It was a unique form of protest. Among the marigolds, vermilion and incense sticks that devotees presented in a bamboo tray to Pashupatinath on Monday was a small FM radio set. More than 50 members of various Nepali non-government radio stations that have been restricted to broadcasting only music since February. First decided to appeal to Nepal’s patron deity for help. “Hamara Mahadev,” they chanted in prayer, “give us rulers some wisdom.”

Nepal’s remarkable strides in community radio has been praised as a model the world over. Since Radio Sagarmatha first went on air in 1997 in Kathmandu Valley, 43 other FM stations have gone on air. Listenership has surpassed that of state-owned Radio Nepal. Commercial and non-profit FMs were equally popular and complemented each other to give Nepal’s pluralism and diversity a voice.

All this came to a crashing halt on 4 February with the government circular prohibiting FM stations from broadcasting news and limiting them to ‘pure entertainment’. The military and local administrations have been increasingly heavy handed with station management, issuing notices and demanding clarification if stations deviate even slightly from the directive.

The result is hundreds of journalists are out of jobs, the public has lost a vital and credible source of information, listenership of clandestine rebel broadcasts have gone up and stations that never broadcast Hindi music have turned to Bollywood to fill airtime. As a result, advertising revenues have tumbled and investors are worried.

For the last four months, broadcasters tried quiet diplomacy with informal one-on-ones with members of the cabinet, top army brass and the Minister for Information and Communication. They tried to convince them that, contrary to the minister’s belief, FM stations worldwide do carry news, that local FM stations can be partners in the country’s development and if the government censored independent news, information hungry Nepalis would just tune to Maoist frequencies. Nothing swayed them.

“When we met the Minister of Information Tanka Dhakal on 7 April, he assured us that the government would soon allow FM stations to broadcast non-political news,” says Raghu Mainali, coordinator of Save Independent-Radio Movement. “No announcement ever came.”

Now, the Community Radio Broadcasters’ Association, the Broadcasting Association of Nepal (an organisation of commercial broadcasters) and Kathmandu Valley FM Broadcasters Forum have come together to launch the radio campaign.
A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

Two weeks ago, after the seven political parties announced their alliance, we said the ball was in His Majesty’s court. Last Friday, the king whisked the ball back, rejecting the call for a restoration of parliament and saying he was prepared to talk to the parties came to him. Predictably, the parties rejected it outright.

We are going round and round in circles. If a relatively similar differerence of opinion such as this is approached with such implacable stubbornness how are we ever going to find a solution to the much more knotty problem of the Maoist insurgency?

In essence, February First was an attempt by the royalists to turn the country’s triangular tug-of-war for power into a two-pronged fight. It was to obfuscate or at least make irrelevant, the parties who are holding on to middle ground. Even some supporters of the royal move now admit that in the last four months the insurgency has been used to systematically dismantle what remained of our tottering democratic institutions.

The free media, one of the few legacies of the 1990 People’s Movement that was still intact, has been deliberately and methodically torn down. The most recent ban on Communication Corner represents a cynical tactic to choke an FM radio network that was acclaimed the world over for giving a voice to Nepal’s voiceless (p.4). These are not the typical public protests of the future, they betray deep-seated insecurity about public opinion and the mindset of a clique that knows its time is up.

It has also been a fortnight of fast-paced developments on the Maoist front. It is now clear that despite denials, a section of the Indian left has been trying to repair the leadership rift and convince the rebels to join the mainstream. The talk in Kathmandu must have got the hint – this is the last chance for the parties to pair up, otherwise the parties and the Maoists are going to put up. That would allow this tri-polar to bipolar struggle, not quite the way the king intended.

King Gyanendra has repeatedly said His ultimate goal is parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. So, the disagreement between him and the parties is only about the sequence of the steps to be taken to get there, not about the destination itself. Democracy demands pluralism, an abhorrence of secrecy and a rejection of violence. We must accept that there must be more than one centre of power. And if history has taught us anything, it is that you can’t wrest power from the people and remain in power for long.

It’s time for a whole new ball game.

"Bring back the trees"

On 5 June, let’s ponder the link between democracy and the environment.

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It’s time for a whole new ball game.
Leading US newspaper, The Times, carried a piece on the interview of former US Ambassador, James Moriarty by roving correspondent, James Hutchison. The interview was of particular interest as it shed light on the US foreign policy towards Nepal and its role in the current Maoist conflict. Moriarty expressed his views on the ongoing negotiations and the need for a peaceful resolution.

The article highlights the importance of transparency and the need for the Nepalese government to take steps towards democratization. Moriarty also stressed the significance of the support from the international community, especially the USA, in resolving the conflict.

The US ambassador’s interview is expected to provide valuable insights into the US position on Nepal and its role in the ongoing negotiations. The Nepalese government is expected to consider Moriarty’s views in formulating its policies and strategies.

