this is a start.

In my travels through western Nepal, I have seen this horrifying injustice that hundreds of thousands of Nepali women are forced to endure in their homes.

In Achham, Kanchha Chhetri’s wife delivered a baby with the help of relatives and she was whisked away to the chopadi shed because childbirth had made her “impure”. Her child died after three days, and she herself was bleeding and running a high fever. But no one helped her.

“I only came to know how sick she was on the fifth day,” recalls Kanchha, “I defied family pressure to rush her to Nepalganj. By the time we got there over the rough roads, her condition had

worsened. She could not be saved.” Kanchha is convinced that had it not been for chopadi, his wife would be alive today.

On the road from Mangalsen to Sanfebagar in Achham, homesteads all have small windowless outhouses. Locals show us inside the dark, cramped and smelly interior of chopadis. It is hard to imagine anyone spending 11 days here especially after giving birth in the bitter cold of winter. Many babies and mothers that survive childbirth later die of pneumonia or tetanus.

Besides childbirth, women have to spend four days a month here during their periods and teenage girls live through the terrifying ordeal of being locked up for four days when they have their first menstruation. The time when girls most need comfort of being with their mothers, a safe and clean place, nutritious food she is left alone in the darkness and dirt.

There are those who defend this practice saying traditional culture needs to be safeguarded. But such misogyny is not tradition, it is a crime. Some women in the midwest are steeped in such ignorance and are so resigned to their fate that even they don’t question the practice and bear it in silence.

“When we were young we didn’t even have chopadi huts, we had to stay under the tree,” one woman in Achham once told me, “rain or shine, day or night we lived under the tree for eleven days.”

Other women remembered shooing wild animals attracted by the scent of blood at night,

the days of mental and physical torture that they quietly endured. Many women prayed for early menopause so they wouldn’t have to go through the ordeal. Some women in the midwest used to ask us for the Depo Provera contraceptive because of its side effect of temporarily halting menstruation. Even women whose husbands were away in India for long periods wanted Depo Provera simply because they didn’t want to be confined to a hut four days a month.

Old customs die hard, and chopadi is still practiced even in educated households of health practitioners. One whispered to me shyly: “We know it is not good, but if we don’t follow chopadi we will be ostracised by our neighbours.”

From the reproductive health standpoint, chopadi is an extreme example of a cultural practice having a direct impact on maternal mortality and morbidity. Yet it has been tolerated for so long because it has been brushed under the carpet by a male-dominated ruling class which preferred to look the other way.

Now that the Supreme Court has given its verdict, will the government try to make up for lost time? Will it enact the law quickly before more women are forced to live through this humiliation? Or are more women going to lose their lives after their bring forth new life in solitary confinement of their chopadi huts? ●

Dr Aruna Upreti is a women's health and reproductive rights activist.

100 days of solitude

Now we have to re-invent the wheels of democracy all over again

The Indian defence establishment seems mighty miffed at Girjababu. They have risked alienating the Nepali people just to get even with political leaders they don’t like. Other reasons being offered by the Indo-American alliance to resume arms supplies lack credibility. Despite the lifting of the state of emergency, the security situation did not warrant a policy swing on this scale. Especially because democracy is in limbo.

Outside the bubble of Kathmandu Valley, violence is intensifying. The International Crisis Group reports 655 people, many of them civilians, were killed in the last three months. It’s a tragedy of our times that statues of past rulers are guarded day and night by armed soldiers in the capital while unprotected citizens across the country are left to fend for themselves.

The national economy is hurting from the fall of remittances from India, the country from which we import all our essential items. To make matters

worse, tourist arrivals from India fell by 33 percent compared to last year. The effects of the royal takeover on institutions of governance have been even more devastating. The process of state building begun after 1990 stands derailed.

The establishment of a competent police force, an efficient civil service, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, and a professional and disciplined military under legitimate civilian control are some of the fundamental features of a functional state. The state gains legitimacy when it is not formed by force, but by consent of the people expressed through democratic process. A legitimate state is forced to be accountable by a vibrant civil society and free press.

Admittedly, the political parties didn’t set a particularly shiny record in promoting these values. But the direct rule of the palace since 4 October 2002 has uprooted the shoots of democracy. We now have to re-inventing the wheel of democracy all over again. ●

LETTERS

FEBRUARY FIRST

Kanak Mani Dixit's article ('Enter the politician', #246) serves as a perfect example to show how the media and especially our iniquitous political parties have failed to understand the sentiments of the public. Unsurprisingly, these very same actors who love to brand themselves as true representatives of the people, are now facing the daunting task of winning the hearts of the masses. It is unlikely that the public is going to break its silence soon, as they seem content with the current status quo and are indifferent to the calls made by political parties. This should not merely be dismissed as a lack of political awareness in the country because the answer to this lies in the public's silence itself. February First swept away our basic fundamental rights but at the same time, it honoured our right to live in a conducive environment of peace, which is needless to say, the foremost priority of the Nepali people. Critics of February First say that by removing the political parties as a buffer, it has led to an increasingly bipolar society where people have to choose between monarchy and Maoism. In this process they have overlooked the fact that the royal proclamation essentially gave the people a choice between peace and terrorism and works ultimately to restore a transparent and vibrant democratic mechanism in the country. Champions of democracy will only continue to be appalled by the popularity of February First among ordinary Nepalis (also observed by many foreign diplomats) because development towards peace can certainly happen in the 'absence of democracy'. Consequently, political pluralism clearly has to take a backseat to satisfy the principal agenda of peace. While Dixit's frustration is understandable, it is disheartening to see a prominent journalist of his stature instigating false feelings of nationalism by misleading the people under the pretext of promoting democracy.

Sanchit Shrestha, email

- Kanak Mani Dixit's 'Enter the politician' is a slap in the face of the common people of Nepal. We the 'chaff' don't want the fake democracy we have been subjected to for the past 15 or so years. We want a system where corrupt politicians go to jail and are banned from public posts. Where the journalists and self-styled human rights activists who lie have their professional abilities questioned by self-disciplinary bodies, lose their jobs and can be taken to court. A system where students who vandalise public and private property are punished by law and made to pay for damages, a

system where a citizen enters politics to serve the interests of the people not their own. A true democracy based on the rule of law, not a sham democracy where some elites and groups are above the law. How can Dixit really believe that the political parties represent these aspirations? Is his memory so short? He says that now they are 'hopefully chastened'. We the 'chaff' need certainties now, we are tired of waiting for change that never comes. In any other country, if faced with such a lack of trust from the part of the public, any political party would have cleaned itself up, getting rid of its failed leadership and corrupt party members. But this is Nepal so the hypocrites, the liars and the corrupt will lead the rallies for 'democracy' with the blessings of Keith Bloomfield, Nicholas Howen and other newly found friends, the same they once had labeled 'interfering foreigners'. The parties might be united now with their trite and uninspired agenda, purposefully silent about corruption, but once they get rid of the RCCC and manage to render ineffectual the CIAA, they will be at each other throats as usual, fighting over a share of the cake. If Dixit is the 'wheat' he should know better.

SK Aryal, email



- All that has unfolded in Nepal these past few weeks has put it in a make or break situation. Nepal has become a company filing for bankruptcy and in this case, the king is the presiding judge. I know he has the final say but I have some comments:
1 The commission formed to investigate corruption should give the accused a chance to voluntarily return the wealth amassed or face prison sentences. The commission should act swiftly and not prolong court battles which could tarnish its own credibility.
2 The new government should represent all regions of the country so they, too, have a say in the policies.
3 The most important measure to be taken is banning people who were elected

officials for the last 20 years from running for office again. People should realise that we are where are because of them. They had their chance and they blew it big time.

