MIN BAJRACHARYA

US Ambassador James Moriarty spoke to Nepali Times on Wednesday on a wide range of issues, including his wish that the king and the parties get over their differences in order to face the bigger threat of Maoism.

Nepali Times: Has the US position changed since 1 February when State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated that the royal action was a setback in the fight against Maoism?

Ambassador James Moriarty: Actually I think what Mr Boucher was referring to was the fact that we thought ultimately if the palace and the parties are not cooperating then you are going to have a tough time getting to a final settlement of the Maoist question. It was against that broad perspective that he was speaking and that still has not changed... We were not saying that we thought the army would be less effective. We were saying that the army can be more aggressive not going to win militarily. So, sure... Our reading was that the State Department statement was premised on the royal action, and that it would affect the fight against the Maoists. No, it was not. Trust me, I wrote it! (Laughs) To address the Maoists you need three conditions in place: unity among the legitimate political actors, unity among the international community pushing the Maoists towards the table, and the question of whether the Maoists recognise that they are not going to win militarily. So, sure the army can be more aggressive for a while and that can cause the Maoists some pain, but if the Maoists believe that they have a chance to wedge the parties and reconciliation, I cannot figure out how you can deal with the Maoists problem.

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The international community and the king himself have always called for the parties to unite, and now they have. Shouldn’t the US be more welcoming of this effort by the parties? Well, actually when she was here Christina Rocca said something pretty close to that. She went on to qualify it, basically said that this should be the beginning point for talks rather than a bottom line ultimatum. Because let’s face it, you know I know that the king has flat out said publicly that he believes that restoration of parliament would be unconstitu-
tional. So, it is going to take convincing for him to buy that. And that’s why we are not specifically saying, ‘ Gee whiz, we agree with all of this....’ What is key to me is that there has to be agreement between the palace and the parties, and anything that they can agree on is great by me. I trust the wisdom of the parties not to do anything suicidal.
ORDNANCE AGAINST MEDIA

If it had to be done, the intelligent way to do February First would have been to build domestic consensus, bring political parties in as a block, build bridges, assuage the international community, and work with a free media as an ally. That is the way to fight fascism. But by pasting their repression on Maoist tactics, our leaders have shown the same sloping desperation as the enemy they are supposedly fighting.

Even people who went along with February First were dismayed by the choice of cabinet, district and zonal commissioners. It didn’t take long to realise that the positions were a facade and real power was with a clique belonging to an old guard hardline faction of the royal fringe of the Panchayat days.

With friends like these, the monarchy doesn’t need enemies. By taking the crude retrogressive steps that they have (the latest is the destruction of the Babri Mosque and the brand of Hindutva that resulted in the Gujarat pogroms), even the RSS leadership. What could be more symbolic of the pincer movement against the media than the looming last week of Ghodaghodi FM in western Nepal at a time when the rural community radio station, like all others in the country, have been gagged by the state.

Elsewhere, we see the same petty-minded, counter-productive techniques to intimidate the media. The ministry’s threats to close down Rishi Dhama’s Reporter’s Club, an important forum for independent public debate, is just one example of this ham-handedness. It doesn’t work in this day and age, this belief that you can shackles journalists. Power must come from popular legitimacy, not by cloaking yourself in spurious propaganda of pseudo-events on state media. It is not true that Nepali television, Radio Nepal and the government dailies are as bad as the pre-1990s.

When lies fly, telling the truth is the media’s minimum responsibility. Better to keep quiet than lie a little. Protecting the credibility and independence of media is one of the ways to protect legitimacy. But they never learn, do they? The draft media ordinance seeks to give the royal seal of approval and permanence to the harsh restrictions already in place, making it more difficult to tell the truth.

In his acceptance speech on receiving this year’s UNESCO Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, Chinese journalist Chen Shuxian faulted the Chinese government in jailing him and turning him into a hero. He added mockingly: “Thank you for giving us the bell, and then taking it away.”

We lay grandiose claims to over 700 years of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Once let loose, it is a genie that won’t be put back in the bottle. What genuine democracy is, and why it should have transparency of management and accountability of leaders.

The forest legislation of 1986, founded on just such governance conditions at the level of local communities, helped us rescue our country from the brink of devastation, restored our forests and turned them into a major resource for local development. This was a unique and self-reliant exercise in grassroots democracy, and it was completely homegrown.

India’s lecturing on democracy is a different ball game altogether. It has always fished in troubled waters here: since the ‘Hyderabad’ proposal as far back as 1949 to the Ranas. Then it imposed an unequal treaty of ‘peace and friendship’ in 1950, foisted its verdict as ‘tripartite agreement’ ending Rana rule in 1951, struck a secret 1963 treaty with King Mahendra to install his own aid programs responsive to Nepali political parties, mainly the NC, that has to be secular.

One wonders if the RRSP leadership are still willing to risk it all to prevent the local messes in Nepal. Whether the parties want to let the public opinion is to let the political party leaders that squandered democratic gains to new the public to purge themselves of their rotten cores? Nepal could benefit from such housecleaning: at least it should make the EU’s own programs responsive to host country needs and if it had been adhered to in the past may have prevented Nepal from sliding down into the present morass.

Nepal’s foreign friends must know how condescending they sound lecturing to us on democracy. We know and value democracy. And at present the public opinion is to let the political party leaders that squandered democratic gains to new Nepali friends must help us rescue our country from our veil. We lay grandiose claims to over 700 years of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Once let loose, it is a genie that won’t be put back in the bottle.
NEPAL

I am really shocked at China's new position on Nepal in the piece you translated from Nepali magazine ('India and China sacrifice Nepal', #247) and its approval of India's control of our Kalapani area. China is Nepal's most reliable friend and has denied making such an agreement. Another jolt was reading that China had accepted Nepal as being included in India's sphere of influence. We respect India and the Indian people but its position regarding Nepal is dubious.

China and India are our big brothers. They should not try to solve their border problems at our cost.

Dr Tahnk Subba Thabebang, email

• The arguments by 'Name withheld on request' (Flip-flap, #248) could be genuine if the writer entertained the 'kleptocratic culture'. The points raised are reflective rather than explicit. Kleptocracy is rampant in almost every institution in contemporary Nepal—it is only a matter of degree, norm and definition. The 'kleptocratic culture' is not an offshoot of just the 1990s but an accumulation of practices from the Rana regime to the Panchayati polity under the active leadership of the monarchy. Why hasn't the letter writer delved into these problems? Indeed, post-1990 experience did not fulfill the minimum expectations of the people and political leaders abused the people's mandate. But there are many aspects of multiparty democracy that are worth appreciating. The writer seems to have very little faith in multiparty democracy and is uneasy to even sign his letter for no obvious reasons while giving his debatable monotonal comments. We can debate fruitfully—both subjectively and objectively—while not being biased, that is what the true Nepali intelligentsia needs to practice now.

Badvii P Bastakoti, email

• When CK Lal greatly advised us to overlook Girija Babu's past and concentrate on the parties' united stand (for how long one wonders?) it's not difficult to gauge Lal's proclivity for Kangresis (State of the State, #248). Lest we forget Bijen Joshi's invaluable sermon on bickering parties in the same issue ('Lest we forget'). It will be better for your paper to sport another gauge in the mast head for impartiality.

