The suspension of one of the country’s most effective donor supported poverty alleviation projects in remote western Nepal has sparked debate about where the line is drawn between staff safety and public need.

On 15 May, the German aid agency GTZ, British DfID and the Dutch group SNV jointly announced the indefinite suspension of Rural Community Infrastructure Works (RCIW) after Maoists beat up a female staff of the project’s local partner in Kalikot.

Debkala Acharya was badly injured in the attack at Sukatiya VDC but reports from Kalikot headquarters of Manma say the reason was more personal enmity than her work with the project. Donor agencies have always said safety of their staff is a priority and have often suspended projects after physical attacks in the past. But what if the threats are a result of local rivalry?

“We are also not happy with the suspension at all but we can’t put our staff at risk, we don’t have any other way,” Ulf Wernicke of GTZ in Kathmandu told us, “We expect commitment from (the Maoists) and the suspension will remain until we have assurances of full security for our staff.”

However, Kalikot-based community groups have sent word out that Acharya was targeted for reasons other than her work with the GTZ-funded food for work program in her district. A local Maoist commissar in Kalikot, while not denying that the beating took place, is said to want GTZ to justify the suspension of its program.
The declaration by seven political parties on 8 May to work together to resolve the country's stalemated tri-polar power struggle is a positive sign. Sher Bahadur Deuba will have ample financial muscle to muzzle the media in pursuit of his goals. If we remain committed to the declaration, the parties half-way.

Bahadur Deuba and Girija Prasad Koirala are obstacles, then the May anniversary to begin reunification talks. If the egos of Sher Bahadur Deuba and Girija Prasad Koirala, at least he has been concerned to review their commitment to uplift the people of Kalikot and Karnali.

In Jumla road, which is going to be paid to others who work on primary sources. They may be affected. We are being told repeatedly and in shrill tones to crave peace before development and then only democracy, as if such a next procedure of fulfilment of human desires were possible. The royal takeover is defended by fumbling heart of a Maoist takeover. We need to pay more attention to the delivery of statements are hurriedly published, due attention must be paid to others who work on primary sources. They may be affected. We are being told repeatedly and in shrill tones to crave peace before development and then only democracy, as if such a next procedure of fulfilment of human desires were possible. The royal takeover is defended by fumbling heart of a Maoist takeover. We need to pay more attention to the delivery of statements are hurriedly published, due attention must be paid to others who work on primary sources. They may be affected. We are being told repeatedly and in shrill tones to crave peace before development and then only democracy, as if such a next procedure of fulfilment of human desires were possible. The royal takeover is defended by fumbling heart of a Maoist takeover. We need to pay more attention to the delivery of statements are hurriedly published, due attention must be paid to others who work on primary sources. They may be affected. We are being told repeatedly and in shrill tones to crave peace before development and then only democracy, as if such a next procedure of fulfilment of human desires were possible.
FLOP-FLOP
Both Prashant Jha and Swapn Dasgupta hit it squarely on the head in your last issue (NT, #247), heralding perhaps not just realpolitik vis-a-vis Nepal but also realmedia. The so-called Indian flip-flop is really the other way around: its ill-informed overreaction in the immediate aftermath of 1 February was the real diplomatic flop, while Mankomhan Singh embracing ground truth in Nepal was a flip back to reality. He is undoubtedly India's pragmatic response to China's Deng. But the South Block’s original flip reaction is understandable. It was naturally reluctant to write off its political investments endowed in various party bosses. After all they did deliver, whether it was Mahakali or the Bhutani refugee imbroglio.

What is difficult to comprehend, however, are the Euro-Americans standing in phalanx behind South Block. Why would these self-styled paragons of liberal democracy and good governance so unequivocally support the resurrection of poet-kleptocrats of yore without forcing them to submit to a popular vote? Could it be that they too live happily in the Enron-like Dhabil deals of Bhoti Koss/Khitmi where Nepali contractors have to pay double the electricity rates while Euro-Americans investors and contractors are walking away with the windfall. Look at the Kali Gandaki scam where Rs 12 billion was doled out in a windfall. Look at the Kosi/Khimti where Nepali consumers have to pay double the electricity rates while Euro-American investors and contractors are walking away with the windfall.

Here is Kiran Panday’s picture of Girija Prasad Koirala and Madhav Kumar Nepal on your online edition (#246) says it all. The distrustful body language of the two leaders, their reluctant postures who probably hopelessly of their demeanours. And in the background, the sadistic grins of party cadres who were probably hoping to benefit from the unity in terms of future employment. That picture spoke a thousand words.

Bijoy Gurung, Ibaraki, Japan

This letter is in response to the letter to the editor by Sandesh Srisuresh (#247). Your newspaper should be wary of publishing anything that purports to understand the sentiment of the Nepali people better than the rest of us. He not only says that Oli, along with the “1inquisitive” parties, have failed to win the Nepali hearts and minds but takes the silence on our fellow citizens’ part as the conclusive proof of love lost between them. Either he is blissfully oblivious to the silencers imposed on Nepalis or he feels them justified, in which case he should talk only of himself and not on behalf of the ‘silent’ masses. The worst arguments in support of the royal coup (and the only argument) is that it was carried out on behalf of the Nepali people. If indeed that is the case, then the king should immediately prove it by taking the proposition to the people. Otherwise him and his followers like Mr Shrestha should stop reading other people’s mind and focus on their own.

Name withheld on request

The concern raised by Former Speaker Damai Nath Dhungana in your translation of his interview in Devadarris (“How dare we let it happen,” #247) shows his concern for democracy in Nepal. He is right about the harassment of people facing. Democracy is granted and democracy is taken back from the hands of people who are the most ashirvad of Lord Shiva. The king has no right to do this to his people, but who has the right to fight against their own self? In the past too, when we had to fight for democracy, we were unified, we shared our interest. We are not interested to get democracy no matter how many times it was taken back. But the people chosen to be representatives of the citizens were distracted by vested interests, abusing the trust bestowed on them. Why can’t leaders work and dedicate themselves to the betterment of citizens and for the nation? The history of politics is stained with corruption, injustice, bias and personal interests. Now that the king has admitted he wants democracy but only when the people understand its value, when leaders can commit themselves for the good of the nation, what makes Dhungana think the people will still support political leaders like him who squandered democracy after they had won? How can these leaders ask, “Did the king consult with any of the political forces before making his February First move?”. The people have eyes to see and the right to cast their vote. Freedom and democracy exist only when leaders understand and execute their duty properly. Things will then fall into place.