In conclusion, The Times article on the Moriarty interview is a significant contribution to the understanding of the ongoing conflict in Nepal and the role of the international community in resolving it. The article provides a fresh perspective on the US foreign policy towards Nepal and its potential impact on the current negotiations.
Planning a career in media?

Himalmedia has ten years of experience in publishing. Its products have set new standards of journalism and production quality in Nepal, and the group is poised for further expansion. Himalmedia’s three core publications, Almal Khabarpatra, Nepal Times and WAVE are trendsetters in their segment and Himalmedia employees provide their brands with the creativity, innovation, talent and commitment that makes them top publications.

The company believes in transparency and fairness, reflecting Nepal’s diversity in its staff profile. Employee turnover is low, with more than 80 percent of staff having served eight years or more. Himalmedia generates an abundance of career opportunities within its 100-strong plus team. In keeping with growth plans, Himalmedia now seeks to recruit competent, self-motivated candidates for the following positions:

ASSISTANT MANAGER, CIRCULATION (1)

You will be managing three popular magazine titles, use reader demographics to formulate strategies to meet targets. Responsibilities include managing operations, database, logistics. Analysing market performance so well as developing and implementing retail circulation strategies, aligning, motivating and developing team members.

Professional experience:
Graduate with at least two years experience in the media environment, including campaign planning.

Strong communication skills and a thorough working knowledge of Microsoft packages

Exposure to sales modeling software and database structures will be an advantage

MARKETING MANAGER (1) EXECUTIVES (2)

Working within a strong existing team, you will report directly to the General Manager, Marketing. As part of an innovative and dynamic department, you will plan and implement marketing strategies in current and future titles. You will co-ordinate with ad agencies, devise new marketing strategies and line-ups with clients.

Professional Experience:
Graduate either with research, sales or marketing experience of minimum two years

Good working knowledge of media and ability to apply this in the marketplace

Exceptional communication skills and the ability to produce written proposals to a high standard

An ideas-led thinker with a sharp analytical mind, positive and enthusiastic approach.

Able to work under pressure, prioritise and be flexible

ASSOCIATE / DESK EDITOR (1)

WAVE, Nepal’s best-selling and most successful youth magazine is looking for an Associate/Desk Editor. You will report to the Editor and work in all aspects of magazine production, including writing, subbing and on-page production using In Design software.

Professional experience:
Good journalism skills honed in noteworthy publication.

Young at heart, though not necessarily young, excellent English, attention to detail a good knowledge of magazine processes

You should be smart, organised, and willing to be fully identified with the product.

Apply in writing with cv and cover letter to personnel@himalmedia.com

Personnel Department
Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd
A 4 Sanchayakosh Bldg, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal

Closing date for all applications: June 15, 2005

Unplugged

An FM radio set was among offerings made to Pushapatinath on Monday by radio staffers in protest of government action against Communication Corner.

Towards the end of April, the government had suspended Communication Corner, an FM radio station in Kathmandu. An FM radio set was among the offerings made to Pushapatinath on Monday by radio staffers in protest of government action against Communication Corner.

“Desperate times call for creative measures,” says Chamanlal Luintel of Kathmandu Valley FM Broadcasters’ Forum. Indeed, the week-long protest includes half-hour blasts of dinousaur sounds blasting by all stations, becozing Pushapatinath, reciting the clause from the constitution on freedom of expression and mailing the government a copy of the constitution with a broken radio. Simultaneous silence on all stations for two minutes and lighting candles at the Maitighar Mandala are also scheduled.

The three broadcasting associations and the radio stations they represent know this is a last-ditch attempt to save radio in Nepal. “Station managers don’t just have to worry about censorship, they also have to deal with salaries of employees and paying license renewal fees due on 15 July,” says Broadcasting Association of Nepal’s Rishnu Hari Dhakal. The license fees will double if not cleared within six months and expire with no possibility of renewal if not paid within a year. Nepali radio is in big trouble.

Ghodagho FM

Nepal’s rural FM stations are not under attack just from the state. On the night of 19 May, 35 armed Maoists raided Ghodagho FM in Alftak in Kalikot and lootd most of the station’s studio equipment. Among the station’s listenership were kamaiyas and other underprivileged groups in Kalikot, Kanchanpur and Bardya and its programs tackled social reform issues. “They often asked us who our technical guys were or whether they could listen to their transmitters or other equipment,” says station manager Biswo Pashchamadanga. He had refused. “Our technicians can operate mixers and tape decks but cannot repair them.” The rebels reportedly operate nine mobile FM transmitters in the country and accused Ghodagho of operating with American money. It is actually supported by a Danish government grant.

Cornered

The Ministry of Information and Communication sent a ‘secret’ and ‘urgent’ letter to Communication Corner, a radio content provider on 27 May. “Since we have received in writing that (the Communication) Corner is being run illegally, we are, as per orders, requesting you to shut down,” the cryptic note read. Communication Corner is a legally registered, commercially run, radio production syndicate exchanging programs between 14 partner stations all over the country since 1998. On 1 February, armed soldiers entered the studio and stopped dissemination of radio and shut off its V-Sat system.