We all know that the critical situation prevailing in the country compelled the government to rein in the otherwise free press but the resulting hue and cry of the media has been so much out of proportion that it reeks of malicious and dubious motives. Recent history of the Nepal private press pertaining to the issue of foreign investment, Lauda scam amply vindicates the truth about how the media have been systematically and intermittently used as a pawn by some sponsors. For a private media sustaining itself on the backs of macaroons, defiance and gruesome slaying of the populace, of the increasingly heavy traffic of the Valley. However, I am not sure that this is the case and even in the last case it should be possible to retain and incorporate the mature trees in the plans. Again, surely the road along Pulchok does not need to be widened at the expense of such beautiful trees? Such carnage would invoke wrath and immediate action from enraged citizens elsewhere in the world but here all we seem to be capable of is shaking our heads and wondering who got the contract for this wholesale slaughter and was the price for receiving this contract? Most reputed schools in the Valley have environment clubs and I hope that the young members will take up the cause. The remaining trees need to be protected and new ones planted in the place of the ones slaughtered. There is no justification in destroying our green heritage to line pockets of fat contractors.

J Thapa, Environment Committee (UNWIO)

WHY NOT NEPAL?

Your translation of Ritul's column from Himal Khabarpanki ('Why English?', #248) is right on. A similar thing happened on 20 May, at the UNESCO Nepal office in Jawalakhel. A publication entitled Cultural and Religious Diversity: Dialogue and Development was launched to mark the world day for cultural diversity for dialogue and development. The audience was an eclectic mix of academics, local dignitaries and school children. All in all, an authentic UNESCO event: colourful, gentle and rather lacking in punch. The keynote address was delivered by Satya Mohan Joshi, life member of the Royal Nepali Academy, intellectual heavyweight and a great storyteller. He started by announcing (in Nepal) that he had been asked by UNESCO staff to speak in English on account of a few foreign guests. Why, I wondered? The audience was overwhelmingly Nepali. Would it not have been possible for Mr Joshi to deliver the talk in his beautiful Nepali and at the same time circulate an English translation for the few non-Nepali speaking expatriates present? The next UNESCO meeting in Nepal is to be attended by a three-person team of professional linguists, including one senior Nepali scholar. It would be a move in the right direction for the opening ceremony to be in Nepali or one more than Nepal's many languages and a Nepali edition of this monograph should certainly be published. Can an organisation have a compelling vision of implementing its mandate in Nepal, particularly when the dissemination of its own message remains restricted by its narrow frame of linguistic reference? From the Third World to the Rest, the world day for cultural diversity for dialogue and development could be genuine if the writer could do and has done was to rein in the misguided fourth estate.

February First threatened it with extinction. What other information could the media have found to cash in on other than atrocities of Maoists? When FM popped out the news of death toll, indefinite blockades, chakka jams each passing hour it became unbearable for most people. The least the government could do and has done was to rein in the misguided fourth estate. The press needs to restrain the most people. The least the government can do and has done was to rein in the misguided fourth estate.

Deen Maharjan

THE 'KLEPTOCRATIC CULTURE'—NOT AN OFFSHOOT OF THE 1990S

Dear tree, I've measured your lovely height and girth.

Do we sit and wait for victim number four?

Of the concussions caused by falling boughs
Two sufferers were poor blind and aged cows.

We then observed your blossoms in the street
As the plans. Again, surely the road along Pulchok does not need to be widened at the expense of such beautiful trees? Such carnage would invoke wrath and immediate action from enraged citizens elsewhere in the world but here all we seem to be capable of is shaking our heads and wondering who got the contract for this wholesale slaughter and what was the price for receiving this contract? Most reputed schools in the Valley have environment clubs and I hope that the young members will take up the cause. The remaining trees need to be protected and new ones planted in the place of the ones slaughtered. There is no justification in destroying our green heritage to line pockets of fat contractors.

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enforcing press censorship. There was very limited role otherwise. Let us face it, most of what has been done, including the continuing detention and arrest of demonstrators is done by the police. I am not trying to whitewash the army, but this is the situation.

But all over the country the army has become the entity of last authority, whether it is vis-a-vis local administrators or the people. You do raise a question, but what can I say. The nation has been mislaid by the insurgents. In times of war, and you are in effect in an internal war here, the military gets much more power than makes us comfortable. The question is what kind of checks and balances you have. There have to be checks and balances.

The centralisation of state since 1 February would seem to go against the tenets of democratic development. The king and the government talk constantly about decentralisation. But I am not naive, I understand that whenever you have someone who is clearly at the top, people tend to defer to that person.

Do you believe that the dozen years of parliamentary democracy till October 2002 to have been a success or failure?

If you had not had an insurgency, people would be looking at Nepal today as a country was making progress in most of the key areas. Between 1990 and 2002, life expectancy increased 50 percent, education increased more than that, the network of paved roads trebled, income went up significantly. Frankly, if you had not had this ideological insurgency, you would have seen conditions for an economic takeoff, with the economy growing at seven or eight percent a year right now.

A Polar Air Boeing 747 freighter landed this morning (Wednesday) at 10:10 am in Kathmandu. Where are we on military assistance?

We have been saying all along that we will be continuing non-lethal military assistance, while lethal military assistance is under review. We have not made any decision because we have not had anything specific to force our hand. The last question Monday’s decision has not been taken on lethal assistance. As for the plane that landed today, there should be a shipment coming in. I will not comment other than to say that it is non-lethal.

Do you think that the present royal government benefits the Maoists?

I will tell you that if the king had not taken over, we would not have kept our lethal military assistance under review. Obviously, the government would have got a lot more Indian weapons by now as well. So I do not agree with that suggestion at all.

Is it possible for the Maoists to win in a conventional war and to take over the state?

If the army has the weapons and ammunition, it will not be possible for the Maoists to win. What happens if your military runs out of bullets, is the one number question facing your country today. Figure it out, where is lethal military assistance comes in.

What about Maoist capabilities?

Frankly if the army runs out of bullets, they can come in with kukri knives.

The army seems more than capable of defending the 75 district headquarters, the Maoists do not have any base in the army command, and they seem to have fractured at the top.

From the study of totalitarian parties, you may actually see the Maoists come out more unified, tougher, leaner and meaner. Baburam may patch up and come out singing praises of Prachanda. In terms of capabilities, two and half years ago Maoists were active in 14 out of 75 districts. Today, it is 70 out of 75. Basically, there is a question of the army maintaining its capability, and they do need weapons and bullets before long or they will get into serious trouble.

What is your sense of human security outside Kathmandu Valley after 1 February?

I do not have a good feel for what happens in the 4,000 villages, and I would guess that the conditions vary considerably. Elsewhere, I get a mixed picture. Obviously the Valley has been getting pretty safe since even before February First, and the bandas are not being respected here. There is news that Nepalgunj has got better over the last few weeks, which I find very interesting because it had been an area of complete failure.