N Lane, Maryland, USA

- Knowing your limits I am softening my language here but want to send a strong message to let royalists know the cumulative impact of their actions since February First. King Gyanendra defied both national and international concerns to suspend fundamental rights. No one, except the Maoists, have gained from the move. The monarchy has played its traditional role of undermining democracy to its own detriment. This move was supposed to focus the fight against the Maoists, but even in a situation of information blackout the people outside Kathmandu know things haven't got better. After February First, the Maoists have been emboldened, garnering unprecedented international exposure and legitimacy. At the same time, the monarchy had its international image tarnished. The royalists simply missed the point that had the king not curbed civil liberties and press freedom and the army done more to address rights violations, the UN's monitoring mission would not have been needed. The world knows about Maoist brutality, now there will also be questions about the 1,400 people whom the security forces have disappeared. This crisis of confidence among the king, the international community and the political parties is the best thing that ever happened to the Maoists. Even though the hexa- and octogenarian leaders of major political parties still like to see the king as a constitutional monarch, republican feelings are running high among the young turks. That also helps the Maoists. As Kunda Dixit notes in 'One on one' (#245) the king bargained for guns with India in exchange for easing the emergency. But there can be no peace or democracy at gunpoint. The international damage to Nepal's reputation and its geopolitical capitulation could have been avoided by sticking to constitutional norms. As King Gyanendra's ancestor, Prithbi Narayan Shah once said: "The monarchy is only as strong as the people."

Surendra R Devkota, USA

- I was not surprised to read 'Vigilante justice' translated from *Himal Khabarpartrika* (#246). It was an anticipated consequence as security personnel were foolishly distributing weapons to these so-called vigilantes without considering the future outcome. Now the vigilantes have started to speak like the Maoists, justifying extortion. Did our security personnel in the higher hierarchy think about this? Or are they just suffering from hubris? It is always fatal when an

untrained individual owns any kind of weapon that the law and society does not allow. There is still plenty of time to have the weapons returned to the state before bandits or another extremist faction get hold of them. We don't have to suffer again. Find another alternative to pacify, not this one. Violence only breeds violence.

Milan Gurung

TANKER TRUCKS

Nepali fuel tankers were recently held up in Bihar allegedly for not having paid their road tax to the state government. Apparently these fuel tankers were on a routine trip from east Nepal to pick up fuel from Barauni, as per the agreement between the two countries, with due written permission from the Indian Embassy in Nepal. Even after repeated negotiations by Nepal Oil Corporation with the government of Bihar and after payment of the newly stipulated heavy road tax, some tankers were still withheld. What flusters me is under what authority the NOC negotiated with the Indian state government for the release of the tankers. This matter should have gone through proper protocol channels: through the HMG Foreign Ministry and the Indian Embassy. If it is true that the oil tankers had proper authorisation from the Indian Embassy then the sole responsibility for the facilitation of the release of the tankers as well as the clearing up of the misunderstanding rested on the Indian Embassy. This would have been an excellent opportunity for the embassy to extend help towards the government and the people of Nepal. Yet the matter was allowed to drag on. It may be admissible that a state government may have different rules than the central government but at that time, Bihar was under direct president rule.

Andy Joshy, email

JASMINE

It was heart-warming to read 'Jasmine' (Nepali Pan, #246) by Trishna Gurung on the occasion of Mother's Day. It left me with a great feeling of gratitude and admiration for my mum. Every time I call her she asks, "Chhori, when are you coming home?" With her three daughters away from home and country, there's a void in her heart that is transparent. I want to thank Gurung for that beautiful piece on the most significant person in everyone's life—Aama.

Kushal Dhakhwa, Sydney

CORRECTION

Due to an editing error, the name of a letter writer in ('Statement', #246) was spelled wrong. It should have been Hemant Arjyal.

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KIRAN PANDAY

Ian Martin is the head of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) new monitoring mission in Nepal. He has 30 years of experience leading missions in Rwanda, Bosnia Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Darfur. In an exclusive interview with *Nepali Times*, Martin talked about the mandates and challenges of the monitoring mission.

Nepali Times: Are we expecting too much from your mission?

Ian Martin: I hope we can fulfil expectations although one must be realistic about what a limited number of people can do. Monitoring human rights and humanitarian law in a conflict situation is inherently very difficult. But so far I'm getting assurances of cooperation that suggest that our work should be able to make a real impact.

What exactly is your mandate?

We will be assisting the National Human Rights Commission and of course, civil society organisations. Ultimately, that is where the protection of human rights depends. But in the meantime, we also have a mandate to do independent monitoring of the human rights situation and have very strong commitments in the agreement to having complete freedom of movement and access to places of detention, high-level channels of communication with the authorities including the army. That puts us in a position where we ought to be able to be effective.

What challenges do you foresee?

One of the challenges is going to be carrying out independent objective investigations because of many reports of violations of human rights and humanitarian law. But our responsibility is not just to depend upon reports from others but to assess those ourselves. Access is difficult in these terrains to get promptly to places where incidents have occurred. So it's not going to be easy to carry out the investigations first hand always. I certainly see that as a challenge. In an armed conflict and highly politicised environment, it is not easy to ensure that we approach things with the standards of testing the credibility of information that the UN must apply.

What will be your first order of business?

Our immediate priority is to open the channels of communication which I have already begun doing in discussion with the government and to begin assembling the team that we need, orient and train the first of the human rights officers to join this operation. People have to understand that it takes time. We are a functioning team. Once we can open offices in other parts of the country we will start to function from there. How soon we can do that also depends on how quickly the donors are willing to give resources that are necessary for this operation because it is dependent on voluntary funding.

What would be the profile of independent monitors?

We won't be able to find people who have both previous experiences in human rights investigation/monitoring and fluency in Nepali language. We would like to recruit some Nepali speakers as human rights officers and are also giving some basic training in Nepali to those who have arrived. But we need the assistance of interpreters.

So when will the deployment start?

Our initial team of about 12 monitors is already here and as soon as they complete their training, we will begin to operate. The UN has already begun to operate and has a human rights presence through the human rights adviser and the human rights information unit that is being established. We will be operating at the initial level from next week.

How will the monitors operate in Maoist controlled areas?

We clearly need to get some guarantees that there won't be any threat to our personnel moving around the country and there have been public statements that indicate support for the operation. So we'll have to test that out. My expectation is that all parties will cooperate with this operation and guarantee the security of our personnel. Certainly, the international community would be very concerned if that was not going to be the case.

Do you think the operation will help future negotiations?

I have been making it very clear that my mandate is confined to that one of human rights monitoring and assistance but I certainly believe that if we can contribute to improvement in the human rights situation, it can be a positive factor in the overall path to peace. That's been the experience in other countries. So it's not my mandate to explore possibilities of negotiations. However, the secretary general has made it clear at a number of occasions that the United Nations is willing to offer its services to assist towards peace. But that is not my mandate. My mandate is to contribute to an improvement in the human rights situation.

Where will the monitors be reporting?

Our report will go to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour and she has asked in the agreement to report to the general assembly and of course the secretary general.

Will you be opening up previous investigations?

I wouldn't separate monitoring from investigation. I think we have quite enough to do addressing the current situation and fresh reports of incidents rather than open up retrospective investigations. But of course, one of the objectives is to address impunity and therefore, the extent to which there is proper follow through on investigations into past incidents is very important.

How long do you expect the mission to remain in Nepal?

The agreement is initially for a period of two years but it is renewable, so it becomes a matter for discussion between the high commissioner and the government of Nepal. As we come towards the end of that two-year period, let's see what the situation is like then.