Even so, the company was distributing Shruta Bacchan, a program promoting people’s physical and emotional well-being. Managing Director Gopal Guragain told us, “We have no idea why they did this.” On 30 June, Guragain moved the Supreme Court to issue a stay order and filed a case against the Ministry of Information and Communication, Ministry of Defence and Lalitpur District Administrator’s Office which issued the order. The court has asked the three authorities to present their case today.

“Donors suspended the Rural Community Infrastructure Works (RCIW) project, one of Nepal’s most effective pro-poor initiative, in Kalikot last month because of Maoist brutality against staff. Mark Mallalieu of the British aid group, DFID and the UN’s World Food Program Erika Joergensen spoke to Nepali Times justifying the decision.

Nepali Times: What exactly happened in Kalikot?
Mark Mallalieu: Two aid workers employed by a local NGO were abducted and repeatedly tortured for a number of days by Maoists in early April. Two brothers of the woman involved were also beaten up, generally intimidated and asked to give money to the Maoists which they did in the end. They were released eventually but it was clearly a human incident. The woman was severely tortured and asked to dig her own grave. So we were all deeply shocked by what had happened.

Erika Joergensen: We saw this clearly as a violation of the principles of the Basic Operating Guidelines adopted by 10 bilateral agencies and by the UN. But we really regret that we have to suspend it. This suspension will continue until we have a firm commitment that such incidents will not repeat and the guidelines will be respected.

A number of NGOs we talked to were quite miffed that the decision was taken unilaterally. How do you respond?

MM: First of all there was detailed consultation within the Basic Operating Guidelines group and we are in contact with major organisations we were funding in Kalikot. We also told the government both locally and centrally. I think the key issue here is to send our staff into the area and disappear. We would have liked to continue our programs in the light of what had happened. We have always warned that we will not be able to run development programs in situations where staff are being subject to violence or risk death. So we really didn’t have much choice in the matter. It was a suspension of two projects.

What are the main points of the basic Operating Guidelines?
MM: The purpose is to enable us to fund programs in the conflict affected areas safely and effectively. These set out the principles that need to be adhered to from all sides to enable us to do that. We can’t allow our projects and staff to be co-opted or used by either side of the conflict. For instance, we don’t allow our vehicles to be used by waring
When staff are subject to violence

And that they haven’t done that yet?

MM: No.

What is the policy on working in Maoist areas?

MM: People and organisations delivering services in rural areas try to take a very pragmatic approach where it is necessary to consult with the Maoists. That consultation does take place. Of course, it’s not just the project funded by donors doing this. The government also operates very often in extremis. It is more about signing a heap of documents that no one wants to read and understand. No one wants to look at basic documents like the Memorandum of Association or Articles of Association. No one perhaps wants to look at various forms of shares apart from the ‘vanilla’ equity shares with the same rights and liabilities. The monitoring of document filing in this authority is so poor that shareholding changes even after decades remain a mystery.

Trying to locate records is a nightmare because the functioning of this document recording is still manual. The people sitting in its offices or by proxy, are often understand the decision and there was no difficulty at the time. People are going to have more hardship and the children in particular, the girls won’t be able to go to school as there won’t be incentives and there will be consequences. Then she asked me if we don’t close it, will any of our colleagues die and I said that I can’t see that happening. WFP has initiated suspension in at least five areas. The implication of suspension is that the environment for development would become a lot more difficult and to some extent that became a self-fulfilling prophecy. People were reluctant to go out in the field. But over the past few weeks, the projects have started to operate because they were before 1 February. In many cases, they have been successful. The other factor is that the Maoists have realised how alienated they are from ordinary people. And of course, at the level of the leadership the officers are under immense pressure from Kathmandu to deliver.

What are field conditions like post-February First?

MM: Immediately after 1 February, everyone conceived that the environment for development would become a lot more difficult and that led to a self-fulfilling prophecy. People were reluctant to go out in the field. But over the past few weeks, the projects have started to operate because they were before 1 February. In many cases, they have been successful. The other factor is that the Maoists have realised how alienated they are from ordinary people. And of course, at the level of the leadership the officers are under immense pressure from Kathmandu to deliver.

Ej: This is not the first time the project has been suspended. WFP has initiated suspension in at least five cases where rice was looted. In each case, we have set our criteria based on the Basic Operating Guidelines and the recipients of our assistance got involved and we could lift the suspensions. There was better understanding on why we are setting these benchmarks.

Do you think the suspension in Kalikot has worked?

MM: It certainly demonstrated that we are serious. One can only go back and say in a year or two to see whether it was a key point in ensuring that development work was able to continue and subjected to threat and violence.

Ej: It has in fact worked in previous cases.

How has the government responded to the suspension?