Reena Sen, email

Recently there has been an overwhelming outpouring of support for February First in your letters column. Most seem to be from readers in Kathmandu or outside Nepal who are ignorant of the security situation in the hinterland. They were pampered during the Panchayat and must be hoping that the good old days are back again. Why else would they be so blind to what is happening in the country? They are following the king in blaming the political parties and their leaders and put all the blame for Maoist activities on them. It was actually the palace that damaged the atmosphere during both past ceasefire and negotiations that the parties tried to negotiate with the Maoists with issues like the Goramanda massacre and the five km limit on army movement. The king has time and again expressed his wish to be a ‘constructive’ ruler, without elaborating on what this means. He has ended up surrounding himself with sycophants and yes-men who are going about issuing orders that are contradictory to his royal proclamation. How else can the flagrant human rights abuses so soon after the signing of the Geneva MoU be justified? The palace’s strategy is to postpone the crisis and buy time to pursue an undemocratic path so the monarch can be active and the psychophants can enjoy power again. It is painful to see so much contradiction between what the royal government says and what it does. The king has said he wants to strengthen democracy but all his actions so far show only a drift towards authoritarianism.

Ram Mitran Sah, Sarihs

COLONIAL HAUNTS
Just read Pravin Rana’s piece (“Colonial hants”, #247) on Rana nostalgia in your front page photo (“Grand Trunk Road”, #247) could break anyone’s heart. At a time when the environment of Kathmandu Valley is worsening the authorities should have been planting more trees instead of felling them. I am writing to you to seek some answers. While people are being cut down outside the capital, in Kathmandu we are witnessing terrorism against trees—the brave and innocent beings that had been protecting us for ages. The sight of the corpses of these trees on your front page photo is heart-rending. Whoever is responsible for this deed with misplaced logic and values must be prosecuted.

Jaya Dev Baliya, Thapathali

Before all our species leave the valley Hauled away in heavy trucks, it’s time To praise improvement of the city And confess to a past of crime: Forgive our jaunty limbs and shiny leaves, That cluttered views and clogged the sewer. Who but foolish cows could grieve The loss of shade and scent of verdure? We kept aloft, with too much peace: As cars and buses smacked our trunks (Grinding gears with fumes and noise) We only emanated love, like monks. So hear, to our misdeeds give coverage! We trees don’t often strive for mention in the press We have no love of paper used for printing knowledge (In fact, we would prefer if printed news were less). Now one can stroll the boulevards with ease Gone is fear of bumping into dirty trees. We deserve our end and are not displeased With alteratives as toothpicks for the Nepalese. Mrs. Milan Sah, Lekhnath, Pokhara

Mister I am the Lorax, I speak for the trees. I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues. Way back in the days when the grass was still green and the pond was still wet and the clouds were still clean, one morning, I came to this glorious place. And I first saw the trees! But that was a long time ago, today at the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows and no birds ever singing excepting old crows— is the Street of the Lifted Lorax.

After Dr Seuss, email

TREE SLAUGHTER
Your front page photo (“Grand Trunk Road”, #247) could break anyone’s heart. At a time when the environment of Kathmandu Valley is worsening the authorities should have been planting more trees instead of felling them. I am writing to you to seek some answers. While people are being cut down outside the capital, in Kathmandu we are witnessing terrorism against trees—the brave and innocent beings that had been protecting us for ages. The sight of the corpses of these trees on your front page photo is heart-rending. Whoever is responsible for this deed with misplaced logic and values must be prosecuted.

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After Dr Seuss, email
The fear now is that aside from depriving villagers of food, the withdrawal may also have put other aid groups in the district in the bad books of the rebels. Other Kathmandu-based aid agencies told us privately they were miffed at GTZ’s abrupt decision.

The three other RCIW donors in Kathmandu, however, say the Maoists are in serious violation of the Basic Operating Guidelines signed by 10 aid organisations that allows termination of programs if aid workers are not safe.

The news from Kalikot was exaggerated in transmission and German media reported wrongly this week that two aid workers were killed in western Nepal. The government is also displeased with the suspension. “We were not consulted and we don’t agree with the decision,” says Basanta Raj Gautam, the Ministry of Local Development’s national program coordinator for RCIW, who has just returned from a monitoring mission to Kalikot. RCIW provides cash and food for infrastructure projects, and local communities are involved in digging a mountain road linking Dalikh in the Karnali Highway. Gautam says that nearly 10 km of the total 18 km of road trail is completed and the remaining would have been finished this year. The work is now halted.

Other aid workers say the withdrawal sends the wrong message to the people and to the Maoists. Says Gauri Pradhan of the National Human Rights Alliance, “We understand this is to pressure the Maoists but such direct action is not necessary and they should have discussed it first with other NGOs.”

Pradhan’s child rights group has been under pressure from rebels in Salyan, Rolpa and Rukum to hand over a share of project funds as donation but they haven’t withdrawn. Hari Prasad Limbu of the Nepal Trust in Humla had his office in Simikot bombed and staff threatened but says it is the duty of aid agencies not to be deterred. “The important thing is to continue to deliver assistance despite physical threats,” Limbu says.

Shanta Lal Mulmi of the National Federation of NGOs had staff members beaten up recently when they refused to register with the Maoists in Sindhupalchok and Dadeldhura. “As people involved in development in conflict areas we have to overcome these challenges,” Mulmi says.

Other development agencies didn’t object so much to GTZ deciding to pull out but that the decision was taken unilaterally. They fear the message to the Maoists is that all they have to do is rough up staff to stop projects they don’t like. Says Action Aid Nepal’s Country Director Shibesh Chaudhary: “The donor action looks right if we think about the safety of staff but it doesn’t seem fair from the poor people’s point of view.”
Don’t roll back
Reversing interest rate liberalisation may be fatal

Two weeks back, a statement from the Nepal Rastra Bank governor went largely unnoticed. He argued that banks are making a lot of money so the interest rate should perhaps be regulated. While he may have had good reasons to say this, we really need to examine what that means to the world outside in the 21st century.

A decade ago, the Rastra Bank made a landmark decision not to peg interest rates but to leave it to the market. That unleashed a plethora of banks competing with different sets of rates but it also gave the consumer the option of choosing a bank with an interest rate that seemed most agreeable. Big and low risk corporate houses got low rates and businesses borrowing from the moneylenders at high interest rates could switch to bank rates that were high but half of what they paid.