संकेतको भेरी ०८३-५२२४४५ । संकेतको बालेश्वरी ०८२-०५२६३९२ । संकेतको मदनपोखरा ०७५-५२२४०५ । यौलाचिसि पुष्पपुर ०६८-५२००४५ । बुटवल पुष्पपुर ०७९-५४६४९८ । माध्यपुच्छे पुष्पपुर ०६२-५३२८८३ । कालिका पुष्पपुर ०५६-५२७२५६ । मनकामना पुष्पपुर ०५७-५२३९२९ । संकेतको पालुङ ०५७-५४०३६२ । साप्तकोशी पुष्पपुर ०२५-५८०२७७ / ०२२-५३६४४५ ।

Kingfishers flying

New Indian private airlines are poaching each other's pilots, leading to a high rate of climb for cockpit salaries. This week, a new budget airline, Kingfisher Airlines began services with Airbus 320s stealing some pilots from state-run Indian Airlines. Domestic traffic is increasing at a blistering 20 percent per year and is expected to cross 50 million in five years. Kingfisher is competing with Air Deccan and Spice Air, Go Air, Indigo, Indusone and Air One are starting soon. Jet Airways is seeking permission to import pilots to add to 14 foreigners already flying. Air Deccan has 31 foreign pilots, including three Nepali captains who fly its ATR-72s. Salaries for pilots are now up to IRs 300,000 per month with senior pilots getting as much as IRs 500,000.

BBC protests

The British Broadcasting Corporation has written a strongly-worded letter to Radio Nepal complaining about a breach of contract in blocking out its World Service English news over BBC 103 FM in Kathmandu. Under an agreement signed in December, the Radio Nepal was required to relay the BBC news feed 23 hours a day over its 103 FM station. But since the end of February, Radio Nepal has been playing music for the first 15 minutes of the news at the top of every hour. A meeting attended by the Minister of Information and Communications last week after the BBC letter came in reportedly decided that the news block served no useful purpose and should be lifted. But the army still has not given the green light.

A new point

A new confectionary outlet, Baker's Point, has opened in Kupondole opposite Hotel Himalaya. With emphasis on hygiene, it has a range of bakery products available .



Weekend grind

Surya Lights is organising its annual Grind at Hyatt Regency on 14 May. DJ Jimmy Tangree will also be performing at the event.



Growing profits

Based on the first nine month's unaudited accounts, Everest Bank's operating profit showed an increase of 23 percent over the last year. The Bank's credit has grown by 22 percent.



NEW PRODUCT

PEPSI PET: Barun Beverage Nepal has begun distributing 1 lt Pepsi and Mirinda in pet bottles. They are available in shops for Rs 50.



WAI WAI: To celebrate 20 years of Wai Wai, Chaudhary Group has launched Wai Wai Quick in two flavours—Chicken Curry and Masala Curry.

Rules of the game

Daron Acemoglu, a professor at MIT, was honoured last month with a John Bates Clark medal. While a Nobel Prize is given out every December, the Clark medal is rarer because it is awarded to an influential economist under the age of 40 every two years. Through his research, Acemoglu has attempted to shed light on the central puzzle of development economics: what accounts for the wealth of nations?

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



Policy pundits have long hewed the usual 'poor countries save less, invest less on education and do not use technology' explanations. Others attribute it to variations in geography and culture. Still others, citing North and South Korea as examples, say that what matters is market-friendliness of a country's institutions. Working with other academics, Acemoglu has treated this last observation with rigour to answer: how is it that countries end up with the institutions that they have now and how big is the effect of such institutions on those countries' wealth? In doing so, he has put the study of institutions right in the middle of economics and underscored the importance of history, politics and legal systems in interpreting nations' economic lives.

Acemoglu defines institutions as 'the rules of the game in economic, political and social interactions'. These rules refer to property rights, contract enforcement mechanisms, limits on politicians' excesses, distribution of political power

Landlordism is still with us

and the like. What he shows is that in many countries, these institutions have been set in place by historical happenstances that responded to the then prevailing incentives. For instance, even when the Spanish were in San Francisco and Los Angeles well before the English traders, they could not be there for long. Because they had to share the profits with monarchs in Europe who controlled how much spoils the traders could keep for themselves, they saw little incentive to hold on to their new land. Meanwhile, the English pushed for property rights to stake claims on the New World that the Spanish had first discovered.

Likewise, in Africa, death rates of their 'bishops, soldiers and sailors' affected the settlement patterns of Europeans. That, in turn, affected the eventual arrangement of institutions in African countries. The logic is that in

most places, high death rates discouraged Europeans from settling down. As such, they set up institutions to siphon the riches from those places to their home countries. As a result, at times of independence in the '60s and the '70s, most African countries such as Zaire, inherited those entrenched extractive institutions, which the local elites kept in place to transfer resources into their own pockets. But in places (such as the US and Australia) where their death rates were lower, the Europeans settled down, cleared land for farming and started demanding that their properties be protected by laws similar to those of their home countries. Over time, those demands coalesced into market-friendly 'rules of the game', positively affecting those new countries' economic growth.

Could an application of this 'rules of the game' theory help us understand what is holding Nepali businesses back? Two hypotheses: first, the Nepali state, though never a colony, has long acted as a landlord—extracting surplus from villagers to pay for the elites' indulgences. Reforms notwithstanding, that landlordism is still with us—dulling Nepalis' entrepreneurial zeal to innovate, produce and sell anything anywhere with ease. And second, given that Nepal's legal system is a mishmash of Hindu jurisprudence, traditional rules, *ad hocism* and western common-law statutes, Nepali businesses continue to find it difficult to fit in with the global supply chain of goods and services—credibly, competitively and for a long haul. ●



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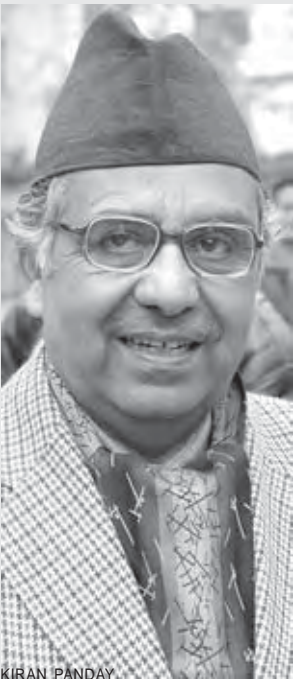
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“How dare we let it happen”



KIRAN PANDAY

Former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana in *Deshantar*, 8 May

बैदेशिक संप्रदायिक

We won democracy in 1950. Fifty-five years later, we are still demanding democracy. Then we were stressing a national consensus and today we are doing the same. In 1950, we had a constitutional assembly but it could not accomplish its task. Perhaps that is why Nepalis have had to keep fighting for freedom again and again. One wonders when this saga of ushering in and hijacking of democracy will end. Who is the hijacker? Why is it hijacked? Until and unless we find the answer, Nepalis will have to continue fighting for democracy. Why is the country once again under the direct rule of the king? The constitution of 1991 had ended any provision for the king's direct rule. It had only provisioned a space in which the king had to remain a constitutional monarch. It was the same constitution that had guaranteed the supremacy of the people's sovereignty and press freedom. Under the provision of press freedom, there are guarantees for the right to information, no closure of any publication house and no imposition of censorship. But now we see there is censorship. A state of emergency can't be imposed without the ratification of the parliament and in absence of the recommendation of democratic forces. There is no way the king can be chairman of the ministers' council. Only the representatives of the people can remain in government. These are the fundamental aspects of the constitution.

Who are these people to threaten journalists, arrest and even torture them? Why are they doing it? These are issues we must raise. I agree with Sher Bahadur Deuba on one thing—wherever we go, we need to understand that the constitution of 1991 should be the basis to march forward. If we are playing a game, we need to agree on the rules before appointing an umpire. If the king wishes to play his role, he should say that he is not within the constitution. Or, the king must explain which constitution he is following.

Did the king consult with any political force before making such a move on 1 February? He made it on his own and yet in the international forum, he said it was the right move. How then can the international community call it a 'correct' move? Vague references to democracy and freedom do not make any sense. Opportunism for state power has always been the greatest enemy of Nepal's democracy.