MM: Well the government were centrally informed and understood the decision and there was no difficulty at the time when we were talking with the government, it hasn’t become a major issue.

But they didn’t seemed happy when we talked to them.

MM: There are two issues here. First, where an aid worker has been subject to violence we have no choice but to suspend activities so we didn’t have a dialogue with the government about whether we should suspend because we had to make that decision but we did inform them and the government did understand why we were making the decision.

So, you will restart once apology is in place from the Maoists?

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When staff are subject to violence

An antiquated system won’t get us anywhere

H aving received kudos from the banking and business community for the last piece on interest rates, your favourite Beed decided to take on another area that nobody bothers about but has affected the functioning of efficient businesses.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Like anywhere else, under the Companies Act basic operating guidelines are supposed to register and monitor corporate entities, while also functioning as a documentation agency where corporate reports and other statutory documents are filed. In Nepal, its role has neither been understood by the people who sit in its offices by those who are supposed to abide by it.

Opening a company here is paying consultancy fees to a lawyer or a quasi-lawyer who drafts a set of documents and returns with a certification from the government. It is more about signing a heap of documents that no one wants to read and understand. No one wants to look at basic documents like the Memorandum of Association or Articles of Association. No one perhaps wants to look at various forms of shares apart from the ‘vanilla’ equity shares with the same rights and liabilities. The monitoring of document filing in this authority is so poor that shareholding changes even after decades remain a mystery.

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...
The king and the parties
Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 May-14 June

All Nepalis and Nepal's friends have only one wish—the king and the political parties cooperate and together endeavour to solve the Maoist problem. But the situation is heading in the opposite direction. The king's continual indifference has resulted in the parties taking to the streets in escalating protests. This has made it easier for the Maoists to appeal to parliamentary parties. While the seven parties' agitation takes shape, criticism and anger against the king's advisers is growing. The Maoists have started sending positive signals about the parties and in the past week it was evident that while the rift between the king and the parties widened, the Maoists and the parties were coming closer. For Nepalis who believe in multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy, this turn of events is unpalatable. But no one has an answer. The leaders of the seven parties themselves seem opportunistic. They do not really want to grow alienated from the king but circumstances have reached a turning point and maybe beyond their control.

A few weeks ago, all external powers supported cooperation between the king and the parties. They emphasised unity among the parties before they could work together with the king. India, Britain and the EU openly welcomed the solidarity. This really angered the government who summoned the British and Indian ambassadors and gave them letters of warning. This was a new and deplorable incident in Nepal's diplomatic history. On the other hand, American Ambassador James Moriarty has used fear of the Maoists to pressure the parties to unite and has been supporting the royal move, substantiating the rumour of the royal move being decided upon with American support. Amidst all this, the Royal Nepali Army made public Prachanda's audiotape to prove that India had an unholy alliance with the Maoists.

This was no small matter for New Delhi. Then unfolded a series of reports that Maoist leaders Baburam Bhattarai and Krishna Bahadur Maram had met Indian Communist Party General Secretary Prakash Karat with the help of the Indian security. After the Delhi meeting, it looks like the Indian intent was to bring the parties and the Maoists closer. Even members of Kathmandu's professional 'civil society' who make their opinions on the basis of which way the wind blows in Delhi have now started echoing the Indian line. They see the king as more to blame for the failure of unity between the king and the parties. This view has gained momentum for a while and if some sudden event does not affect it, the attitude in Kathmandu might be like that of Delhi—if it is a choice between the king and the Maoists, either will do.
“Try to be in my shoes”

He Majesty King Gyanendra speaking to select editors last week at the royal palace and quoted in Naiapahya, 31 May

‘One needs to be clear about the work being done. One needs to be clear about goal. First of all, one’s mind needs to be in peace. Once again would like to request the press—it is menacing the country’s future. If the line of the king has already rotten, what will you pick? I can reiterate parliament but that would violate the constitution. Would that be right? I am the patron of the constitution; it is the people who have to say what needs to be done. The constitution does not apply just for the king. Destruction, vandalism, arson, these are not what Nepalis are known for. Where did all this come from? The parties need to be clear about whether or not to hold talks with the Maoists. They should also make their position clear about terrorism, corruption, good governance and fiscal discipline. Only then can we reach a conclusion on how to go about things.

The 1 February move was for the good of the country and the people. I have heard that the country has been able to witness some peace. But peace has to be restored across the country. There has been progress in the last three months. Our responsibility is to establish the progress made in the Valley and urban areas and to spread the normalcy throughout the country. These things take time. No one has a magic wand. This is the age of democracy. The country has to be navigated with a democratic culture. The priority of ‘me, party and then the country’ needs to be reversed. Try to be in my shoes. It is difficult to do everything at once. Running the country through ordinance is not a good trend but it can’t be run by the laws of the jungle either. We need to move ahead abiding by the law and we need to understand the situation and compulsions. The monarchy wishes to see democracy flourish in a way that accommodates everyone. The role of the king of Nepal is for the Nepali people to decide, not for foreigners.