Is there a distance between the State Department and the senators and congressmen on the Hill, in terms of how they see February One, the palace and military assistance?

I think that basically everybody shares the same two goals of return to democracy and effective handling of the insurgency. There is some debate about how exactly you do it but I do not get the feeling that we are constantly under siege from parts of the Hill. We have a pretty good dialogue going.

It has been said that in Washington DC recently you painted a rather rosy picture of the current situation in Nepal, particularly having to do with the Kapilavastu vigilante action, the NHRC and the OISCA.

On Kapilavastu, frankly there is a range of opinion on what happened and that is what I reported. On NHRC, they have undergone a change of places since then, after this first of February. It is a statistical fact that they are getting better access. The Supreme Court tells me that there are no writs of habeas corpus outstanding, these are facts and I am sorry if they do not jive with people’s perceptions of the way things must be here after February 1. You’ve got a glass here, obviously it is mostly empty, maybe only a quarter full, but there is some fullness here and it is not that everything has gone to the extent of your worst nightmare.

The glass may be quarter full”
**Eurocopter on Everest**

An Eurocopter AS350B3 helicopter (pictured) landed last weekend on the top of Chomolungma, setting a new world record, company sources said in Paris. It is not clear why news of the landings which took place on 14 May was only released on Tuesday through its website and not from Nepal. Eurocopter, the European helicopter maker, said its specially-upgraded chopper had landed on the 8,850 m summit twice, setting a new world record for high-altitude landings and takeoffs.

The aircraft, flown by test pilot Didier Desalle, took off from Lukla and remained aloft the peak for more than two minutes. Another second successful landing and takeoff took place later. Eurocopter had submitted the feat to the International Federation of Aviation for approval as a world record. The company is a division of the aviation giant European Aeronautic Defence.

**West Seti on again**

China and Australia will invest in the $1.2 billion and 750 megawatt West Seti project in western Nepal, a Chinese embassy official in Kathmandu was quoted by Xinhua as saying last week. The construction of the project, is likely to begin in the coming dry season. Ma Dongsheng, second secretary of the embassy’s economic and commercial counsellor’s office, told Xinhua. The government awarded the contract to the Snowy Mountain Engineering Corporation (SMEC) of Australia in 1994 but was stuck because of delays in negotiations with sale of power to India.

The project is expected to be completed by 2010 if it starts this year. Now, Ma said, the China National Machinery and Equipment Import Export Corporation and the SEMC will invest 70 percent and 30 percent respectively for the project. The Chinese and Australian investors have already signed an agreement, and they have to get a production license from the Nepali government to start the project. West Seti is Nepal’s first export-only project and the Power Trade Corporation of India will buy the electricity at 4.95 cents per unit.

**More no landlocked**

Star Cruises is poised to market its ocean cruises in the Nepal market this year after encouraging response in India. Star Cruises has appointed two Preferred Sales Agents in Nepal but marketing and sales will be handled by its New Delhi office. “We intend to tap into the substantial base of travellers in Nepal and present them with the option of a world-class cruising experience in addition to destination-oriented travel,” says Smil Baniepke of Star Cruises who was here to showcase cruise vacations at the NATTA travel fair earlier this month.

**Welcome wins**

**Welcome Advertising and Marketing has won the Certificate of Merit in the 38th Abby Awards ceremony. It won the award in the Best of Nepal Advertising-TV/Cinema (Single ads) category for its Wild Candy commercial made for Bhagwati Confectionery. Various Best of Nepal Advertising-TV/Cinema (Single ads) category for its product. It is a ready to mix soft drink concentrate.**

**SUNFRU: Sujal Foods has launched Sunfru, its latest Win’ contest coinciding with the AFC President’s Cup. It is a ready to mix soft drink concentrate. Sujal Foods has launched Sunfru, its latest Win’ contest coinciding with the AFC President’s Cup. It is a ready to mix soft drink concentrate. Star Cruises has appointed two Preferred Sales Agents in Nepal but marketing and sales will be handled by its New Delhi office. “We intend to tap into the substantial base of travellers in Nepal and present them with the option of a world-class cruising experience in addition to destination-oriented travel,” says Smil Baniepke of Star Cruises who was here to showcase cruise vacations at the NATTA travel fair earlier this month.**

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**Yamaha workshop**

Morang Auto Works, the authorised dealer of Yamaha motorcycles in Nepal, has set up a workshop, Yamaha Care Centre, in Tripureswar, Y Mitra, chief general manager of Yamaha Motor India inaugurated it on 18 May. This is also the 50th anniversary of Yamaha Motor Company, Japan. Users of Yamaha motorcycles can avail the free-up facility at the Centre for two weeks. Morang Auto Works plans to open similar centres in other parts of Nepal.

**SHOE FITS: Birat Shoe Co Ltd has added sport shoes to its Fit Rite outlets. It recently held a ‘Guess and Win’ contest coinciding with the AFC President’s Cup.**

**MORE WAI WAI: Fast Foods Nepal has introduced the new Muliton flavour Wai Wai for Rs 10. It also has the cashback scheme where a consumer can win upto Rs 1 lakh.**

**SUNFRU: Sujal Foods has launched Sunfru, its latest product. It is a ready to mix soft drink concentrate. VIP BAGGAGE: VIP Industries Limited in association with Sagtani Exim, its exclusive distributor for Nepal, has launched a range of VIP and Carlton luggage in Kathmandu.**

**Best-selling business**

The success of Samrat’s book could teach our gurus too

**L**ast week, sitting for almost three hours at the Educational Book House stall on the first day of the Ninth Nepal Education and Book Fair 2005 at Bhaktapur Mandap, writer Samrat

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**

**Ashutosh Tiwari**

1 upadayksh sold 200 copies of his two fiction books. That was more than a book a minute. When his books were all gone, fans started bringing other writers’ novels for Samrat to sign anyway (pic, right). Anjan Shrestha, a bookseller who was the force behind Samrat’s impromptu book-signing ceremony, later said that he was overwhelmed by the Book Fair visitors’ spontaneous positive response toward Samrat’s works. He should not have been. What is truly overwhelming is that at a time when many well-regarded (at least by newspaper experts) Nepali-language books struggle to find readers, let alone buyers, two works of fiction—that too written in English—by an expatriate Nepali have since 2003 sold a total of 60,000 copies in Nepal alone.

How can we interpret this fact to understand the opportunities and threats facing Nepal’s book industry?

In recent years, the publishing industry, in tandem with the then government’s plan to promote creative industries in Nepal, has witnessed a major upsurge in the number of new writers, hiring editors to help them work on their manuscripts, working with agents to find foreign publishers, and bringing other writers’ novels for Samrat to sign anyway (pic, right). Anjan Shrestha, a bookseller who was the force behind Samrat’s impromptu book-signing ceremony, later said that he was overwhelmed by the Book Fair visitors’ spontaneous positive response toward Samrat’s works. He should not have been. What is truly overwhelming is that at a time when many well-regarded (at least by newspaper experts) Nepali-language books struggle to find readers, let alone buyers, two works of fiction—that too written in English—by an expatriate Nepali have since 2003 sold a total of 60,000 copies in Nepal alone.