No doctor

Rajdhani, 8 May

राजधानी

RASUWA—Hundreds of patients are without medical care at the primary health centre in Dhaibung due to a lack of doctors. According to Bishnu Poudyal, a former member of the District Development Board, one doctor ran the health centre single-handedly until some time ago. The centre has had no doctor since then. Now that winter is over, locals hope a doctor will finally arrive soon.

On Constitution Day

Nepal Samacharpatra, 9 May

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

According to constitutional experts, the country is mired in conflict because the constitution is interpreted only when it seems favourable to those concerned. They acknowledge that the constitution and law is confined to words. Legal experts say the government is carrying out unconstitutional actions under Article 127, interpreting it to its advantage. Senior Advocate Moti Kaji Sthapit says, “The situation now is very different. Actions contradict the law and constitution. How can you say there is lawful administration in the country?” Nepal Bar Association's ex-Chairman Harihar Dahal says, “If the judiciary is not independent, the law is not active and without the law, the judiciary cannot be independent.” For the country to be governed according to law, the king, judiciary and each constitutional party must act according to the law and constitution, say experts.

Since the present government is unconstitutional, interpreting constitutional monarchy with the king carrying out his duties according to the constitution and

other parties doing the same could lead to some improvements, according to Senior Advocate Sri Hari Aryal. “The situation has grown worse after February First. The king and the political parties must sit down now to find a common roadmap for the good of the nation,” adds he. Our constitution never envisioned a country without a parliament and according to principle, the situation cannot be analysed from the point of view of laws formulated by parliament. The experts underlined that it was against the law to arrest people even after the Supreme Court had ordered their release.

In Tundikhel

Rajdhani, 8 May

राजधानी

Maoist victims who have been living in temporary camps in Tundikhel are falling ill because of the rain and fall in temperature. The children and the elderly are suffering from cold and other diseases, some have swollen bodies. More than 300 people have been living in makeshift tents here for a month now. Chairman of the Maoist Victims' Organisation Dharmaraj Neupane says, “We have no roof over our heads, nothing to protect us from the damp.” He adds that though they had asked various NGOs for help, their requests had fallen on deaf ears. The Maoist victims had asked to be given internal refugee status but the government has remained unresponsive.

Money in the tank

Former Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikary in *Jana Astha*, 4 May

आस्था

If the news that I had hidden money in my water tank was true, do you think this regime would have spared me? I would have been behind bars. After February First, my hands are as good as tied and my mouth as good as plastered because they've kept me under house arrest. Even my household help was not allowed to go out. While I was being kept captive, they launched a propaganda against me through print media and television. They conspired against me and said I had hidden money in my water tank. They filmed a scene recovering money from someone else's water tank and labelled my name on the entire episode before airing it on tv. And here I was under house arrest, helpless and unable to defend myself. Does this not expose the political culture of the present regime?

Can anyone prove that I illegally earned even one paisa while I was finance minister? I was chief of the financial department of the party. Even there, I maintained the accounts up-to-date. I still don't have my own house and live in rented premises. I don't own a car and am not ashamed to walk. I am a poor country's politician. When so many people live in poverty, why should I lead a luxurious life? When I was the finance minister, the revenue increased by

33 percent. Now the finance minister himself is saying the revenue has dropped. How come? I did not agree to raise royal palace expenses. Compared to the previous year, I brought down the army's budget by Rs 430 million in order to persuade the Maoists to come for peace talks. In the meantime, the army has been blaming me. But the Maoists called us servants of the king and insisted on talking only to him.

VDC secretaries

Dristi, 10 May

दृष्टि

JAJARKOT—The conflict may have spread misery among Nepalis but it has been a boon for VDC secretaries. It's been four years since they stopped visiting the villages but the VDC secretaries still receive their monthly allowances for going to the villages and returning to the headquarters. With the lack of people's representation in the residential administration and the Maoist control over the villages, the VDC has been misusing money. Of the 30 VDCs in Jajarkot, in all VDCs besides Khalanga, there is lack of transparency in work procedures including documentation and paper work of the people. These officers register their appearance in the headquarters for their salaries without performing their duties and also make fake bills for things supposedly bought for the VDC.

100 days later

Editorial in *Sanghu*, 9 May

सङ्घ

It will be one hundred days since the council of ministers was formed under the chairmanship of the king. Now that the honeymoon period is over, this is a good time to evaluate its performance. This non-politically aligned council was formed after the multiparty government was accused of bad governance, incapable of restoring peace, lack of transparency and accountability. This wasn't the first ministerial council of a non-political character. The council appointed under Lokendra Bahadur Chand's prime ministership after Sher Bahadur Deuba's was kicked out with the 'incompetent' label was similar. So was the council under Surya Bahadur Thapa also formed but Sher Bahadur Deuba had a multiparty cabinet. Accused of not being able to function according to the norms of democracy, this too was thrown out and a new one formed with the king as chairman. That is why, this council of ministers, too must be evaluated according to their ability to restore peace, good governance, transparency and accountability.

Kathmanduites have been living in a false sense of peace. Beyond Kathmandu, there has been no actual improvement in the situation. What was before February First has remained the same. That is why experts have said time and again that it is not right to evaluate Nepal from Kathmandu. Yes, citizenships and passports were issued in one



Where is the news about emergency being lifted?
I thought you told us not to write whatever we wanted.

समय Samaya, 12 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Today from the Caucuses to Central Asia, people demand freedom and they will get it.”

US President George W Bush's speech in Georgia on 10 May.

Banner: Convention of Nepali journalists

If I win the elections, I will work on development, eliminate corruption, peace....oops, this seems to be the party manifesto

Stop crying, Daddy is going to be turned back from the airport anyway.

day after 1 February but there is no report of whether the pace was continued. This lack of transparency has resulted in lack of information. Public hearing programs have been organised in the name of accountability but the inaction despite various topics being raised has resulted in the people's disbelief in such programs. This disillusionment is to be expected. Even the 21-point program put forward by the government is beginning to fall apart because the points listed out have not been implemented. More than focussing on making sure that their programs are carried out successfully, the individual members of the Council of Ministers have been focussing on painting the

political parties black and assassinating the characters of political leaders. They cannot gain the upper hand by only pointing out the bad things the multiparty government did. If someone is really keen on serving the nation and the people, they need not point out somebody else's mistakes. The people will see their work as proof. Though this ministerial council has been critical of the multiparty government, their work has not been very different either. At least back then, the people could raise their voice against them and be critical. They could have talked to the people in the government. Now, even this right has been taken away from the people.

India and China sacrifice Nepal

Sudhir Sharma in *Nepal*, 8 May

When it comes to nationalistic agenda, the Nepali public has a tendency to rise in rage without rationalising. Unfortunately, this does not last long. Take the Kalapani issue. Both the government and the citizens had forgotten about it, but it seems to have remained in Indian memory. China's agreement with India on Kalapani proves that along with the annexation of Sikkim after 30 years, China's policy shift towards India will not just affect Nepal's geopolitics but will also have adverse effects on many other Indo-Nepal issues. At a time when Nepal has opened its territory for transit for both China and India, they have together been putting Nepal in a very difficult position. During the Chinese premier Wen Jinbao's visit to India last month, out of the 22 bilateral agreements, the border issue was regarded as the most significant and China reportedly approved India's control over Kalapani. The border protocol agreement made to develop mutual trust between the two countries mandates two additional border meetings annually at Spanggur Gap in the western region, Nathu La Pass in Sikkim and Burn La in the eastern region. At these meetings, the Chinese army will have to come down to Kalapani and Nepal will just have to watch the Chinese and Indian flags fly over its territory.

Nearly five years ago, the Chinese

ambassador had said in a press meet that Kalapani belonged to Nepal. It seems like China has given India the green signal for encroachment in Kalapani. China's approval of Indian control over Kalapani came simultaneously with its support of Indian claim on Sikkim that China had been previously protesting.

China's support for India is out of vested business and trade interests. Trade is the priority for Beijing, not the sensitivity of the geographical integrity of a buffer state.