Multi-reporting from: Baburam and Krishna Bahadur Mahara.

“My shoes”

Angry Manisha

King Gyanendra, 31 May

Manish Koirala has said that by taking a step that could put this throne itself at risk to save the country and people from the decay of the past, the king has become a symbol of magnanimity for the whole country. Expressing dissatisfaction over the NC’s expulsion of her father Prakash Koirala, she stated that to not be able to have a different opinion within the party was a serious setback for democracy itself.

Diplomacy?

Yuburg Chhim in Samay, 2 June

Last week, the Royal Nepali Army played tapes captured from the Maoists to the press. The growing distance between Prachanda and Baburam, Prachanda accusing Baburam of moving towards India and again, Prachanda rehabilitating his accusations, show the internal conflict within the rebel party. After February First, the RNA appears to have grown stronger. Military aid has also resumed. The captured tapes showed India was pursuing another rapprochement with the Maoists. In the audiosphere, Prachanda talked of Baburam being clearly motivated and that the Indian government would release CP Gujrat and Mohan Baidiya if Baburam was reinstated in the party position. The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu immediately questioned the authenticity of the tape. Later, Chief of Army Staff Pyare Janga said it hadn’t been their intention to ‘expose’ India. So why did the RNA organise a press meet that would affect diplomatic relations? Why weren’t the questions raised distinctly with India first? And which rank in Nepal’s government has the Indian government taken into confidence? Or was this responsibility given to India after an understanding was formed between Prachanda’s group and a rank in the Nepali government? Top army and government officials see the international pressure put on the king to return to democracy have lashed out at India, Britain and the US. To mobilize the army to make such expossures will bring huge damage to the king, people and the state. In fact, this way, the king will be blamed for everything that has gone wrong. Three days after the press meet, Prachanda released a statement denying the authenticity of the tape. In the same way, the Indian government should also clarify its rule. It is preparing the ground for another Delhi Treaty?

NGOs pullout

Glastana Rai Dhawal, 25 May

Many NGOs whose work is focused on women and children are on the verge of closing down. Maoist demands that NGOs be registered and permission taken from them had frustrated party ranks. “There have been 1,500 landmines,” said the Vigilante Committee’s District Chief Mutrim Pahalman Kushak. “We want, we say, blow them all up at a touch of the switch.” Kushak and the members of the committee have warned the villagers from telling anyone about the landmines. The explosives are brought in from India and made through the constituent assembly will pave the way for me, party and then the country. These days any NGO taking its work to the villages are asked to mention its support source. If they are supported by USAID or other American agencies, the Maoists bar them. Now, the state is also trying to put like this on NGOs. Thousands will be out of jobs if the NGOs shut down.

Landmines

Kantipur, 31 May

PAKHLAWA—To protect themselves from possible Maoist attack, the vigilante committee has planted hundreds of landmines in all wards. Since last week, vigilantes have begun planting 170 landmines in each ward. The villagers are afraid to live in the area for fear that they might either die in a landmine explosion or be caught in a battle between the security forces and the Maoists. “We have planted 1,500 landmines,” said the Vigilante Committee’s District Chief Mutrim Pahalman Kushak. “We want, we say, blow them all up at a touch of the switch.” Kushak and the members of the committee have warned the villagers from telling anyone about the landmines. The explosives are brought in from India and made in the village itself. “We put together the detonator, metals and wood chips to build the landmines,” said Kushak. Chief Village Administrator Nitinan Banal said he did not have any information regarding the landmines.

Mahara, Baburam

Nepal Samacharpatria, 30 May

NEPALAGAD—Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara has been appointed the head of the United Revolutionary People’s Council in place of Baburam Bhattarai who had held that position. Spokesman of the party, Mahara had been working as the joint-coordinator of the council. The Western Central Command’s Organisation Mobilisation Committee in charge Prama Subedi confirmed this saying Bhattarai had not been reinstated in the politbureau. “But he is working with the party headquarters,” she said, adding that the central leadership dispute just when the party had gained momentum in its struggle had frustrated party ranks. “There are attempts to create confusion by highlighting the intra-party struggle but nobody has seen the action taken against Bhattanai as a wise move.”

“Political outlet”

Interview with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai in BBC Nepal service, 30 May

BBC: There have been so many charges against you of late. What hurts you the most? Baburam Bhattarai: I feel bad because some quarters have questioned my patriotism while I have been striving to take nationalism and democracy together for the last 30 years and I believe that the two are inseparable.

The charges seem to be based on contradictions between your party’s official line and what you are doing now. That is not the case. We do not look at India only as a country, we look at the people there after categorising them into different classes.