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Voltage shortage
Kantipur, 22 May
BIRJU—Low voltage in electric supply has affected industries here. Many are on the verge of closing down because of its flow current. According to the Nepal Electricity Association, this has happened since the production of electricity in Kulekhani declined because of the dry season and the load in Pathailey-Palpali grid is 66 KV transmission line increased. At present, around five to 10 megawatts of electricity is produced at Kulekhani at night. Bihar Distribution Center’s Chief, Deepak Acharya, says that the problem can only be solved after 152 KV wire is fitted from Kulekhani’s electricity production to Palpailey-Palpali grid.

Royal flight
Dhriti, 24 May
Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation, which is already in a financial mess, suffered further loss when its flight to Jakarta returned empty to Kathmandu on his royal visit. The king’s trip to Jakarta and Singapore affected international flights for a full week. Since the Boeing 757 was grounded, the airline couldn’t operate any of its flights to 10 international destinations. The 757 flew with royal visitors in Jakarta on 20 April. On 21 April, it flew back empty to Kathmandu for six hours 35 minutes. On 22 April, it flew empty to Jakarta for five hours and 50 minutes and headed for Hainan, China, with the royal entourage before flying back empty to Kathmandu for five hours. On 23 April, it flew to China without passengers for four hours 35 minutes. On 26 April, it headed out to Singapore from Hainan with the king. On 27 April, it returned empty to Kathmandu in five hours five minutes. On 28 April, it reached Singapore empty in five hours five minutes and returned to Kathmandu with the royal family on 29 April. Before the king’s visit, the SNAC had conducted tests flights for one hour 25 minutes. Total number of useless hours flown: 53 hours 40 minutes and that’s counting the many hours it spent at various airports waiting on the tarmac.

Tantrum
Jana Astha, 25 May
“I will finish them! Do you understand? Bloody Americans, the British and Indians are trying to control our country! We don’t need their money; we will show them!” The elderly stocky man in daru sawar and topi was jumping up and down at the Soaslem Hotel at an anniversary party. Who was this man in powerful glasses with greying moustache and beard? None other than honoory royal AIC and former ambassador to Britain, retired Major General Bharat Simha. He is also the chairman of the World Hindu Federation, whose Pandit Narayun Prasad Pokhrel was recently assassinated mysteriously. This was the 50th wedding anniversary of 103-year-old Naina Shumshere Rana, the nephew of King Tribhuvan who executed pro-democracy martyrs Gangaal and Deepak Acharya. The function was boycotted by Naina Shumshere’s own son Pushkar Rana and his son Siddhartha. Simha was getting worked up about the errors of America, Britain and India, saying they should be thrown out of the country. “We don’t want outside interference,” he thundered, “just because they being involved in corruption in the access road construction of the drinking water project. The contractor company’s representative Surya Prasad Pokhrel said his company’s bidding was accepted only after an agreement with the Asian Development Bank saying it was in line with the multilateral agency’s guidelines. “That is why it is not possible to influence the contract awarding process,” said Sharma. The bidding contractors are evaluated by Norplan, the project’s consultant appointed by the donors of the scheme, he said. He, however, accepted that there was an escalation in price and the reasons were changes in design, estimates and overall inflation in the price of goods. MWSP had to evaluate by Norplan, the project’s consultant appointed by the donors, he said. Norplan and the country’s fiscal rules. So no contractor can claim that the contract was awarded to them after they won the international bidding and that no one had influenced the bidding process. This comes as the RCEC CEO suggested investigations against Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Former Minister Prakash Man Singh and four other MWSP staff. The commission has changed them of

Free me!
Letter to the editor
Jana Astha, 25 May
My name is Pradip Devar and I live in New Baneshwor and have been in the education profession for many years. On the evening of 12 December 2004, I was riding my bike towards New Road when I recognised Ganesh Regmi, an acquaintance. I gave him a lift to the optical clinic to New Road but when we got there, the police nabbed Regmi and they bundled me off even though I protested, stating my innocence. I didn’t know Regmi very well but I am not aware of what exactly he did. On 4 January 2005, they produced me in court but since I was not threatened, I couldn’t make any statements in my defence for fear that I may be disappeared. My whole being was focused on

Melamchhi contract
Kantipur, 24 May
The access road construction contract for the Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP) is in line with the international standards and the country’s fiscal rules. So the commission of the contractor of Nepal’s biggest project. The contractor, CCECC, Shanghai and Lava Company held a press meet to claim that the contract was awarded to them after they won the international bidding and that no one had influenced the bidding process. This comes as the RCEC CEO suggested investigations against Former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Former Minister Prakash Man Singh and four other MWSP staff. The commission has changed them of

New NHRC
Kantipur, 22 May
Krishnam Pradhan in Nepal Samacharpatra, 24 May
Five years have elapsed since the National Human Rights Commission was formed and it is time to assess the role it has played in protecting the human rights of citizens. But one can easily gauge from the activities of NHRC members that they did everything to turn this national body of immense significance into a trivial private company.

The commission was constantly struggling with personal feuds between five of its key members who, if they were not arguing with each other, were travelling abroad every two months on justify. It was clear that the commission was nothing more than an NGO involved merely in organising workshops, interaction, training and stereotyped research. Its main role should have been to lead civil society, mediate between the state and rebels, monitor human rights abuses, make field trips to those areas where violation of rights occurred, pressure the state to adhere to humanitarian laws and closely coordinate with donors. Unfortunately, nothing of this sort happened but the commission alone cannot be blamed. NGOs failed to pressure and alert the commission about its responsibilities. Instead, they were too busy attending its receptions and seminars which resulted in making the latter indulge in fruitless actions. As of now, in a bid to reshuffle the membership in the commission, the government is on its way to nominate the chief justice as chairperson and the foreign minister as member. What we must remember from our past mistakes is that the chairperson must not be appointed because he is a senior and beholden to the state but on merit and proven experience in the field of human rights work and advocacy. What we should try to avoid is the quota system where it is obligatory to have a female representative or equal representation of people from both the hills and tarai. If a woman is appointed, she should not be someone who shouts slogans on the streets but someone with real experience in human rights work at both national and international levels.

The citizens are asking the commission to become what it intended when it was first established: a strong, powerful and independent human rights protector. We need a commission that intended when it was first established: a strong, powerful and international levels. Someone with real experience in human rights work at both national and international levels. And international levels. And international levels.
trying not to get myself killed. Before taking me to court the police had tortured me to sign a confession saying that I was a Maoist, if I didn’t they said they would disappear me. Back in Nakkhu Jail, I found out I was being detained on suspicion of extorting money from a certain Purna Lal Pradhan and Bhanut Khadgi on behalf of the Maoists. I don’t know either of these gentlemen and there is no question of me extorting money from anyone. I have been taking care of my family through hard work, I don’t need to go around demanding unearned money from people. I’m not a terrorist and I’ll never be one. The accusations against me are false and anything I have signed I have only done so under duress. There is no justice in this country, an innocent person’s life is being obliterated in this country, an innocent person’s life is being obliterated in this country, an innocent person’s life is being obliterated in this country, an innocent person’s life is being obliterated in this country, an innocent person’s life is being obliterated in this country.