China seems to have accepted that Nepal is in India's sphere of influence. Just like America and Britain are looking at Nepal through Indian eyes on the Maoist problem. But it cannot be denied that India does not want American presence in Nepal in the name of curbing the Maoists. Nepal is hurt with China's move because it has always supported and respected China's geopolitical integrity. Nepal has always backed China as is apparent from its closing down of Dalai Lama's Nepal office and has supported the Chinese position on Taiwan. Nepal should have benefitted from the

improvement in relations between her two powerful neighbours but it seems to have been punished. But while such serious events are taking place, the government is mute. We really have to wonder what the so-called nationalistic government representatives are doing about this issue.



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Across the hump



MARK TURIN

Tracing Princess Bhrikuti's journey from Kathmandu to Lhasa in an air-conditioned Sajha Yatayat bus

MARK TURIN in LHASA

On Friday, 29 April, a group of local Chinese officials, Tibetan businessmen and a contingent from the Royal Nepali Consulate to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) gathered at the bus station on the western side of Lhasa. Quite a crowd had assembled on this bright morning, including a fair number of passengers whose departure on local transport had been delayed by the inaugural ceremony for the direct bus service between Kathmandu and Lhasa. The local press were there in droves: tv cameramen, reporters and photographers, making the most of the splendid weather and colourful balloons which had been hung up to herald the occasion.

After a traditional Tibetan welcome involving costumed and masked dancers, the official introductions started, including that of Leela Mani Paudel, the

Royal Nepali Consul General to Lhasa. Paudel read out a thoughtful three-page speech, delivered in excellent English and simultaneously translated into Chinese by an interpreter at his side. It was a matter of rejoicing, he said, that 11 years after the signing of a Transport Agreement between Nepal and China, this direct bus service between the capitals of the kingdom of Nepal and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China should be ready to depart. Nepal is the only foreign country which has a direct air link with Lhasa, courtesy of Air China's biweekly flights and this direct trans-national road service will help provide increased mobility to the citizens of these neighbouring regions, the Consul General stated.

The commencement of the bus service was widely reported in the local media in Lhasa and is generally seen by both ethnic Tibetans and by migrant Chinese residents of Lhasa to be a positive

move leading to increased connections between the cities. On the other hand, the railway linking Lhasa with 'mainland' China, which is under construction, is far more contentious and many Tibetans are concerned about a massive influx of Chinese labourers and settlers to the region.

As for Lhasa's resident Nepalis, some expressed doubts about the utility of the Kathmandu-Lhasa bus service, suggesting that the practical benefits may be limited simply because the vehicles will ferry only around 100 people up and down every week. The flight, although expensive at \$ 280 one-way, remains the option of choice for well-heeled travellers, while Nepalis involved in trade will continue to make use of the trucks and lorries that bring their supplies in and out *en masse*. The direct bus service is truly a passenger service for short-stay tourists.

Who, then, are the projected



MARK TURIN

- Clockwise, top:
- The first Lhasa bus drives past fields of wheat near Bhaktapur on 29 April, it reached Lhasa on 4 May.
 - Chinese passengers of the Lhasa bus walk through the Friendship Bridge.
 - Hundred-year-old Bhekh Maya come to greet the passengers of the first Lhasa bus at Bhaktapur.
 - Spectators gathered at the inaugural ceremony in Lhasa.
 - Leela Mani Paudel, the Royal Consul General of Nepal to Lhasa, standing in front of the Lhasa bus, flanked by Chinese and Tibetan officials.
 - People waiting to welcome the passengers at Friendship Bridge.
 - Driving off after a brief stop at Sangha to keep the engine from heating up too much.



punters? Are they Chinese, Tibetan, Nepali or foreign? As long as a structural inequality between China and Nepal remains unresolved, it appears that the number of Nepalis able to avail themselves of this service will remain limited: the Royal Nepali Consulate in Lhasa issues tourist visas to Chinese citizens at no charge within a few hours of application, while a reciprocal service has as yet not been extended to Nepalis applying for visas at the Chinese Embassy in Kathmandu. It would be great to be able to secure a short-stay Chinese visa together with the bus ticket or have them both organised by a tour operator. Until this happens, once the flow of dignitaries making the trip has subsided, it is likely that the bulk of the passengers will be non-Asian tourists who can't afford the flight but are interested in the novelty of the bus service. Even for this to happen, security between Kathmandu and Kodari must be assured and the vehicle

will need a proven track record of comfort and reliability. In short, then, the commencement of the service is an important step for cross-border mobility and a credit to the persistence of the authorities in both countries who have seen the idea through all of the possible obstacles. Now that the road is clear, we can only hope that more of Nepal's citizens will be able to visit the city where their ancestors set up shop after weeks of gruelling hikes across Himalayan passes. What would the fabled seventh century Princess Bhrikuti Debi, who married the then Tibetan ruler Tsrong Tsang Gampo, have thought of an air-conditioned Sajha Yatayat bus completing the journey in two days. ●

Mark Turin is a linguistic anthropologist and Director of the Digital Himalaya Project based at the University of Cambridge in UK. He is presently a Visiting Scientist at ICIMOD. www.digitalhimalaya.com

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Problems don't disappear

They can only be solved as extraordinary times call for extraordinary courage



Kigali, 1994. Paul Rusesabagina, house manager of Des Milles Collines, has just bought Cohiban cigars to entertain his guests with style. Outside his home and hotel is chaos and conflict. The streets

FILM

Abha Eli Phoboo



are lined with men in green fatigues carrying guns and machetes. The Hutus are out to kill the Tutsi rebels and the violence in Rwanda can only grow worse.

The radios crackle to life as

they tune into the Hutu Power Radio. This media is their medium for brainwashing the Hutus by referring to the Tutsis as 'cockroaches' and 'tall trees' in their propaganda. "They must be cut down", "They must be squashed". The Hutu rebels believe that they can only win by wiping out the entire Tutsi tribe. In the midst of all this is Paul, a Hutu married to a Tutsi, assuring people of the end of the conflict until he flees to Belgium. His love for his family leads him to summon extraordinary courage and save 1,268 Rwandans. And they were extraordinary times.

Just a decade ago, in the age of

the Internet and hi-tech gadgets, the genocide that swept this country in sub-Saharan Africa was virtually ignored. The UN and world super powers hid their selfish interests behind the technicality of big words and bureaucracy. "We are here as peacekeepers not as peacemakers," says UN's Colonel Oliver (Nick Nolte) in an interview during the course of the movie. And one journalist remarks in disgust to the world's indifference, "They'll say 'Oh my God, that's horrible!' And go on eating their dinner."

Nepal, 1996. Much as it seems unbelievable that genocide went unnoticed just two years ago, you

wonder at the world's selfishness. You wonder at the people's indifference as an insurgency grows its roots in your own backyard. The least developed regions are the most fertile grounds and Kathmandu continues to ignore it hoping it will go away.

Kathmandu, 2005. The streets are lined with men in green fatigues carrying guns as tall trees that took years to grow are being cut down. Your radio can easily crackle with propaganda as it tunes into an underground station still dispensing news of sorts. Beyond your bubble city, there is chaos and conflict. You watch the news on tv every day and exclaim, 'Oh my God, that's horrible!' and go on eating your dinner. Tomorrow, you will have something more to talk about.

One agreement has been signed and another is to follow. The west has not ignored us completely but as you rush from this reception to that party to that conference and this conflict management workshop, you wonder who is really hiding behind the technicality of big words. You can taste the fear when you watch *Hotel Rwanda* in the comfort of your home because the smell in the air around you is all too real.

The 'them' fast becomes 'us' for Paul and all the Tutsis taking refuge in Hotel Des Milles Collines. And Colonel Oliver, despite himself, explains in



disgust why the world doesn't care, "You are dirt. We think you are dirt, less than dirt, you're worthless. You're not even a nigger—you're African." When all else fails and the world leaves them to their own defence, they know that their only way out is to 'shame them (the world) into helping us'. When no help comes, you wonder—was the world too ashamed to turn around or had it grown so indifferent that it was beyond shame?