Individual consumers could choose a bank that provided better interest rates. Some businesses argue that the interest rate spread of banks is high and the central bank needs to flex its muscles to control it. Perhaps these businesses either belong to the high-risk category thereby paying the highest interest rates or are jealous of the people who have opened banks, made money and been quite successful. The Beed has observed that some businesses are paying interest rates that are three times the rate paid by some prime corporate houses. It is a true market-determined situation and if banks are making profits by risking money to high-risk customers, the central bank should not have any problem in this project.

It would be better for the government and the central bank to work harder at regulating the functioning of the banking business than to try and disrupt fundamentals. For instance, should a set of promoters be involved in more than one financial institution? Why not start a credit rating system for banks so customers know when the deposit scheme of one bank is different from that of another? Why not make public the actual changes that have taken place in foreign managed banks and how the millions poured into these banks have actually benefited Nepali consumers? How can we encourage more foreign banks to participate in Nepal and provide strong balance sheets to fund larger projects here?

Post-1990, the banking sector has done well. It has created many Nepali millionaires in terms of stockowners with a wealth of knowledge and experience in management and operations. If so many banks are doing well, it is because management skills of Nepali professionals have excelled.

Nepal Rastra Bank should stop sending misleading signals like rolling back on interests if it still believes that foreign investment and technology transfer is the way to bring a surge in market-oriented economies. We have witnessed the impact of rollback. When the central bank clamped down on stock exchange trading with stringent regulations a decade ago, it did not realise that confidence does not bounce back, even 10 years later. That is something we surely do not want.

N - BIL SPEEDREMIT

Speed Remit Pvt. Ltd. has entered into an agreement with Nabil Bank for domestic distribution of money for customers across Nepal. NabilSpeedremit will facilitate domestic and international remittance, with an immediate network of more than 50 branches all over Nepal. The major locations of such branches include Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari, Sindhuli, Janakpur, Bara, Parsa, Dang and Surkhet.

New schedule

Druk Air will begin its new summer flight schedule effective until 29 October on the Delhi and Paro routes from Kathmandu.

Masti campaign

Asian Thai Foods has started Rumpum Biking Masti scheme under which every second day a consumer will be given an Anna Lifan bike. Rumpum packets also have coupons worth Rs 1 to Rs 5,000.

Safe safe

Bumil Safe has launched Dia Safe in Nepal. The safes are available in a wide range of models and colours at their showroom, Home Furnishers in Trisulapur.

MILKY DREAM: Golchha Organisation’s Hulas Biscuit and Confectionery’s has introduced Dream Cream Milky in the market. It is specially packaged to appeal to children.

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MediaWatch

- Bishal Raj Ghimire, managing director of Samadhi weekly, has been detained for a week in the past two and a half years without charge.
- Nepal Times editor Nirmal Bhakta was summoned before the Lalitpur ECO office on Wednesday.
- Dr Bhanu Banskota has been relieved as the head of the Department of Health Services.
- Sandesh Dhakal, the correspondent of the Duniya FM, was seized.
- Enthusiastic watch sales are in the making in the capital.
- The Nepal government is set to launch a new national lottery this week.
State blockade

Sarayu, 19 May

POLPA—Many villages have been unable to get medical supplies because security forces have blocked them to prevent supplies from reaching the Maoists. Rolpa has been a refuge for injured rebels and a training ground for Maoists. To control the growing activity of the rebels in that area, security forces have barred transport of medicine and food supplies to rural areas for the past three months. But local people say the blockade has affected their lives. In Kot, 63-year-old Bir Maya has been unable have her wound healed for the last two months after she fell off a tree and broke her arm. She has been visiting the local health post only to find that they have no medicines. She cannot afford to travel to another district for treatment and now has been using local herbal herbs but her pain is still severe. In Triveni, Ram Bahadur Pun has been suffering from stomach ailment for several months and has been in pain for a long time,” he says.

The posts have even run out of items. Many villagers have no choice but to travel all the way to Nepalgunj and Dang,” says pharmacist Yam Bahadur Baskot. Food supplies have been restricted and the people of this district have not seen rice for many months. Says Bir Bahadur of Rangkot: “The Maoists have made Rolpa unfit to live in and the security forces have been harming the local people.”

Corruption charges

RCCC Chairman Bhakta Bahadur Koirala in Nispagaksha, 17 May

We had instructed the police to arrest Sher Bahadur Deuba on 22 April. They brought Deuba to us only five days later. We had to arrest him because he refused to answer our questions. We will arrest anyone who does not cooperate on interrogation. We have charged him of a crime, he has the opportunity to defend himself. In fact, it is a chance to get a clean chit. But if someone says he or she will not give any explanation, that is a different issue altogether. That is his fundamental right and no one can do anything about it. If Deuba keeps quiet it may be an admission of guilt and if he does not produce bail, he will have to face legal prosecution. It is clear that under such circumstances, he will have to go to jail. Former Ministers Purna Bahadur Khadka, Mohammad Mohsin and Yuba Raj Gyawali were summoned and they offered their explanations and produced the bail. If Deuba had done the same, he would also have been freed by now. It is only the corrupt people who are afraid of us, corrupt politicians of political parties have ganged up against us. Their politics are aimed at protecting themselves from our actions. But we have no concern with politics. We have no political vendetta.

Captain’s telly

Jana Astha, 11 May

It wasn’t an easy one for NINAC Captain Sishir Sharma who had imagined trying to sneak his 42-inch plasma tv through airport customs by posing as the king’s pilot. His crate imprinted with king-size letters ‘Royal Palace’ at first caused quite a stir at TIA among airport and security personnel. They thought it belonged to the palace after the royal visit to Boao and needed to be rushed off to Narayanhiti. When they found out it belonged to the pilot who was missing the name of the palace, orders for his arrest came. But he was released on the recommendation of a government department. When asked why he had indulged in such an act, the pilot replied that he had the privilege since he was flying the aircraft carrying the king from Singapore. Sharma, who has also served as the director of RTAC, escaped not only with no charges despite such a brazen attempt at smuggling. He was even allowed to take his plasma television home after seven days upon paying a custom duty of Rs 127,000.

Quote of the week

Newspaper Nispagaksha, 11 May

This is not an authoritarian regime. We work within the limits of the law and acts of the country.