"..." Today, the office appears non-existent even though its physical facilities are still intact. The prime minister’s brass nameplate is wrapped in paper. The door is locked. A security guard stands outside not knowing what he is guarding. According to the Spokesman of the Cabinet Secretariat, Yubraj Bhusal, the prime minister’s office is open only for cleaning purposes. He said the staff does make it a point to check if faxes have come in. In the hall where the Cabinet meetings used to take place, different committees hold meetings these days. In the prime minister’s chamber, there are pictures of the king and queen. Facing the prime ministers’ chair is BJ Koirala’s picture. There are phones on the table and the prime minister’s chair has been kept in a way as if expecting someone to take the seat. Around 40 soldiers have been deployed in gate number one. Gate number three is guarded by the police. There are 16 civil staff under the Ministry for Housing and Physical Planning.

Gorkhaland
Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 May

There are reports in West Bengal about a partnership between Nepal’s Maoist rebels and the political parties of Darjeeling that have been fighting for Gorkhaland. The godfather of the Gorkhaland movement and Chairman of the Darjeeling Gorkha National Liberation Front, Subhash Ghising, said recently that a struggle like that of Nepal’s Maoists was necessary to establish Darjeeling as Gorkhaland. Faming the debate further, West Bengal’s Nepali papers have reported that communal parties are preparing to form an alliance with Nepal’s Maoist rebels to fight for Gorkhaland. A splinter group of the DGNLF has even said it is already forming an alliance with the Maoists to fight for a free Gorkhaland. Nepalis residing in Darjeeling and its surrounding areas since 1960 have been demanding a separate state. But the Marxist Communist Party leader and Chief Minister of West Bengal, Babulal Deb, has rejected this.

The government is summoning ambassadors who issued statements advising the king and political parties to work together to restore democracy and solve the Maoist problem. On Friday, the government accused British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield and Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee of crossing the line when they openly welcomed the solidarity shown by the parties in demanding restoration of parliament. Even the United States, which had believed that the democratic process would be restored within 100 days is dissatisfied. What course of action the US will adopt is hard to say but to support a non-democratic nation is not a part of its doctrine. There is still a possibility that America will not resume military and financial support to Nepal. While the government is drawing up its budget, donor countries are busy cutting theirs. This will certainly cause more problems for the state. India, which has from the very beginning clearly opposed the royal move and supported democracy, might take the warning issued to its ambassador lightly. Nepal’s relationship with these two countries may go cold because they have supported the political agenda for peace and democracy put forward by the parties. If the palace does not listen to the international community’s advice it will antagonise them further. The strict restrictions put on the media and publication houses, the undemocratic changes in process for the Civil Servants Act and the suppression imposed on democratic activists indicate that the king is in no mood to look back. Even if the government’s relationship with India, Britain and the US grows cold, it is hopeful that its northern neighbour China will extend military aid. A special envoy from China will be in Kathmandu this week to discuss arms trade. All this points towards the government’s inclination to tighten its control, maintain its dictatorial state and isolate Nepal from the rest of the world. This government is clearly more focused on intensifying the conflict than in solving the country’s problems.
he clock in our hotel in Chandranigapur has just struck 8PM and suddenly the highway is engulfed in silence. This used to be a town that never slept. Buses plied every 20 minutes and eight o’clock onwards was rush hour for bus passengers stopping off for food. These days, there is just the sound of shutters being rolled down, the vendors and jhalmuri wallas wheeling away their carts to reach home before curfew. Only the street dogs are still out and their barking punctuates the still night.

All it takes is one trip along Nepal’s highways to see how much the country has deteriorated. Four months after the royal takeover people here live in constant fear, intimidation, mental stress, injustice and harassment. And they are asking, “Weren’t things supposed to get better?”

We travelled in buses from Kakarbhitta on our eastern border to Kawasoti in central Nepal along the East-West Highway, Nepal’s artery. Jhapa used to be known as a district of educated, hospitable and talkative people. It is now unrecognisable. No one speaks to strangers anymore and if they do it is a perfunctory word or two at a shop. There is no eye contact, no smile.

The east had escaped most of the ravages of the conflict till two years ago, not anymore. As police stations were pulled back for fear of Maoist attacks, maobadis, khaobadis and dacoits of every hue have filled the vacuum. The jatras and festivals that used to be a significant part of tarai life have gradually diminished. People don’t travel home anymore for fear of harassment by security forces who think they are Maoists, Maoists who think they are spies or highway robbers who just want to steal everything you have.

If the movement of people is restricted, the movement of farm produce, consumer goods have come to a virtual standstill. No one knows when there is a blockade and no one wants to risk travel. Many dairy farmers don’t take the risk of producing milk anymore. Vegetables, ghiu, honey, mushrooms and sugarcane support for the Maoists has faded with the forced recruitment of school children for their militia or to take part in abhiyans being the final straw.

On the trail to the village of Pipal, we caught up with 10 children between 13-18 years returning from a Maoist cultural program in Rolpa. The boys and girls had been walking for four days had little to eat and looked frail and weak. The rebels had come to their village and taken away 34 students from the school. “My mother must be crying but she had to let me go,” explains Sushila Shah, one of the 18 girls who were taken.

The Maoists had also force-marched 4,000 children from Dang all the way to the same cultural program. They had to march for a week, many had fallen sick and weak with hunger and had to stay behind.

Further up the valley we run into villagers who were waiting for their children to return. Rukum just wants.

The villagers of Rukum don’t want to have anything to do with the Maoists. In Rukum the people don’t seem the least bit interested in being liberated. The conflict has brought so much misery and there is no end in sight. This has hardened the people, made them more resilient and they say they are prepared for anything the future has in store.

Rukum has suffered more than its fair share. Atrocities by the police against innocent civilians during the 1998 Operation Kilo Sierra Two are still fresh in people’s minds. And in recent years the Maoist insurgency, and the people of Rukum are resigned to their fate. “Yes, there are Maoists all around but we have to make a living, right?” says a young farmer as he joins his father in ploughing the family farm.

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to be left alone

thing to do with the government or the Maoists

children to return. “What do the Maoists know about the pain of a mother for her child?” asked a woman whose 14-year-old daughter, Babita, has been away for eight days.

While the Maoists are forcing children to join their abhiyan or dig trenches in their school playgrounds, the army has also been using some schools like the Tribhuvan High School in Khalanga, turning two classrooms into barracks.

“There are guns and mortar all over Rukum,” says UML district secretary Sher Bahadur KC, one of the few local politicians who have remained behind. After February First, the politicians now have to contend with threats not just from the Maoists but also the state apparatus. “We politicians who believe in democracy have nowhere to go,” says NC leader Man Bahadur Nepali.

The impact of the rilt in the Maoist leadership has percolated down to the remotest villages. During a Maoist public meeting in Magma VDC to announce newly elected district commissars only about 200 people turned up and many of those who stayed away were said to be Baburam loyalists.