Hotel Rwanda is a true story of heroism in today's world telling leaders their ego could cost too many precious lives. Don Cheadle as Paul Rusesabagina and Sophie Okonedo as his wife Tatiana are brilliant. Directed by Terry George, the screenplay is especially effective without the usual glamourised terror of Hollywood films. As a movie of social conscience, it moves you beyond indifference. ●

Hotel Rwanda is available for rent at Suwal Video, Rs 75. 4421522 DVD.com, Rs 50. 5551655 Utsav Video, Rs 45. 4422655 Akash Video, Rs 35. 4440688

The religious X-file

Cracking the Da Vinci code from this side of the world

At least once every year, we in Nepal enjoy the season of the divine Durga. We examine our religion and our beliefs as an essential part of our self-inventory, take stock, repent ways of living that do not honour us or our highest calling.

So to take some time to sit with a book that makes us think about religion and what it means to each of us is probably an annual luxury we can afford. And if that book happens to be a grippingly well-played mystery à la Sherlock Holmes, all the better.

The plot of the *Da Vinci Code* is that of the age-old quest for the Holy Grail but not the one most Christians consider fact: the chalice used in the Last Supper was indeed a simple cup. In this book, the Grail ends up

BOOK

Jiggy Gaton



being the search for Mary Magdalene's tomb in which there are interred secret documents whose contents will wreck Christianity. These documents contain the 'true' gospel—one whose foundation is the feminised divine known in goddess worship. If revealed to the world, these recovered 'truths' will pave the way for us to return to a more enlightened spirituality centred on the divine feminine.

For us here in Nepal, it comes as no surprise when the author, Dan Brown, points the plot towards uncovering the divine feminine (Maya, Debi, Kali) that has been

hidden from Christianity by mere mortal men, specifically, the Vatican Church in Rome through an internal organisation called the Opus Dei. They are both in cahoots and in opposition with another society called the Priory of Sion whose members included the heretic Leonardo Da Vinci and other historical figures such as Sir Isaac Newton and Victor Hugo.

This book will appeal to any conspiracy theorist, unfolding just as a religious X-File would. Major clues to the 'truth' about Christianity's beginnings are hidden in Da Vinci's paintings and elsewhere, and the author assures us in the prologue to the novel that the organisations involved in keeping the secret are real and still functioning today. (It is true that Opus Dei has just completed their new national headquarters for \$ 47 million in New York City). So when the novel reveals some of the clues of the conspiracy, as in Da Vinci's famous painting *The Last Supper*, we are all ears.

Da Vinci is said to have put clues in the painting to show that Mary Magdalene was beside Jesus Christ at the Last Supper (in the very feminine figure of John the Baptist) and that the seating arrangement forms the letter 'M' for Mary). The painting may further insinuate the plot to kill off the feminine principle, as represented by a threatening dagger, ready to finish off Mary at the next opportunity.

What is uncovered and documented along the way is that early Christian leaders, wanting to downplay the role of females, have vilified Mary as a prostitute, burned women at the stake, and in short, erased any role of women and the divine feminine from Christianity. The shocking part for the reader of *The Da Vinci Code* is that this struggle is perhaps still taking place today (how many women were considered for the position of Pope?).

The Vatican has already made a formal statement saying that the book is rubbish, which for such a global power to comment on a *New York Times* #1 Bestseller is almost unprecedented and for Church leaders across the globe there has not been as much consternation since the Hollywood movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* was released. That story by Nikos Kazantzakis taken to film by Martin Scorsese in 1988 had Christian rioters at the ticket counters blocking the entrance for all theatregoers, just for implying that Jesus Christ had a physical relationship with Mary.

Personally, as a theatregoer who was hit on the head with a picket sign during

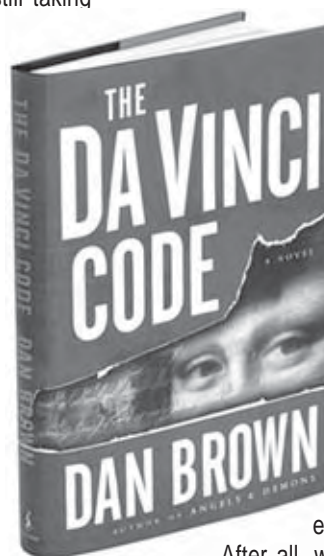
the opening of *The Last Temptation of Christ* in Hollywood, I found *The Da Vinci Code* to be a good read even when compared to great suspense and mystery writers like John Le Carré, Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Dan Brown happened to choose the right topic at the right time (when many Christians are

questioning their faith) and when many others around the globe are wondering what has gone wrong with the Church of Rome. So overlooking his inferior skill as a writer seems like a fair trade-off.

In addition, for many of us here in the Hindu/Buddhist part of the world (and if we believe the conspiracy), the book may be an insight into why Christianity seems to lack that 'woman's touch' we all know to be a vital element of our own faiths.

After all, whether we are religious or not, we know the axiom that behind every strong man there is a strong woman to be firmly rooted in the truth, if not in our own lives. ●

Jiggy Gaton is a cartoonist for *Nepali Times* and a frequent contributor.





KIRAN PANDAY

Hungry season in the hills

...but there is no food crisis yet, says the UN

NARESH NEWAR
in NEPALGANJ

This is the time of the year when a large number of Nepali migrant workers traditionally return from India to their remote homes in western Nepal to harvest winter crops and prepare for the monsoon cropping.

It is the notorious 'hungry season', the weeks between mid-March to mid-April when food stocks are down and farmers need to dig into their savings to survive.

For centuries, food supply has always been precarious in Nepal's remote districts especially during pre-harvest season. And when shortages are acute, villagers migrate temporarily to neighbouring districts or down to the plains in search of work. But the national media has confused these shortages with famine conditions and has drawn the false conclusion that it is due to the conflict.

"If there is food crisis according to what is reported in the media, then it should be based on facts and not speculation," says Erika Joergensen, representative of the UN's World Food Program (WFP) in Nepal, "rumours should not set the agenda. Our monitoring shows no sign of a large food crisis."

Since October 2002, WFP has surveyed food security situation in 32 districts of Nepal where 30 field monitors collect household and community data to provide information about the food situation in the country.

The conclusion is that Nepal has not yet reached a situation where lack of food is leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. The UN is concerned that exaggerated media reports will delay response when there is a real crisis in the future.

"The problem is that most of

the news about the situation of the remote areas is taken from the district headquarters. It is very important to visit remote parts of the country by which we can assess the actual situation," says WFP's Subash B Singh who has travelled extensively across the midwest.

In the last few months, the news of a food crisis was highlighted after the government's Nepal Food Corporation (NFC) was unable to airlift rice into some remote districts due to the Maoist blockade. This temporary shortage of subsidised rice in the district headquarters was described as an 'impending famine' in alarmist media reports.

Relief groups working in western Nepal say rice unloaded from choppers mostly feed civil servants stationed at district headquarters, it doesn't really get down to the poorest of the poor farmers away from the town. Paradoxically, some of the subsidised rice is turned into raxi in many district headquarters to meet the local demand for alcohol.

"The most affected are government officials, the airlifted rice makes no difference to the villagers," said Jiwan Shahi, the ex-DDC chairman of Humla. In the outlying villages, farmers eat wheat, millet, beans and maize as they always have. Rice is a luxury anyway.

In Simikot, the local food depot provides 15 kg of rice per person every month at subsidised rates. Villagers from more than a day's walk away can't travel all the way to the Humla district headquarters to buy rice and even if they could, they can't afford it.