Bhakta Bahadur Koirala, chairman of the RCCC in Nispagaksha, 17 May

INDIAN ARMED FORCES: The bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs have traditionally determined Indian policy towards Nepal and since the 1 February move it has stuck to its ‘Two Pillar’ policy of supporting the Nepali monarchy and parliamentary democracy. Indian policy is now the responsibility of the National Security Advisor to the Ministry of External Affairs. The current situation in Nepal is a Brahmo-Hindutva battle, says a New Delhi analyst. The Indian decision to stop and then resume military aid to Nepal and Bhutan when news of the Jakarta meeting came and it is learnt that they, as well as the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, were taken aback with the news to resume military aid. It was a sign that Naryanhiti had been successful in pulling the Indian prime minister closer to its preferred option. The bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs have traditionally held views close to that of the security forces, especially the army. Besides his senior cabinet colleague, Mamohan Singh must also have been influenced by the need expressed by the Indian army officer to support a ‘brother army’. The Indian Army has always been sensitive about the Gorkha troops in its ranks, and its officers would be worried about retired soldiers not being able to collect pensions in the hills of Nepal. The present Commander-in-Chief Jl Singh is said to feel that cutting military aid would hurt the feeling of the Nepali side as well as affect the morale of serving Gorkha troops and pensioners. According to sources, Singh and Saran actually sparred at a high-level cabinet security meeting over this issue. The fact is that Indian hardware may enhance the fighting capability of the army by a bit but it will not bolster its dignity and sense of self-worth at the current juncture. More than support the Royal Nepali Army, the Indian decision to resume arms supplies has bolstered the king’s political position.

POLICE/INTELLIGENCE: The suspicion with which Indian police and intelligence involved in fighting armed rebels in Bihar, Jharkhand, Telangana and other regions regard the Nepali Maoists is understandable. Although various central and state police and intelligence bodies compete for influence, their common concerns are represented at the Prime Minister’s Office in New Delhi by the former head of the Intelligence Bureau, MK Narayanan. More than a political resolution in Nepal he would be keen to see the Maoists of Nepal brought to the ground and journalists in New Delhi say his position has been to argue in favour of the resumption of military aid.

INDIAN ROYALTY: A key source of Narayanhiti’s influence in the Delhi Darbar has been through India’s former prime minister and is said to be naturally sympathetic towards the Nepali royal family. Nepal’s Princess Himani is also a descendant of the royal clan of Sikar, also in Rajasthan.

It is clear that the change in Indian policy in Jakarta last month was the result of clash and accommodation between these four forces. But there may have been other factors. Indian Hindutva organisations have been close to the Nepali monarchy, and several conservative columnists and commentators also affected Indian policy-making. This time, the palace was. But the Jakarta about-turn has left such a bitter taste among policy-makers in New Delhi that it may actually have an opposite effect in the long-term. Jakarta indicated how much less he had indulged in such an act, the pilot replied that he had the privilege since he was flying the aircraft carrying the king from Singapore. Sharma, who has also served as the director of RTAC, escaped not only with no charges despite such a brazen attempt at smuggling. He was even allowed to take his plasma television home after seven days upon paying a custom duty of Rs 127,000.

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This is not an authoritarian regime. We work within the limits of the law and acts of the country.
Who killed Pokhrel?
Samaya, 19May

Who killed Pandit Narayan Prasad Pokhrel and why? As with any other murder of a powerful person, conspiracy theories abound. Though the Maoist affiliated Dalit Mukt Morcha of Kapilbastu has taken responsibility for the incident, the silence of the upper echelons of the rebel party casts reason for doubt. Some months ago, the Maoists of this region had captured Chet Bahadur Kunwar of the royal palace and freed him a few days later. This shows that the Maoist policy in this area does not include the killing of ‘high profile’ people. Two years ago, two members of the Maoist revolutionary wing were arrested at Puraili Pokhrel’s residence. Sources say that though the revolutionary group suspected the Pandit of informing the police, they did not blame him. But this does not mean that the Pandit did not have political enemies. He had close connections with the World Hindu Council and World Hindu Federation. Hindu hardliners had for some years been trying to make Nepal their centre. After the Federation’s Achhyut Regmi began favouring Ashok Singhal’s Hindu Social Workers’ Association –is connected to the present regime while Pandit Pokhrel’s power came from his Hindu fundamentalism and untouchable practices. Often accused of trying to destroy Hindu society, it is not difficult to measure their scorn for him. The power wielded by the World Hindu Federation and World Hindu Council and its sister organisation in Nepal– Hindu Social Workers’ Association –is connected to the present regime while Pandit Pokhrel’s power came from his popularity among devotees and his ‘Puran revolution’. Before news about his death was broadcast, a directive was issued to state-run tv and radio stations in Nepal telling them not to call him ‘Bachan Siromani’. If the leaders of the Maoist party do not clarify their role in Pandit Pokhrel’s murder, it will only benefit the Indian extremist Hindu association and their associates in Nepal. Pandit Pokhrel’s religious and altruistic campaign for the people had become the greatest obstacle to their domination campaign. (A Maoist mouthpiece, Jana Bahalika said this week that the leadership had started an inquiry into the murder.)

Prachanda blames Baburam for:
1. Glorifying Prachanda path by making it like Mao Zedong thought
2. Not allowing freedom within the party
3. Blaming him for the arrests of Maoists in India
4. Developing a personality cult
5. Showing ‘Rayamajhi’ traits by displaying affinity to a feudal king
6. Sideline supporters of Baburam
7. Putting himself on the same pedestal as Marx, Engels and Mao

Prachanda blames Baburam for:
1. Demolishing the strategic offensive plan
2. Severing links to the party and the people’s war
3. Taking revenge against top leadership
4. Suspicious role in the arrest of party leaders in India
5. Looking down on the People’s Liberation Army
6. His actions have helped imperialism, expansionism and the royal army
7. Lobbying against the central leadership
8. Questions about integrity and commitment to party ideals
9. Promoting anarchy by raising objections at the wrong time

Rebel rebels

Time to move with the Times...
When Sony Rana got her pilot’s license in 1988, she became the first Nepali woman to sit in the cockpit. Now, she has become the first Nepali woman to be certified to fly jets after she got her Boeing 757 rating recently. “It has always been exhilarating and no, I have never felt awkward,” says Rana who has now been flying with Royal Nepa Airlines for nearly 20 years. There are eight women pilots flying for Royal Nepal and other private carriers and the number is increasing to keep pace with the growth in the domestic airline industry. Women have found that they don’t need to be stereotyped as stewardesses anymore—they can be pilots, aeronautical engineers, air traffic controllers or work in managerial positions in airlines. “I got into piloting quite by accident really,” says Rita Thapa, the most recent addition to the female pilot sorority flying for the national carrier. “I was just flipping through the papers when I saw this ad and made up my mind to go learn to fly. My parents were very supportive.”