“People used to be many more people at these meetings, now the Baburam ballads don’t come,” said a local teacher. A security source in Khalanga told us that there has also been a serious split in the district cadre after the rebels suffered heavy losses in the battle of Khan in March.

Many of Rukum’s villagers couldn’t care less who is in power in Kathmandu or whether the Maoists have split. All they want is for the conflict to end and they are too busy preparing the fields for the monsoon. Since life is so difficult, many are supplementing their income working as labourers in the GTZ-supported food for work program on the Khalanga-Mankot road.

“The project is the only reason we have food to eat,” says one farmer, pausing over his pick. Every worker gets up to eight kg of rice everyday for working from 10 to five. The Maoists know how much the villagers rely on the food, so they haven’t stopped the project.

While the government’s presence has withered away, community groups have stepped into the gap working on health and education in remote areas with the tacit support of the rebels. The government’s development budget of Rs120 million for Rukum this year hasn’t been touched.

Gheta is the only VDC of 42 in Rukum that hasn’t suffered a single fatality or disappearance in the conflict so far. Located near the Rukum-Bajhang border, the rebels could never strike roots here because of the strong presence of the UML. Says local journalist, Ramji Thapa, “It’s so much better and peaceful without the government.”

Recently, the government tried to reestablish a police post in Gheta. The people chased them away.

are Nepal has changed—for the worse

from rural areas have no market. Services like telephones, electricity, roads, health posts that had taken decades to be built have been either destroyed or abandoned. Development has come to a grinding halt. If the Maoists haven’t bombed telephone relay towers, the state has removed existing VHF phones on security grounds. The NEA has long given its customers.

Dharan road. The bustling market its customers. Today, Itahari rush of customers. Today, Itahari

Itahari is on the junction of the East-West Highway with the Dharam road. The bustling market here has become nearly a ghost town. Even till last year, shopkeepers here slept barely three hours a day such was the rush of customers. Today, Itahari goes to sleep at 7PM. “Itahari is finished,” says the town’s former mayor, Surbhadoy Savai.

But as we travel westwards, things get progressively worse. Simha and Supadi have seen recent fighting, bus passengers have been literally caught in the crossfire between Maoists and the RNA. Then there are armed anti-Maoist groups like the Tanai Jantiuntrik Morcha which are using communal flames by trying to rid Nepali-speakers from the tanai villages that it controls. Nepali-speaking health workers and teachers are under pressure to leave.

In Naswalparasi the scars of recent vigilante violence haven’t healed. Thirty-six people, most of them innocent villagers were killed in vigilante attacks and Maoist retaliation in the past two months. The vigilantes are local criminals who have been used in the past as goons for hire by armed factions during the Panchayat, by political parties during elections in the 1990s and by the Maoists. But now they are being encouraged by the state to wipe out the Maoists.

By the time we reach Kawasoti, it is clear that what remains of Nepal’s economy is now on the verge of collapse. The state is losing its revenue because of the drop in trade across the Indian border, the farmers are losing their income because they can’t sell their produce, ordinary villagers are terrorised by Maoists, khadgaadis, vigilantes or state security. No one can tell who is who anymore because no one wears uniforms.

Kawasoti was rich in fruits and vegetables but with the uncertainty on the highways no one is growing them anymore. Everyone we met along the highway had one question, “Does Kathmandu care about us?” We had no answer.
A first sight it does not look like a vase or an incense holder. Its texture makes you think it is another one of those unusual pebbles you come across on a river bed. But the careful shape, colour, cracks and pores in this one are designed and serve an aesthetic purpose.

"Rather pretty isn’t it, one of my favourite works," says Carole Irwin, the potter who created it. She has lived in Nepal with her husband, David, for 14 years and for six of those, worked with clay. Now, the couple is leaving Nepal and this is her last exhibition at Indigo Gallery where she showcased her ceramics every year. This one is a retrospective of her years in Nepal and her creative influence on her.

Carole worked with local potters in Bhaktapur with GTZ’s Ceramics Promotion Project which trained them on glazing and using the kaolin kiln. “The clay here is not very good for pottery, it melts at very low temperature and does not seal the kiln. “The clay here is not very good for pottery, it melts at very low temperature and does not seal the kiln.”

Having moulded earth for more than 20 years, Carole says she can now usually shape things according to the image she has in mind. “But still,” she adds, “every time you open the kiln it’s a surprise. You only have control over part of the process.” Leaving it to chance is what she really likes.

"The earth you shape keeps surprising you, like His one here," she says pointing to a vase that looks like molten lava. She ran her fingers down the vase and not liking the effect, nearly discarded it. But now, it’s among those she’s kept for her own collection.

Carole has worked with earth in Trinidad, Bangladesh and her home England. She is also a painter and when she’s back in London hopes to set up a studio and work on intricate ceramic tabletops that she began doing here.

Artist’s Choice at Indigo Gallery, Kathmandu, 28 May-6 June

Carole’s own works are a variety of unusual shapes, colours and textures, five of them adom the presidential suite at the Hyatt Regency in Kathmandu. “I’m influenced by rocks, stones on the riverbeds, waves and shells,” she says, “and working with clay has something to it. It’s a common substance and you don’t have to go to much trouble for material.”

At the Book Fair 2005 this week, Sonam J. Phuyal was the centre of attraction. Even those who have neither read his books nor are likely to do so anything more than go to see if they can get their autographed copies.

Despite the change that they welcome for a foreign audience or to impress each other, Nepalis writing fiction in English enjoy a measure of prestige and privilege and are usually at the forefront of the vernacular (the word itself comes from the Latin for ‘slave’). No wonder, Peter Karthak, an award-winning winner in Nepal, a recognised name in newspapers and a regular of the social circuit in Kathmandu, wanted to be known as a novelist in English as well. In his anxiety to please his readers, the author has sermonised his debut novel with concern, care and love.

It’s difficult to capture the complexity of this book, but in essence it is what its name says—a narrative of people and places. Universality of human emotions and the rule of language in their expression are quite well-known but the place of a piece in giving distinctiveness to the style of a writer is often ignored.

Without the props of a Valley of Gods, Sumrat wouldn’t have been able to do ‘Arresting God’ in Kathmandu, Amrut Mani Roy’s God of Small Things is difficult to imagine anywhere else except in his own country and Samuel Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children were looked to be born in Bombay, a magically real post-colonial metropolis. Stories of every place and every person need to be rooted in a particular place and played out in the lives of specific personal.

The stage for Peter’s Himalayan tale is Darjeeling of the mid-60s, a ‘hill station’ in the process of change and degradation. It’s a story of longing and belonging in a town without a past or a future. Cat loose from its roots, its residents cling like vines to every tree and every hillock in often desperate attempts to trace their physical and moral sustenance. Some are émigrés from eastern Nepal, others trace their origins to the Ganga plains and a number of them are from surrounding mountainous regions. All are looking for a place in the process of transformation from a tourist and teaching town to a postcolonial marketplace dependent upon the energy of distant metro poles.