Shahi thinks a road to Humla would solve the chronic food shortage this time of year. "The government should stop wasting money on airlifting rice and plough the money into a highway," says Shahi whose project to connect Simikot to

Tibet is half-complete.

And the insurgency doesn't seem to be a problem for relief organisations working in food deficit districts. "If we maintain our neutrality they don't bother us," says Pitamber Acharya of the non-government group, DEPROSC-Nepal which carries out irrigation, cash crop cultivation and farming technology projects in 21 districts unhindered.

A donor-supported Quick Impact Program (QIP) in conflict affected food deficit districts of Bajhang, Bajura and Mugu is helping the farmers develop mule trails, bridges and off-season vegetable and orchard cultivation. "As long as the programs are pro-poor there is no obstacle from the Maoists," says economist Narendra KC of another relief group, SAPPROS-Nepal.

Agriculturist PB Singh also doesn't believe that the conflict has reduced food production. "Low production or barren fields in Bajhang or Bajura are not a direct result of conflict, they were there even before the conflict," he explains, "the media has got it all wrong."

Lack of planning, management, poor distribution and storage and lack of efficient response have always contributed to food shortages in western Nepal, and today it is no different.

"Millions of small farmers, landless rural families and unskilled urban workers are food insecure but it is less clear whether there has been a real decline in food security over the past five years, and whether any decline can be attributed to the conflict specifically," write David Seddon and Jaganath Adhikari in their report *Conflict and Food Security in Nepal*.

Agencies like WFP, however, continue to monitor the food situation closely and say they want to be prepared in case things really take a turn for the worse. ●

Colonial hunts

A poor Rana's guide to hunting

There is this stereotype that has been around since I was a kid: that all Ranas are rich, have concubines, engage in prolific tiger-hunting, and generally indulge in extreme decadence. Only the part about the decadence is true. Indeed, Ranas are now about as diverse as any group in Nepal (perhaps with the exception of the Koirala clan).

Take our family. According to my grandfather, after Jang Bahadur took over, he spread the wealth around amongst family

NEPALI PAN
Pravin Rana



and friends. But my great, great grandmother, who never met a card game she didn't like, wiped out the family fortune in a couple of Dasain

card parties.

By the time the baton was passed to my grandfather, he said we were so down and out that we didn't even fit into Chandra Shumsher's A, B, C classification system for Ranas. My grandmother tells me that Chandra Shumsher was forced to extend the classification on a one-time basis just for our family. I believe we fall somewhere between U and Z.

In practical terms, this means that we were so out of it that Chandra Shumsher's eighth concubine's fourth cousin twice removed living in Doti was ahead of my grandfather to become prime minister. Why do you think I work for a living?

Remember those tarai colonial hunts we read about in history books? The ones where Juddha Shumsher and King George along with the help of 800 drummers, bartenders and relatives bagged 38 tigers, 49 wild boar, 36 rhinos and 25 species of game birds in a single day—all from the comfortable perch of an elephant!

Well, making sure we didn't grow up as deprived Ranas, my grandfather devised his own low-cost version of the colonial hunt. Basically, we'd go out with home-made slingshots and hoof it from Naxal to Pashupati, doing serious damage to the sparrow, temple pigeon and monkey populations along the way. But unlike the environmentally insensitive colonial hunts of those other Ranas, we ate what we killed. Ok, enough about Ranas, even they deserve a break and also, I don't want to go back home and find that we've now been re-classified again as Z Class. That would ruin my grandmother's day.



With human rights groups and activists screaming for a stop to military aid, the RNA needs to come up with a self-sufficient military strategy for this insurgency. Being an aficionado of movies, may I suggest that they borrow from Akira Kurosawa's Japanese sword-fighting classic, *The Seven Samurai*. Instead of Samurai, send seven gregarious, backslapping, butt-scratching Gorkhalis to each Maoist village. Replace the Samurai's two finely made swords (known as katana and wakizashi for you Samurai illiterates) with two roughly made but highly effective khukuris. And, in return for nothing except rice, *rayo ko sag*, dried red chillis and millet whisky our adapted Samurai would vanquish the terrorists and return the village to normalcy. One small weakness with this strategy is that there are about 5,000 villages in Nepal and that's going to tie up almost half of the RNA. Who's going to take care of things like Ghode Jatra?

Nice touch by *Nepali Times* with that liberty gauge. Completely baffles the average RNA Major, I'm sure. May I be bold enough to suggest to the fine team at *Nepali Times* a 'crapola' gauge to accompany the liberty gauge. When we read published statements on the Internet like 'Nepal has one of worst press freedoms in the whole world', perhaps the crapola gauge can be hiked up a notch. Or, when yet another EU member proclaims 'democratisation through peace' as if any other party other than the Maoists have been asking for anything else, perhaps the crapola gauge can be dialled up a couple of more notches.

I have to agree with Mr Lal that we should wait and see on this whole UN monitoring thing. With cries all over the United States to move the UN out of Manhattan to the Congo, the Oil-for-Food Scandal, missed opportunities for redemption in Iraq, irrelevance, and oversight issues (on everything), it is difficult to figure out who is doing who a favour here. There is a Nepali saying that fits this scenario and is fellow-contributor Herojig's motto, it goes like '*lata ko desh ma gande tannaree*'. Loosely translated it means:

Ratchet up the crapola gauge to 'F' please.

The Ugly Indian

Diplomacy is far too important to be left to New Delhi's diplomats, argues an Indian analyst



It would be instructive to look upon India from the vantage point of Kathmandu, the capital of a Nepal that was gratuitously described by *The Economist* as a 'failed state'. For the past fortnight, there has been both consternation and confusion in Nepal over Big

COMMENT
Swapan Dasgupta



Brother India's stand on developments in the Himalayan kingdom. After King Gyanendra imposed his emergency on 1 February, it was understood that New Delhi was not amused. The Ministry of External Affairs proffered long sermons on

democracy and civil liberties, even as it railed against a duplicitous monarch. After an initial bout when indignation meshed with concern, it was decided that India would not supply weapons to the Royal Nepali Army for the war against Comrade Prachanda's People's Liberation Army. That's where things stood until the prime minister and external affairs minister met King Gyanendra on the sidelines of the Bandung jamboree last month. The king assured Indian leaders that the emergency would be lifted by 1 May and steps would be taken to ensure a phased return of normal political activity, including the release of political prisoners. Unfortunately, the apparent

U-turn of the political leadership did not please the mandarins in South Block—the covenanted custodians of national interest. Seizing on the arrest of the former prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba on corruption-related charges, India did another flip-flop. Even after the emergency was withdrawn on 1 May India responded with the bland assertion that it was not enough. The message from South Block was clear: never mind the Maoists, the king must grovel. It is a policy that lacks credibility and is likely to be woefully counter-productive. First, there was considerable anger in the top echelons of the MEA that the king had wilfully defied New Delhi's advice to

refrain from assuming direct charge. It was decided that the monarch must be taught the lesson of a lifetime so no future potentate would dare defy India or at least its pro-consuls, again. Second, it was believed that the marginalisation of political parties in Nepal would trigger a mass upsurge that would either unseat the king or force him to crawl to New Delhi and reconcile himself to becoming another tourist attraction. Third, it was also felt that without the discreet assistance from India, the RNA would flounder in the war against the Maoists. There was, in fact, the bizarre spectacle of the Maoist blockades of Kathmandu being quietly cheered in South Block. Finally, it was put out that the regime in Kathmandu would be completely isolated diplomatically and viewed as a rogue state by all those who had a stake in Nepal. Even the potential danger of China fishing in troubled waters was brushed off. Each of these assumptions has proved to be flawed. First, the protests by the political parties have evoked little or no response. On the contrary, so intense is the popular disgust with the politicians who made such a mess of the country that there is a willingness to give the king a chance. Second, far from retreating into their fortified garrisons, a motivated RNA has actually scored a few military successes against the Maoists. Most important, India's grandstanding

has fuelled a fierce anti-India mood in Nepal. The image of the pesky, intrusive Ugly Indian has been reinforced in Nepal. For the past three months, King Gyanendra has tried to persuade India to appreciate his compulsions. His emissaries have spelt out the common dangers posed by the Maoists, a threat well recognised by the Indian military. The efforts have failed, not because objective realities argue against it but because India's Nepal policy is tied to a churlish MEA desire to give the king a bloody nose. India's national and strategic interests have been mortgaged to a personal agenda of *papier-mâché* Curzons in South Block. The implications of this subterfuge are profound. If the monarchy is crippled, India will have to end up holding the can for a fractious and unreliable 'democratic' regime. This could even involve direct intervention to keep the Maoists at bay. A royal holding operation, on the other hand, will expose the glaring mismatch between India's policy objectives and its capabilities. Apart from exposing India as a vengeful but thoughtless bully, unworthy of assuming global responsibilities, King Gyanendra would have also taught New Delhi that diplomacy is far too important to be left to diplomats. ●

Swapan Dasgupta is an Indian political commentator and this column was excerpted from *The Telegraph*.