Then there are those who always dreamed of flying and from a very young age knew for certain that a pilot was what they wanted to be. “My uncle was a pilot and he used to take me to the airport and the tower. I sat in the cockpit as a little girl and I remember the first thing I liked about it was the smell of the fuel!” Deep down I knew that I would fly one day,” says Yashodhara Thapa of Buddha Air.

Sarina Gurung is now the only female helicopter pilot in Nepal and takes Simrik’s Mi-17s to remote airports. “I love flying choppers, they are adventurous and I’ve always loved adventure.”

Indeed, some women pilots have found that air hours flown in the Nepal Himalaya are worth a premium and that makes it easy for them to get better paying jobs elsewhere. A few have defected to foreign airlines but most say they wouldn’t give up flying in Nepal for the world.

Women power (Clockwise from top left): Bhawana Pant of Buddha Air, Prashansa Shrestha of Cosmic Air, Toshodhara Thapa of Buddha Air and Jeena Lingden of Yeti Air.

Women (ABHA ELI PHOBOO)
Cosmic Air’s Fokker 100s and their unbeatable prices have transformed air travel on trunk routes from Kathmandu to Biratnagar, Bhairawa and Nepalganj.

More established domestic airlines like Buddha and Yeti have had to think fast to respond. Fares have come tumbling down, frequency of flights have gone up, service has improved somewhat and airlines are focussing on their unique selling points. Buddha and Yeti have forged an alliance and are now offering early morning or late night slots to counter competition from Cosmic.

They are hush-hush about it but some airlines are also planning point-to-point flights within Nepal that don’t touch Kathmandu. Biratnagar-Nepalganj, Pokhara-Bhairawa and even Bhadrapur-Mahendranagar are seen as viable options because of the hassles of highway travel these days.

At the moment, passengers have to fly through Kathmandu and often spend the night here if they want to travel from, say, Biratnagar to Pokhara.

Prem Nath Thakur at the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) says permission for such routes would be readily given. “We are waiting for the airlines to come up with proposals, it would inject new business and ease the traffic congestion in Kathmandu. With Cosmic ready to bring in its fourth Fokker 100, there is going to be a parking problem here. “We’ve been expanding like crazy and I don’t know where we are going to park our planes anymore,” admits Cosmic’s Lawrence Liew. “Competition is getting really stiff, it’s become like a fish market,” says RP Bhandari of Gorkha Airlines, “and fares are being slashed at a time of high fuel prices and low tourist volume. It’s great for consumers but not so good for airlines.”

Gorkha has therefore decided to diversify to remote airports like Tumlingtar and Rumjathar where there is less competition.

But officials are finding it difficult to prod other carriers flying trunk or tourist routes to also fly to remote strips. “Few airlines really fly to unprofitable remote areas,” says Mery Patrabansh, manager of Flight Schedule and Permission Section at CAAN.

We asked Buddha Air if they are hurting from the competition. “The drop in occupancy is expected in the off season,” said Rupesh Joshi of Buddha Air, “but we are concentrating on providing high quality services at reasonable fares.” At Yeti Airlines, the fall in tourism has prompted focus on Nepali passengers. Says Bijay Shrestha of Yeti, “We really want to encourage Nepali travellers to fly and it’s working—many are now hooked on the comfort and speed of flying.”

Abha Eli Phoboo

Low fares lure domestic travellers

The introduction of jets on domestic air routes for the first time has taken the aviation sector by storm

Photography: KIRAN PANDAY

Jet lagged: Passengers from Kathmandu disembark at Nepalganj airport this week (top) and a Buddha Air Beechcraft readies for takeoff as a Fokker 100 lands.
It is now four centuries since the birth of a masterpiece whose author and hero both seem younger than we do. The simplest explanation for this may be found in Flaubert’s words about Don Quixote: “I found my origins in this book, which I knew by heart before I learned how to read.” Indeed, at the core of Don Quixote is something essential that we knew even before we read it, which became part of our nature only after we completed its mesmerising journey. This is the unmistakable stamp of greatness in a writer.

Hunting after his own ghost–an obvious sign of inner unhappiness–Hidalgo searched for a place where dreams, reality, sanctity, love and justice coexist. In their burlesque approach to humanity, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are the most enduring and enduring clownish couple in world literature. It is no surprise, then, that for the last 400 years Don Quixote and Panza have been the most enduring and endure clownish couples. Even the history of circus is focused on such a pairing: the vain, foolish, the humble loser who is kicked in the pants by his stiff, pompous partner. For an east European like myself, it is not easy to ignore the history of the circus–or history itself. The solemn Communist Manifesto announced the spectre of the revolution’s deceptive dogma as disguised a farce that affected not only a single life, as in Cervantes’ story, and affected not only the misleading army of buffoons believed to be missionaries. This dream destroyed generations of victims.

In the world circus, the poet looks like a Knight of the Somnolent Countenance, and Augustus the Fool, the humble loser who is kicked in the pants by his stiff, pompous partner. Augustus the Fool faces the Clown of Power. This dream destroyed generations of victims.

In today’s free-market carnival, nothing seems visible unless it is scandalous and nothing is scandalous enough to be memorable. So we pay homage to Cervantes at a time when we routinely co-habit with a very different outrages: religious fanaticism and terrorism, political manipulation, the cacophony of perverted simplification, the belligerent marriage between a new messianism and an aggrandising quixotic blindness. So long as we celebrate Cervantes, however, perhaps all is not lost.

Etching a world

Seema Sharma Shah etches questions of spiritual consciousness in her new exhibition

Seema Sharma Shah, a graphic artist, has taken printmaking to Nepal to greater heights. Her works at the solo exhibition Mystical Song at Park Gallery, Lajimpat, showcases the full dimension of her artistic ability through etchings.