Darjeeling of the mid-60s is a town mired in the pathos of its lost sense of purpose. The last of the colonialis have already left, Sikkim is yet to be annexed, Subhas Ghising hasn’t yet raised his Gorkhaland war cry. Shorn of claims to grandeur, the decaying town is trying to come to terms with its second-class status in independent India and being a third-rate province for Calcutta. This is the time when everyone in the town is either leaving the town or contemplating a departure. In the stress of wilful inaction, the urge of a vibrant girl...
on a hillock by seven promising youngsters shakes all the tall trees in town to their roots. Vines begin to tumble. A few are blown away by the winds of change to faraway lands. Some survive with reduced stature by clinging to the earth. An existential tale with the complexity of simplicity unfolds through the days of a week—from Monday evening until the evening of another Monday. Life survives. It’s not an uplifting book but it’s not despondent either. Upon completion of the story, a reader is too drained out either. Upon completion of the story. A reader is too drained out to have any compassion for its principle character—the town of Darjeeling.

It’s an article of faith among literary critics that basically there are only two themes in all works of fiction: someone goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. The challenge of the novelist is to get a proper mix of these two plots. Karthak decides to linger in his fictional Darjeeling town and be a witness to its travails with mixed results. The rape, around which the story revolves, is perhaps merely a metaphor for a small town losing its innocence but even then the details tend towards tiresome rather than shocking.
**Meningitis**

NEW DELHI—An outbreak of bacterial meningitis that has already killed 15 people and hospitalised 200 others could be the precursor of a full-blown epidemic that might strike India in the next six months, warns a leading public health expert.

“What we have is a focal outbreak which could die down on its own but going by past experience with this cyclical disease it would be wise to gear up for a full-blown epidemic in December or even in May 2006,” said Krishan Kumar Aggarwal, president of the Delhi Medical Association. Vaccines are also reported to be in short supply despite their high cost at around $30 a dose and beyond the reach of most ordinary people. (IPS)

**Fake drugs**

BANGKOK—Despite the odds weighing heavily against it, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is placing its faith in the Internet to battle the alarming spread of counterfeit drugs in Southeast Asia’s poorest countries. The UN health agency’s initiative comes in the form of a web-based system to track the ‘activities of drug cheats’. The Rapid Alert System which was unveiled in Manila, is the first of its kind in the world. This system will alert health authorities and the public in the region almost immediately after a fake drug is identified. WHO invites health experts and the public to report cases of counterfeit medicine they encounter. (IPS)

**Left right, left right**

The Congress fears its leftist coalition partner more than it fears the BJP

A year after defeating the BJP at the national polls, the Congress party of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has more to fear from friends than enemies.

As Singh’s minority Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) observed its first anniversary it came under attack from Prakash Karat, the intellectually formidable general secretary of the Marxist Communist Party of India (CPI-M), for its pro-liberal economic policies.

The CPI-M and its allies in the Left Front provide critical outside support to the UPA government. But that support base is only for keeping the BJP out of power. Many in India feel that the BJP’s political agenda is in complete variance with the secular republic envisaged by India’s founding fathers.

Karat and AB Bardhan who heads the CPI stresses that the government they support has strayed from the Common Minimum Program (CMP) that was supposed to help bridge problems stemming from ‘differing class perspectives’. Both leaders have constantly reminded the Congress that it returned to power mainly as a result of the BJP’s liberalisation policies, which were seen to benefit a narrow urban elite at the cost of hundreds of millions of people.

The communists are angry about the steps taken over the past year such as allowing foreign direct investment of up to 74 percent in private Indian banks and the telecom sector. The Left is also furious over plans to open up the country’s mining industry to foreigners and allow multinationals to enter India’s retail trade, which has developed without the frills of global marketing and branding.

Singh is also accused of reneging on promises to amend labour laws to protect unorganised workers and those in the agricultural sector, while land reforms remain neglected. Though both Karat and Bardhan pledged continuing support for Singh’s government, they warned that the coming days would see mass mobilisation and movements to ensure the implementation of ‘pro-people’ policies.

While complimenting the UPA government for moving to develop an axis of trilateral cooperation among India, Russia and China, the communists are wary of New Delhi developing close security and military ties with the US. BJP President Lal Krishna Advani took it upon himself to provide Mammohan Singh and the Congress party with some unsolicited advice on how to deal with its communist allies. “Marginalise the ideological and political influence of the communists, for their policies will not double digit growth,” he said. Advani even offered the support of the BJP and its allies in voting in “any reform vital for India’s economic progress. For Mammohan Singh, this must have sounded like the right advice coming from the wrong place. (IPS)
Yip, yip, hurray

Breaking away from bouts of uncertainty

The yips became a much-used term among golfers when Bernard Langer, Germany's top golfer at one time, went through a prolonged phase of suffering from them. Commentators worldwide loved to use the term repeatedly to describe his slump in rankings. The yips was soon in vogue, used to describe any prolonged bout of errant putting. Not familiar with the term? It is used to describe a strange phenomenon of losing total confidence in your putting abilities to the point where you can't even sink putts of two to four feet! Soon you feel you can't sink anything at all.

In my many years as a golfer, I have found myself going through the yips. From my experience, once you start missing the short putts, your level of confidence decreases, which then makes you make more stroke and ball conscious than is healthy. Soon little involuntary muscle twitches and psychological interferences sneak in and in the end, you just can't pull it off anymore.

History has proven that putting yips will break down even the greatest ball strikers. You just can't make it to the top with such a problem. For example, in the early 90s, Raymond Floyd missed a three-foot putt on the 18th green of the USPGA in 1992 costing him the tournament. But the worst experience of my career came in the 1993 Masters at Augusta. I was confident with my putting stroke I would have had a nice championship by the slenderest of margins, just one stroke. If I had been confident with my putting stroke I would have had a nice championship by the slenderest of margins, just one stroke. If I had

Orlando Patterson and Jason Kaufman

Bowling for democracy

Cricket, the quintessential English game, is one of the most international of sports. It is dominant in more countries than any other sport except soccer, in lands as varied as Australia, India, Pakistan, South Africa and the Commonwealth Caribbean. But a glance at the global map of cricket poses a cultural puzzle.

Why, on the one hand, does the game flourish in countries like Pakistan and India, where a hard-fought series can transfix nations and even lead to improved diplomatic relations? And why, on the other hand, is cricket not played much in other former British colonies like Canada—or, for that matter, in the US, with its heritage and "special relationship" with Britain?

The puzzle only deepens when you consider that the world’s first international test match was played between Canada and the US in 1844. Why did they subsequently reject it in the early 20th century? Climate has nothing to do with it. Cricket emerged as a summer game and is easily played during mild weather. North American multiculturalism is hardly a factor, given the game’s popularity in the multicultural societies of the Caribbean and South Africa. Ethnicity can't be the answer—there is a far greater proportion of English in North America than in India or the Caribbean. Why then did hockey and baseball eventually trump cricket in Canada and the US?

Cricket is a gift ground in North America because of the egalitarian ethos of its societies. Rich Americans and Canadians had constant anxiety about their elite status, which prompted them to seek ways to differentiate themselves from the masses. One of the ways was cricket, cordoned off as an elite-only pastime. In the late 19th century Canada, it became associated more with the old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon elite."