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Practice, then preach

Hitting and hoping won't get you anywhere

In these many years as a teaching professional, I have constantly come across regular golfers who get on the practice range and whack hundreds of balls with what I call a 'hit and hope' attitude. I feel they believe that after hitting enough balls, the Golfing Gods will magically bestow upon them the ability to hit straight and long. There seems to be no end to the supply of this breed of aspiring players.

Jack Nicklaus, one of golf's greatest players, said, "I NEVER practiced without a firm plan and ALWAYS practiced with a certain goal in mind for each practice session." Most weekend golfers manage to sneak in time to visit a practice range during the week to improve their game. They put in quite a few hours to get the ball

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



airborne in a straight line and often manage to achieve reasonable success. Come weekend and back on the course, they just can't seem to repeat what they were doing in practice. Confused and aggravated, they wonder why. My answer is simply that their practice sessions are often executed without a goal or target.

- Here are some guidelines for your forthcoming practice sessions:
- 1 When working on your technique, do it without a ball and do it slowly so you can feel and see (better if used with a mirror or camera) the exactness of the motion.
 - 2 Always aim at something and practice.
 - 3 Periodically check your alignment to ensure you are correctly lined up all the time. Also recheck your posture after each 20 shots or so.
 - 4 Take a few seconds between each swing; hitting balls continuously one after the other usually results in more fundamental errors creeping into the swing and getting ingrained.
 - 5 While working on your shots, if possible hit your fades and draws around a target object like a tree or a flag. It really helps you to get the feel for the shots. If there are no target objects to use, try to hit your fades from the right side of the practice tee and your draws from the left side. This will help you see the actual amount of movement you are getting.
 - 6 Always watch the ball flight. See how it starts and how it finishes. You can actually identify faults on your swing plane, if any, from the ball flight. If your ball starts left and finishes right that means you are hitting the ball with an 'out to in' swing path with an open club face. Conversely, if the ball starts on the right of the target line and finishes left, you are hitting the ball with an 'in to out' swing path and a closed club face.
 - 7 Rhythm is very important for consistent shot making. When practicing be conscious of the speed of the swing. Be aware that after hitting about 100 balls, the swing speed accelerates automatically.



In 2002, I had the opportunity to watch top golfers from around the globe at a European Tour event. Believe me, when practicing they were taking approximately 30 seconds to hit a single ball. So it is really not how many you hit, it is how you hit.

Next time you practice, keep the above points in mind. Practice is both about training the mind and the body. It creates a more stable base to play from. You can be assured that this will soon lead to an improvement in your game.

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



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GOLF

WAJA_{1.6}





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KIRAN PANDAY

IT'S A BALLGAME: Nepal's league football champions, Three Star Club, posing before their match at Dasrath Stadium. The team made it to the AFC President's Cup semi-finals after holding Regar TadAZg to a goalless draw on Sunday.



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

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

❖ NATTA Travel Mart at Birendra International Convention Centre, until 14 May. 4256909

❖ Mystical Song Etchings by Seema Sharma Shah at Park Gallery, Lajimpat, until 20 May. 4419353

❖ Aloha Nepal Works by Wicki Van De Veer at Lajimpat Gallery Café, until 25 May. Proceeds go to SETU Nepal. 4428549

❖ Samay Chakra by Ragini Upadhy-Grela, until 8 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4218048

EVENTS

❖ Surya Lights Grind on 14 May at Hyatt Regency. 4491234

❖ Journalism–Roles and Challenges Presentation by EMBA students at KU School of Management, Man Bhawan, on 21 May, 11AM.

❖ Tai Chi Free classes at Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618, 4256693

❖ 1905 Sundays Garage sale, pet practices, stalls, food and more. <http://www.extreme-nepal.com/1905sundays.htm>

❖ Fun in the Sun at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999

❖ Art workshop for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689

❖ Rugby Practice Every Saturday. 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com

❖ Sanibaar Mela Saturdays at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.

MUSIC

❖ The Good Time Blues Band with Alicia Dinerstein at Rum Doodle on 13 May, 7PM. 4701208

❖ ICIMOD Open House Book fair and bazar on 14 May at new HQ, Khumaltar. 5525313

❖ Kathmandu Chorale Spring Concert on 14 May at The British School, Jhamsikhel, 3.30 PM-6PM. Free entrance.

❖ An Evening of Nepali Classical Music with Sukarma at Siddhartha Art Gallery on 15 May, 6PM, Rs 200. 4218048

❖ McTwisters Live jazz at Moks, Pulchok, 7PM onwards. 5526212

❖ Ladies Nights Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music, one free drink. 4256622

❖ Fusion Time Mondays at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438

❖ Live Music Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711

❖ Jukebox experience Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox. 4491234

❖ Jazz at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays. 8PM

FOOD

❖ Bawarchi The Restro Bar for Nawabi cuisine at Lajimpat. 4436673

❖ Seven Sensations at the Pub, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

❖ Great Value Lunches at Soaltee Crowne Plaza at Rs 299 per person, Rs 399 on weekends. 4273999

❖ BBQ Lunch at Le Meridien, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 4445550

❖ Sunshine Weekend Brunch Free swim at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

❖ As much as you can eat Barbeque lunch Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080

❖ Special Combo Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.

❖ Sekuwa and Momo Revolution Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048

❖ Arniko Special Lunch at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711

❖ Krishnarpan Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488

❖ Barbecue Dinner Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810

❖ Exotic Seafood at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4491234

❖ Delicacies Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755

❖ Earth Watch Restaurant at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280

❖ Café Bahal Newari and continental cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632

❖ The Beer Garden at Vajrayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

❖ The Tharu Kitchen at Jungle Base Camp. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

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JAI NEPAL CINEMA

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 an adventure trip 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 the hunted with death at their heels.

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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 main city were within national standards. With the rains coming down still, the pollutants in the air will hopefully remain fairly low this week too. So, breathe easy and take a walk after the rain.

1-7 May 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np

Hazardous	>425
Harmful	351 to 425
Unhealthy	121 to 350
O k	61 to 120
Good	< 60

N/A

202

109

67

101

39

Putalisadak Patan H Thamel Kirtipur Bhaktapur Matsyagaun

NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

After the weeklong cloudy weather and rains in the first week of this month, weather parameters have finally changed from cool to hot. Valley temperatures hit the 30s for the first time this season and due to northwesterlies, humidity levels have dropped this week. This satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows a high pressure region over northern India that has sent temperatures soaring into the 40s in the Gangetic plains. The high pressure has deflected moisture-laden clouds into Central Asia. But there is a possibility of the clouds spilling over the pressure barrier on us. Mercury is going to climb into the low 30s this brilliantly sunny weekend, so plan to go swimming.

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Mon
29-15

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सूचना तथा संचार मंत्रालय
सूचना विभाग