Seema’s earlier prints dealt with nature where she presented the parthenic view. She explored primitive mysteries, hidden truths and primal fears using a crude format of line and flat simplified shapes in which the rhythm of composition, form and colour is created through two-dimensional abstraction. This created harmony and unified the artwork.

She has moved into a new domain of creative experience as she explores the female psyche from various perspectives. What does it mean to be a woman? What is her relationship with the society? To her family? To her self? Here again, she relies on the two-dimensional qualities of line and colour as a means of suggesting mood and meaning while retaining a semblance of reality, her primary emphasis being on form.

This solo exhibition of Seema’s works is a vision of the mystery of life and its spiritual consciousness. She draws attention to universal mysteries and the incomplete power of various Hindu mythical gods and goddesses. Surrealism and dreamlike imagery, in some of her art pieces, defies fixed interpretation and reflects the inexplicable spiritual realm of the subconscious.

The crude vocabulary of line and simplified shapes of her Nature series assumes a sophisticated dimension. She moves from two-dimensional abstraction to nearly three-dimensional abstraction, revealing the poetic quality of her creative process. The pervasive mood of solitude of her series on women gives way to spiritual serenity and mystical joy and the muted colours of her earlier works are replaced by brighter shades. This exhibition of hers marks a culmination in her artistic career where she has overcome challenges posed by the medium. She etches questions that haunt the viewer. The thematic concern is reflected by the effortless dynamics of creative tension.

Don Quixote, dissident

Four hundred years later, let’s pay homage to Cervantes and the quixotic world he warned us about

In the socio-political arena, Augustus the Fool faces the Clowns of Power. Cervantes’ political parody can be read in many 20th century east European stories. His incomparable vitality and language, for example, find their way into the work of the Soviet writer Andrei Platonov. A communist who considered himself an honest proletarian writer but called by Stalin, the Red Clown of Power, ‘svoloc’ (scooter) and ‘balagushnik’ (buffoon), Platonov lived a lifelong ordeal.

His carnivalesque odyssey of totalitarianism displays a world of misery, boredom and obedience in its dark journey to an unreachable paradise. The communist Knight, the new ‘caballeros de la triste figura’, a kind of enlightened idiot, blinded by his loyalty to the unreal and by his harsh political correctness, considers Lenin a new Moses. He rules the Rosnami of the Proletarian Forces, falls in love with the dead Rosa Luxemburg in her role as Comrade Dulcinia and has intercourse with a locomotive.

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Project Syndicate

Norman Manea is a Romanian novelist. His memoir, The Return of the Hooligan, is being published across Europe.
Nepal's world acclaimed anti-TB treatment program is relatively unscathed by the conflict

NARESH NEWAR

Every year, on World Tuberculosis Day, attention of Nepal's biggest killer disease peaks. On 24 March seminars are held, ministers give speeches and the next morning's papers are full of reports. But, as is usual with this sort of flash flood coverage, the interest soon dies down and the disease slips off the radar screens. Half of all Nepal's are infected with the TB bacillus and of these nearly 100,000 have active TB. There are 40,000 new cases every year and up to 7,000 people die annually from the disease. And 15 percent of all TB cases are in children, the infections spread more quickly than in adults.

Still, a lot more Nepal's would be dying from TB every day if it had not been for the national tuberculosis program managed by the state-run National Tuberculosis Centre (NTC) with technical and financial assistance from a consortium of international health agencies. Indeed, Nepal's efforts with TB control is regarded as a model for other developing countries. Treatment success rates in Nepal have more than doubled from 40 percent in 1994 to over 68 percent now.

"Today, we are able to save the lives of 60,000 people, that's the number of people with active TB," says Christian Gunneweg of the UN's World Health Organisation (WHO), one of the government's main partners in the TB program.

The anti-TB drive in Nepal has been heading in the right direction especially with the Directly Observed Treatment Short (DOTS) course. Introduced in 1998, DOTS is now been implemented in all districts and 75 percent of the population has access to treatment.

"I lost my grandfather when he was 50 because he did not have medicine," says Subita Nakarmi of Lalitpur.

Fifteen years after her grandmother died, Subita was also infected with the TB bacillus eight months of DOT's cured her completely. "I'm lucky to be alive, I only wish that such treatment had been available for my grandfather," says Nakarmi.

Even with the conflict situation, the DOTS strategy has faced minimum difficulties. It is available in more than 2,500 treatment centres and sub-centres throughout the kingdom. "TB is the disease of the poor, there should never be any obstacle in its treatment," says Neta Mitra Shrestha, director of Nepal Tuberculosis Project (GENETUP), which runs one of the most effective DOTS centres in the country.

The treatment is available in rural areas but there are serious concerns about whether TB patients can reach these health centres for the antibiotics. For the first two months, patients have to take their medicines daily in front of trained health workers. The medication will not be effective if they miss even a single day. Constant Maoist road blockades have interrupted the treatment for many TB patients.

"Access to DOTS like all health care is a fundamental right for all citizens, the provision of services and people's access to them should be protected, respected and promoted by all concerned in this conflict," says Sumit Chakrabarti of the British aid group, DfID. But Chakrabarti adds that the conflict has not really affected the TB project, as DfID supports the national TB program by providing $7 million worth of anti-TB drugs through WHO annually.

Despite transportation challenges, NTP has sufficient drugs stored in all centres so patients have enough medicines and because communities have learnt to value the NTP's service, patients continue to show up for treatment and avoid the hardships.

Many health professionals involved in helping TB patients agree that even those families displaced due to the conflict continue DOTS as the treatment is available anywhere in the country and the drugs are free.

An improved program, DOTS-Plus, is being added this month to treat patients with multi drug resistant-TB, one of the leading causes of death among patients. Others who die of TB have multiple complications like AIDS, because of cancer, lung and heart diseases. "TB program works when it is well thought out and designed and treatment centers and diagnostic services are placed close to patients," says Keshab Bhakta Shrestha, director of NTP.

Experts have found that the best way to improve the efficacy of DOTS is by raising awareness and educating patients. Nepal's success in this has attracted a large number of aid agencies especially since the government categorised the TB program as a high development priority. Over 14 key agencies from Germany, UK, Japan, Netherlands, Norway and France have been actively participating in the national program.

Explains DfID's Clapham: "Nepal's TB program has adopted a commendable public health approach, it has decentralised care provision right down to sub-health posts. In addition to the fact that frontline health workers provide care, so do trained community volunteers."