Your own chairman (Prachanda) says you have been meeting the Indian officialdom. It’s not just India. In the absence of an understanding between India, China, the United States and the European Union, there will be no sustainable outlet and peace in Nepal. In such a context, you are making diplomatic moves contacting these powers. Comrade Krishna Bahadur Mahara and I have been sent here (India) to do international work.

India has declared your group terrorists. Yet you are not afraid.

Even the United States of America has said that the Maoist power can’t be quelled through military might. Everyone agrees this needs political outlet.

But India has not withdrawn the terrorist tag on you.

You see similar developments in all movements—Palestine and South Africa. Diplomatic contacts are held through official channels and terrorist tags are finally withdrawn.

How come the Indian intelligence had no idea about your presence in New Delhi? One must not forget that India has a billion people.

What did you talk about with Indian and Nepali leaders? History after the 1950 movement has shown that the monarchy and the army are not in the mainstream of democracy. That is why, we have been proposing that we, the revolutionaries who believe in a new people’s republic and those forces, who believe in a simple parliamentary democracy need to work for a common goal of the people’s republic and create a transition in a short span. Unfortunately, the Indian prime minister is looking out to Nepal by ending the monarchy. Some progress has been made. We have been demanding the election of a constituent assembly under international monitoring. We believe that the new constitution made through the constituent assembly will pave the way for an election that will ultimately bring about the real representatives of the people.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“If the political parties believe in multiparty democracy then they should cooperate their commitment and to restore peace in the country.”

King Gyennendra in Kantipur, 28 May
They may not be as fierce-looking as their larger reptile cousins but when you get up close and personal, the fish-eating gharial of Chitwan is impressive nonetheless. Instead of huge ominous maws, you have a foot-long slender snout that has more than 100 razor sharp teeth. The gharial prefers to eat fish and that is why people have taken advantage of their meekness and brought them to the brink of extinction.

In Nepal, their dwindling numbers went unnoticed until 1976 when some Indian conservationists came to ask for gharial eggs. They had less than 100 gharials left in the Ganges but here in Nepal we hadn’t yet bothered to count ours. “We were quite ignorant of the danger our gharials were facing and we were selling gharial eggs for Rs 100 each to India,” recalls Tirtha Man Maskey, director general of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC).

In 1977, the Indians came back but Nepalis had grown smarter. “We agreed to give them the eggs free-of-charge on the condition that they give us 50 percent of the hatchlings,” says Maskey. The Indians agreed, the eggs were hatched in Chitwan and taken to India. “When we called to enquire about our share of hatchlings, they told us they were all dead,” adds Maskey. Not so smart, after all.

Learning its lesson, Nepal started its Gharial Conservation Project with Frankfurt Zoological Society’s help in Kasara, Chitwan. Fishermen who formerly poached eggs from gharial nests were hired in the conservation work. An average gharial egg weighs 160 g and makes one whole meal, making it an easy substitute for the river-dwelling Botes of Chitwan who believe that the eggs cured headache, TB and other diseases.

A maximum of 60 eggs in one gharial nest and a minimum of 20 eggs have been recorded in Nepal. The eggs are collected, hatched in artificial conditions and the young gharials reared in ponds until they reach two metres in length. They are then released into Rapti and Narayani rivers.

In 1981, the first batch was released with transmitters to monitor their movement. Since then, more than 500 gharials have been set free every year. The gharial population has increased but has not been stable. They are distributed in the Karnali, Babai, Narayani and Sapt Kosi rivers. Though the captive rearing program is a success, the pollution of the rivers, construction of dams, use of seines and gill net for fishing have affected the gharials. Fewer fishes mean less food for them because they have to compete with the fishermen in the area, who also steal their eggs.

According to IUCN studies, only seven percent of the released gharials survive. To check this, DNPWC, in collaboration with Conservation des Espèces et des Populations Animales and Ferme aux Crocodiles Pierrelatte of France began a radio-telemetry system to monitor gharials. They started out to investigate the reasons for the disappearance of the last gharials.

In March 2002, two male and eight female gharials from the program were measured, marked with notches and released implanted with indexed radio-transmitters equipped with electronic chips for individual frequencies. By the end of the month, most of them had travelled downstream and finally moved to Indian rivers.

Last November, 10 more gharials were released with another 10 this February. They were marked with the same code. Nearly 70 gharials are now living in the rivers of Nepal.

It is clear that for the survival of gharials, bilateral coordination is needed between the two countries. As for other endangered species that have transboundary ranges, a long-term conservation and management strategy between India and Nepal is critical otherwise both countries will lose their rare wildlife.

“We need to educate the people about gharials and their importance in biodiversity, gharials could also become an important part of ecotourism in the tarai,” says Antoine Gali of Noé Conservation who has worked for five years with the Gharial Conservation Program. The buffer zone concept of crocodile farming that was a hit in Papua New Guinea may need to be replicated in Nepal.
Pride of Southasian democracy

The people shouldn’t be pushed to rediscover democracy all over again

There is only one country in Southasia today where mainstream national-level politicians who believe in constitutional government and rule of law—a former prime minister, parliamentarians, politicians and activists—are in jail. The 1990 constitution is in tatters and every whim and fancy is being implemented by decree.