This elite appropriation played into the hands of baseball entrepreneurs who were successful in diminishing cricket’s popularity. Baseball, in contrast, was sold as a rugged, fast-paced, masculine game, buttressing its rugged, fast-paced, masculine image. Americans of all classes swallowed the charasmatic line. It was also great business for AG Spalding. By inventing elaborate baseball gear, he created a market for his new sporting goods company. In the remaining British colonies, however, the opposite happened. In these rigidly unequal societies the colonial elites and their native allies never had any anxieties about their status and the British actively promoted the game—first to native elites, then to natives. In India, the wealthy Parsis first took up the game in emulation of their British masters. Soon, royalty throughout the subcontinent adopted it. English-style grammar schools were an important source of exposure to upper-class mobile native men. In the Caribbean, grammar schools made the imperial game a core feature of their education and made competition possible between different classes and ethnic groups without disrupting the social fabric.

The game itself partly facilitated this process. Cricket requires no contact between players and is its strict, complex rules, dress code and officiating largely eliminate any risk of embarrassment in play with those of different ranks or casts. So did the careful allocation of positions—less glamorous rules like bowling and fielding were assigned to social inferiors while those of specialist batsman and team captain were reserved for the elite.

What broader lessons might the history of cricket have for the globalization of western cultural practices? It shows that such practices can be promoted or discouraged from the top down; it is not necessarily a bottom-up process as is commonly believed. Nor does such downward dissemination require the point of a gun. The passion for cricket in places like Pakistan and India also shows that a complex western cultural practice can be adopted in its entirety by very different cultures even when highly identified with its country of origin. Might the same be true of other western cultural practices like democracy? – NYT
There was a slight improvement in Kathmandu’s air quality last week due to a shift in prevailing winds that reduced wind-blown dust from India and the Valley’s own pollution. The average concentration of particles below 10 microns along the busy streets of Patan dropped by 19 percent and in the residential area of Thamel by 11 percent. Although the pollution level in residential areas is just within national standards, things aren’t going to really improve if the monsoon arrives next month. Hello Putali sadak monitoring station still out of action.

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BUGGY RIDE: Climbers Toni Streathers and Norman Hardie with British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield at Kathmandu Darbar Square participating in the Mt Kanchenjunga Golden Jubilee celebrations on Wednesday.

WORLD PEACE: Locals in Maha Bodhia light oil lamps to celebrate Buddha Jayanti on Monday.

WOMEN POWER: Dalli Rokaya, Belmati KC and Laxmi Kathayat of the community group involved with building the Karnali Highway in Jumla answer reporter’s questions in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

Swadeshi soda

Suresh Suwal has been in the soda business for as long as he can remember but not just any ordinary soda. His father, Buddhiram Suwal, set up his soda shop outside Janasewa Cinema where the Bishal Bajar now stands. The unique bottle with the blue glass marble used to be a hit among cine-goers in the days before Coke and Pepsi. Though the shop has changed its location many times, it has been running for 67 years now. And the bottles are still that old-fashioned kind and the taste is still the same.

The legacy passed from father to son and Suresh, at the early age of 11, was hooked on to making sodas. “It’s called the army machine,” says Suresh proudly of his soda making gadget, “during World War II, it was used to make sodas for the soldiers.” When the equipment was hauled into Kathmandu back in the old days the Suwals delivered fizzy sodas for the Ranas who liked to dilute their champagne with it.

Contrary to popular belief that sodas are not hygienic, the Ranjana Galli Soda Pasal uses only mineral water in its products. Compared to multinational colas, Suwal says his product is not only an healthier option but also tastier. He claims to have upto 27 different flavours of soda though the most popular are plain soda and cola with a twist of lime and special masala for added zing. It is also the cheapest option at only Rs 7.

With summer here and the temperatures sliding into the 30s, soda offers a healthy alternative to soft drinks. The average soft drink has about eight teaspoons of sugar and leads to tooth decay and caffeine dependence. But Nepali ‘guchha soda’ tastes much better, is a lot healthier and is supposed to cure ulcers, indigestion and even hangovers.

Suwal plans to expand. “We are trying to make sodas available everywhere. We want to supply not only to restaurants and parties but also make labelled bottles with manufacture and expiry dates and then market them in local shops as an alternative to other drinks,” he says bubbling with enthusiasm.

If Suwal’s small shop is any indication, the business is ripe for expansion. He gets as many as 1,300 customers a day during the summer. “The market is growing and we’ll grow with it,” says Suwal. This may be the next soda revolution.

(Aarti Basnyat)
Covering up our manhood

Now for something completely different. Many of us are reluctant to shed our cozy illusions and want to go on pretending that everything is fine in this kingdom of ours. That is why we must use the window of opportunity before the new press ordinance becomes law to analyse important trends in male fashion and what that means for our democratic way of life.

Many of you must be wondering why, post-February First, kids think it is mandatory to wear trousers that look like they have been designed for people who don’t have any buttocks. I haven’t, just wondered if you had. Because preliminary inspection has shown what I suspected all along: it is because today’s teenagers aren’t endowed with the formidable backsides our generation was proud to call its own.

Ever since our Neanderthal ancestors started greeting each other with the phrase “How’s it hanging, man?” human beings have been acutely aware of their various accessories and the need to keep them undercover. In those early days, man used whatever was lying around the cave: woolly mammoth bladder, antelope skin, or sabre-toothed tiger fur. And that was how the world of men’s fashion was born. (Women were required by law not to wear anything to cover up.)

But even back then it was already clear that men’s fashion was ephemeral. Early wildbeest hide dungarees, for instance, were tied with rope belts at the chest. But trousers have been drifting downwards ever since and by the early Elizabethan Era had arrived at the vicinity of the midriff. Today, if the latest fashion trends I have spotted in Thamel is any indication, baggy draw-string trousers must be tied just below the bums in a gravity-defying feat of brinkmanship. At this rate, by the year 2015 we can safely predict that boys’ trousers will be at the level of the ankles and mankind will have come a full circle to our early cave-dwelling underwear bears.

But how can the ordinary man on the street keep track of latest fashion trends, especially if he doesn’t have Fashion TV on cable? As a public service we present below a table with can-wear and can’t-wear tips. Fine print: Readers are advised to exercise maximum caution since fashion trends can change suddenly and without warning making you look like a dork. Management bears no legal liability for the consequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s in</th>
<th>What’s out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard issue</td>
<td>A-Front Underwear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Lowise half-mast pants</td>
<td>Boob tubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone-washed jeans with faded</td>
<td>Brooke Shields or Che</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patch in vicinity of crotch</td>
<td>Mini skirts (especially for men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baburam Bhattarai designer</td>
<td>Stone-washed jeans with faded patch in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>golf cap</td>
<td>vicinity of knee caps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipple ring</td>
<td>Navin K Bhattarai baseball cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose-tinted glasses</td>
<td>Nose ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bands for scribes</td>
<td>Ray Ban shades during parades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bands for scribes</td>
<td>Red bandanas for pharisees</td>
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</tbody>
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October 2005

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