This 'de-medicalisation' is said to be a key learning point not just for TB but for other diseases in other developing countries.
Denial of departure
If you can’t fly, take the road

What do you do when the immigration exit stamp is rescinded before you get to board the plane and your Jet Airways ticket is returned to you with a note ‘Off-loaded by Nepal security’?

Collect one’s baggage, get the airport tax reimbursed and go home to skulk and complain about the unfairness of life in autocratic regimes?

It is bizarre, this particular evolution of restricting personal liberty currently being carried out in the Nepali kingdom. Lawyers, activists, politicians and framers of constitution are refused entry into aircraft to fly to international or domestic destinations. There is no charge sheet, no prior notice, just a mysterious list (an original one, apparently updated twice since the royal takeover of 1 February) that is held close by someone in the maws of the terminal building and is referred to on walkie-talkie by hapless immigration officials and superintendents of police.

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There are not a few politicians who, still waiting for a shower of goodwill from on high, will not even announce that their boarding cards have been snatched. They tiptoe home, hoping that their show of trust, patience and obeisance will register where it needs to register, and they will get ‘the call’. That is how it is beginning to work, for ministerships, ambassadorships, corruption commissionerships, and perhaps even (in the days head) National Human Rights Commissionership.

So how does one get to Colombo from Kathmandu to attend a conference organised by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies? Does Nepal have roads? Yes. Does it have an open border with India? Yes. What is the nearest airport in India with regular air connections to Delhi? Lucknow.

Off-loaded at 2.30 PM, I was on the road by 5PM, Lucknow-Delhi-Colombo ticket in hand. The ‘list’ obviously had not made it to Nagdhunga at the Kathmandu Valley rim. A massive thunderstorm slows progress but no tigers and leopards were in evidence to make it a high adventure. A traffic jam of more than a hundred trucks and buses meant we can’t make it into the town of Narayanghat before curfew. But a ‘member of the security forces’ in an extra jolly mood waves us through, and at 10PM we enter the busiest market hub of Nepal and find it looking like a ghost town.

After waiting out the curfew in Uncle’s Lodge across the Narayani River at Gaidakot, we are on the road again at 4AM. Arriving at Butwal in the central tarai in two hours flat, it is time to head down to cross over into India at Sunauli. Nepal not being in an efficient state of repression, one is allowed to cross the border as a free citizen. It helps that the Nepal-India ‘simana’ is the ideal Southasian frontier, ie it is open.

At Sunauli, a Tata Sumo jeep is willing to take me through the backroads of eastern Uttar Pradesh to Lucknow. The vehicle is the regular hire of the Gorakhpur correspondent for the Dainik Jagran (whose total circulation from 25 editions across northern India is over two million, with readership of 17.5 million, let that sink in). It is clear that the Sumo is used to having its way in these backwaters of erstwhile Avadh, and we make good time over the Rapti River on whose upper reaches lies the cradle of the Maoist rebellion of Nepal.

There used to be a time when Nepalis feared travelling through these badlands of northern India. With Nepal converted into a playground of Maoists, bandits, highway robbers, gun-toting soldiers in plain clothes and state-supported vigilantes, it is the taxi drivers south of the border who now quake at the thought of entering the kingdom, by day or night.

Bypassing Gorakhpur, we take a short-cut through Basti, Ayodhya, Faizabad and arrive at the outskirts of Lucknow this side of the Gomti River. It is getting awfully close to the boarding time of Air Sahara’s last flight to New Delhi and we are still on the other side of Lucknow’s urban sprawl. Over the Gomti Bridge, past the stadium, downtown Hazratganj and the railway station, we do make it in time.

No, I didn’t get offloaded in Lucknow, nor in New Delhi later that evening for the flight to Colombo.
II Sun Park sets a golfing record

Il Sun Park arrived in Kathmandu with her Korean diplomat husband HD Kim in February 2002. She is an avid golfer and well known in the Kathmandu golfing circuit for playing 36 holes (two full rounds) a day. A couple of weeks ago, she approached me and explained her intention of attempting to play 100 holes or more in a day. She planned to do this on a Monday when the golf course is less crowded. She asked if I could inform all players to let her play through on the day of her attempt so as not to slow her down during her challenge to reach her target.

I was intrigued by her idea. To be honest I thought then that playing so much golf in a day was impossible. If you asked me to attempt it, even dangling a very lucrative prize as an incentive, I doubt I would be able to make it!

Setting a goal is one issue but actually accomplishing is quite another.

To get an idea of what she was aiming for, six rounds of golf (108 holes) means walking about 50 km. Well, actually it ends up being more since it’s not possible to hit every ball straight. On top of that is the energy needed to swing the club the whole day long.

The day of reckoning finally arrived—9 May 2005 at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. A contingent of Korean lady golfers was present to encourage and boost Park to reach her goal.

She started her game at 5.30 AM in the rain and in what looked like would be a miserable day. Her prayers for better weather were soon answered and by 10AM, the sun was shining and it was a glorious day for golfing.

Park then played relentlessly for 12 hours and 25 minutes with an half an hour lunch break. I believe she had a few blisters on her feet but she kept right on at it. By 6.55 PM in the evening, it was too dark to continue. When she finished she commented, “I was still energetic and could have played more holes if the course had floodlights.” I just shook my head in amazement.

The semi-final of the AFC President’s Cup last week was Upendra Man Singh’s last game as a national football player. The 32-year-old captain and goalkeeper of this year’s Nepal league champion, Three Star Club, has not hung his boots and plans to be Nepal’s first goalkeeping coach. He spoke to Nepali Times about being a professional sportsman in Nepal.

Il Sun Park, 51, had accomplished her remarkable endeavour. She had played 108 holes or six rounds of golf in a single day. This is definitely a record in Nepal for playing the most number of holes.