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit

The ongoing mockery of constitutional principles would have the jurists and constitutional lawyers in Colombo, Karachi or Delhi aghast. While each country will have its own challenges, in Nepal there is breathtaking disregard for norms and decorum, and the willingness to run roughshod over values in the belief that no one is watching or that it does not matter if they are.

Amidst this massive unwelling, Kathmandu’s educated classes are busy (and happy) running down the political parties even while the democratic rug is being pulled from underneath the public. This is a process of urban elitism that will be understood well by the students of political science and sociology from Lahore to Patna to Gauhati.

Generals are being appointed ambassadors with alibis, traffic is blocked and sidewalks emptied to allow royal motorcades to pass, a kangaroo commission has been set up for corruption control but more to cow down politicians who protest too loudly. A municipal election has been announced at some future date, as a sop to those who ask for just that morsel to prove democratic leaning. The National Human Rights Commission has just been filled with individuals of unproven commitment. Meanwhile, the one real human rights activist who openly rejects Maoists violence as well as the state’s snowballing excesses, languishes in custody. Krishna Pahadi is a Southasian prisoner of conscience.

Other Southasian societies have had their days of reckoning, against raging and brutal militancies, and against a rapacious state bent demolishing democracy under the umbrella of chauvinist nationalism. Today, Nepal is asked to stand up and be counted but their fight is probably harder than for most because there are two adversaries in the fight to save the democratic middle. There are the violence-prone Maoists and there is the royal palace which has used the excuse of the Maoist threat for takeover, staking a smoking heap of xenophobia along the way.

The clearest writing against the 1 February takeover, smuggled out from jail in Tanahun, has been printed in Monday’s Kantipur. Ram Chandra Poudel, former speaker of the house and deputy prime minister, is not an extremist who should be behind bars. In poor health and kept incommunicado for four months now, he has plumbed the depths of conscience. And the defence and agenda of his political experience and written a defence of Nepal’s democratic exercise that should be read in translation by all without access to the Nepali language.

This classic testimonial by prisoner Ram Chandra is bracing in its defiance of autocratic methods, reassuring in its faith in the self-correcting democracy, illuminating in its defence of 12 years of democracy before the royal half-takeover of October 2002. In sum, the former speaker does not want the people pushed back to an era where they will need to rediscover democracy all over again.

There was a time when everyone, including King Gyanendra and the all-powerful donor and diplomats of Kathmandu challenged the political parties to get over their petty differences and to unite for the greater good of the country. A month ago, they did just that, presenting one common, principled, non-violent agenda for the greater good of the country. For this, they have identified restoration of parliament a necessary, logical, people-friendly requirement, of parliament a necessary, logical, people-friendly requirement, of a more inclusive state. For this, they have identified restoration of parliament a necessary, logical, people-friendly requirement, of the parliament. It is incongruous to allow royal motorcades to pass, to allow ambassadors with abandon, traffic to block and sidewalks emptied to allow royal motorcades to pass.

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The people shouldn’t be pushed to rediscover democracy all over again.
Monitoring the monitors

Even before it starts work, the new NHRC is drawing flak

NARESH NEWAR

M o n i t o r i n g human rights violations seems to have taken a back seat as activists are embroiled in a controversy over the appointment of new members of the National Human Rights Commission.

A coalition of 25 human rights organisations have vowed never to work with the NHRC unless it changes new members inducting last week who they say are “too old, incompetent and pro-government”.

One of the new members, Sudheep Pathak of the rights group Himright, rejected the allegations. “If there’s any sign of the HURON, rejected the allegations. Sudeep Pathak of the rights group Human Rights Commission. of new members of the National controversy over the appointment activists are embroiled in a

One of the new members, Sudheep Pathak of the rights group Himright, rejected the allegations. “Our members were strong enough to hold off state control,” asserts former member Kapil Shrestha, who thinks the commission’s main problem was one of leadership and disunity.

But the NHRC’s clout and influence seems to have waned, said former member Subodh Pyakurel, who has surrendered to the army. But the suspension of its visits to army barracks is a “package deal” but refused to go into detail as to which one of the provisions were not respected by the RNA.

ICRC deals directly with the highest army authorities to present its findings with the aim of improving the situation of the detainees and making sure they are protected from disappearance, abuse, torture and psychological anxiety. It does not question the right of the authorities to detain someone but underlines that, while in custody, they must be treated humanely and according to the spirit and the letter of the Geneva Conventions.

The RNA knows that we work in a confidential way which means that our findings are shared with the detaining authorities only. We do not know the reasons why our cooperation was at times hampered,” explained Medert.