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ABOUT TOWN

- Buddha Jayanti on 23 May.
- Artist Choice Ceramics by Carole Irvi at Indigo Gallery, from 28 May.
- Bottle of Stories: Raku pottery by Dopal Kalsang at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat, until 30 May. 4428894.
- Our Lives are Linked
- Buddha Jayanti
- Festival and Exhibitions

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
- Journalism—Roles and Challenges
- Music
- Rugby Practice
- Intercultural Exchange Program
- Rock 'n Roll Night
- Sanibaar Mela
- Fun in the Sun
- Tai Chi
- The Good Time Blues Band
- Ladies Nights

EVENTS

- World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
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- Music
- Rugby Practice
- Intercultural Exchange Program
- Rock 'n Roll Night
- Sanibaar Mela
- Fun in the Sun
- Tai Chi
- The Good Time Blues Band
- Ladies Nights

FOOD

- Al Fresco goes to a Brat at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999.
- Bawarchi: The Restro Bar for Nawabi cuisine at Lajimpat. 4436673.
- Seven Sensations at the Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999.
- The Organic Cafe and Sohal Bar at Thamel. 4415756.
- BBQ Lunch at Le Meridien, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 4445550.
- Subhome lunch Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680090.
- Special Combo Burmese and Thai Menu at Rox. 4491234.
- Jukebox experience Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Ros. 4412349.
- Jazz at Upsitis Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays. 8 PM.

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

- Rainfall prediction for 8-14 May 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.
- Hazardous: >250, Unsafe: 121 to 250, Good: <60.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

- Valley had risen by 20 percent. Things should ease with the rains.
- National standards while in residential areas it hovered around 120 microgram per cubic metre. The average PM10 concentration in the Valley had risen by 20 percent. Things should ease with the rains.
- By MAUSAM BEED

Nazar portrays Divya Varman (Menon) as a successful singer and dancer who leads a monotonous life until she meets with an unfortunate accident. She is suddenly haunted by strange visions of unavenged murders that make her believe she is going over the edge. As the story unfolds she meets Special Investigating Officer Rohan Sethi (Adhit Patel), who is on a case of serial killings that are doing the rounds in Mumbai’s beer bars. Sethi employs Divya’s constant visions and flashbacks to solve his case but this leads to frightening consequences.

Call 4442220 for show timings
www.jainepal.com

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MAUSAM BEED

Though the official date of monsoon arrival is a month away the current weather patterns do not indicate it is on schedule. There are some strings of activity in the bay and in the Arabian Sea off Kerala but the westers are still strong over the Tibetan plateau. This satellite picture taken on Thursday shows fresh westerly jet heading towards the plateau while the stream of cloud from Bay of Bengal is struggling against the westers towards the northeastern Himalaya. There is possibility of more thunderstorms and hail like the one in Pokhara across the next few days.

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Prativa goes places

Prativa Panday used to be quite satisfied being a doctor to Nepal. But she loved to trek and go places. Earlier this month, she was elected president of the International Society of Travel Medicine (ISTM) at its convention in Lisbon. Not only is she the first Nepal to hold this position but also the first Asian and the first woman.

Born into a big clan that emphasised the need for education, Panday was already studying medicine in Delhi at age 15. She worked in Nepal for some time before going to the US for a postgraduate degree in Internal Medicine. After practicing for 10 years as an attending physician at Boston’s Beth Israel University, Panday decided she wanted to come home. “My children were growing up and I didn’t want to grow old in a foreign country eating turkey and mashed potatoes,” she says. The fact that there was a family support system in Nepal helped. Panday works with CIWEC Clinic Travel Medicine Centre in Kathmandu. She has trekked all the major trekking routes in Nepal for work, pleasure or both. She even worked one season as a Himalayan Rescue Association volunteer doctor at Pheriche and the work varies from stomach bugs to acute mountain sickness.

CIWEC Travel Medicine Centre helps tourists, expatriates or even locals with almost any medical problem and if they are not able to provide the required services, they provide referrals to other appropriate medical facilities or even arrange evacuation to another country. The Centre is a member of ISTM, which is the only and largest international organisation of travel health with 1,800 members from 72 countries.

Nepal is now known as one of the best-studied destinations in the world for travel medicine. Panday has been a doctor for 30 years and she tells us that she enjoys her work immensely, which is the reason behind her dedication. When asked for advice for other aspiring professionals she says: “Anything is possible if you try hard and work towards your goal.”

Aarti Basnyat
The great thing about practicing journalism at a time when corporal punishment is back in vogue is that you don’t have to worry about telling the truth. You can’t imagine what a big load it is off our backs not to have to double-check every piece of gossip and conspiracy theory for its veracity and accuracy, if any. Suddenly, we can forget everything we ever learnt in journalism school and just make it all up as we go along. When it is against the law to tell the truth and nothing but the truth so help us God, we can all sit back, relax in front of the tv with a cylinder of Pringles and let the chips fall where they may. It’s not as hard as you think for us scribes and journos when we are requested in the national interest to ensure that there is no truth in what we say. And you, dear readers, should by now know better than to believe every word we say. You should only believe every other word. If, perchance, a bit of authentic fact does somehow find itself inadvertently into print then we are duty-bound by the code of conduct of our professional ethics to issue a correction in the next edition of the paper. That little insert buried in the inside pages therefore is an important clue to our valued customers about items the previous day that the editors mistakenly thought were wrong but were in actual fact right and therefore had to be immediately refuted so that people didn’t get the wrong idea. So, as a newspaper of record here are this week’s politically corrected news items.

CORRECTIONS

The caption accompanying the front page picture in yesterday’s paper mistakenly said that 80-year-old trees along Pulchok were being chopped down. What the picture actually shows are the trees in the process of being re-assembled and glued together as a part of the municipality’s tree translocation and graft campaign which it is carrying out in cahoots with logging contractors. Beg your pardon, we will be more careful next time. –Ed.

Due to a reporting error, a news item in yesterday’s edition said the Maoists have called an indefinite nationwide transportation strike. The strike is now definite. The terror is regretted. A news item in yesterday’s paper about DIG Gopal Man Shrestha caught red-handed running a red light at Baneshwor intersection and not being able to produce his driving license, while being factually correct was incomplete. The Valley Traffic Police has given up trying to control Kathmandu’s kamikaze drivers and has subcontracted the job to retired Japanese freelancers since they’re the only ones who can make head or tail of the solar-powered Maitighar traffic lights which are working again after being under repairs since last June. Inconvenience caused to the red-faced DIG is regretted. –Ed.

Due to space constraints caused by the downsizing of our newspaper, a news item in yesterday’s edition referred to the high-up authority by his first name, omitted honorifics and failed to capitalise his Official Title. Sorry about that, we’re now returning to our broadsheet size.

There was a typo in last week’s new item on page one about God being detained again soon after his release. The correct title should have been: ‘Re-arresting God in Kathmandu’. We apologise for the inconvenience.