Even now, ICRC continues to visit detainees in the district and central jails, police stations and rehabilitation centres of former Maoists who have surrendered to the army. But the suspension of its visits to army barracks is a “package deal” but refused to go into detail as to which one of the provisions were not respected by the RNA.

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**Shot in shape**

Drawing and fading on creative shot making

On the driving range, one often sees advanced golfers meticulously practicing a particular shape of shot. Their aim is to build an armoury that enables creative shot making. After wayward drives, bad lies, bad weather or sometimes just bad luck, it allows a recovery shot that leads to more greens hit and ultimately lower scores.

Shaping includes intentionally moving the ball right to left, left to right, keeping it low and hitting it very high with a lot of spin. Lately, I have been trying to re-groove my ability to shape my shots more precisely. I thought it would be interesting to share the techniques I am using.

During practice, I have been working on precision draws and fades. The simplest method to draw the ball involves having the clubface slightly closed (aiming to the point you wish the ball to finish) and the body aligned towards where you wish the ball to start (right of the target).

For the fade, the set up is opposite: the clubface slightly open and the body aligned left of the target. I keep in mind that the draw shot would fly a little further with a lower trajectory and the fade a little shorter with a higher trajectory.

Some situations though call for a more complex approach. Take for example the high draw needed for curving around some trees on a narrow right to left dogleg or to a back left pin. Or perhaps a low fade keeping it under the branches or carving a path to a tight back left pin. For example the high draw needed for curving around some trees on a narrow right to left dogleg or to a back left pin. Or perhaps a low fade keeping it under the branches or carving a path to a tight back left pin.

Knowing the techniques needed for these shots is the first step to executing them. Practicing them till they become second nature is the key to successfully using them. This is what I have been working on.

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**Running in the mountains**

Marathon in the highest and one of the most dangerous routes

“Mother Nature will fix it,” said Bikram Acharya, president of the Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon. “If you’re fit, you’ll get you up to Everest Base Camp and then if you’re in good health, you’ll join the marathon.”

“I wasn’t so sure. I could just imagine Mother Nature getting me slowly up to Base Camp but not in a million years could I see her getting me to run the marathon back down again. One hundred six-and-a-half men and women, however, did the former, are clearly made of sterner stuff.

And Sunday, they triumphantly completed the world’s highest marathon.

Where you know the runners have set off more than four hours earlier, from the foot of the deadly Khumbu icefall and you are waiting in a valley as noisy and animated as Namche, the prospect of seeing the first runners appear is somehow thrilling. Tiny schoolchildren watching in the big crowd on the finishing line point upwards at three or four figures that had just appeared on the side of the cleft in which Namche sits. They were walking, clearly breathless, uphill, still to tackle a final loop through Khunde before returning.

Meanwhile the Namche cheerleaders raised a deafening cacophony of welcome: cymbals, drums, horns sounding like conch-shells, funny megaphone noises and vocals whose main quality was enthusiasm. Waiting for the athletes to reappear, race director and coach Khadga Ranabhat spelt out for me the marathon's organising mantra. "I was really happy with the encouragement and cheers I got from villagers along the way."

One-and-a-quarter hours and a stream of Nepalis later, in came the first-placed foreigner, Robert Gelinski of Poland, 32, slightly built and puffed, sank to his knees, made the Catholic sign of the cross and kissed the ground in the manner of late Pope John Paul. Pronouncing Nepal a beautiful country, he admitted that running this marathon was a little mad. “My dream was to win this marathon and get the Nepali government to give me a passport,” he said, straight-faced, “then I could represent Nepal at the Olympics.”

Yugul Sherpa was the first woman across the line. Erika Kogel of Germany won a special “fair play” prize for going back round the loop after mistakenly changing in the mountains.

Those sentiments were echoed that night at the marathon awards ceremony. Tourists need to come, said the French and German ambassadors, both present as special guests. “This is a country people always want to revisit,” said French Ambassador Michel Jolivet. Later, the medals all distributed, you could see one of the reasons why, Mongolian Band (Nepal, actually) were on stage at the concert. They were singing and yelling their way through a litany of favourite numbers. Marathon returnees gyrated and danced, and the Kugel of Germany won a special “fair play” prize for going back round the loop after mistakenly changing in the mountains.

Even with the downturn in tourism was holding steady, tourism was on the rise. “I wasn’t so sure,” said Bikram Acharya, president of the Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon. “If you’re fit, you’ll get you up to Everest Base Camp and then if you’re in good health, you’ll join the marathon.”

**Tee Break**

Deepak Acharya

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Pokhara Golf Resort Forest& Spa, Kathmandu. 

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**SURYA NEPAL GOLF**

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**The New WIRA CE**

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Bired and his wife Kamal Keshari Tuladhar make a great team at home and in business. They are pioneers of Nepal’s department store phenomenon and the first European style self-service supermarket, Bluebird. Married for 26 years, the couple hit upon the shopping centre idea after returning from Austria where Binod studied hotel management. "We didn’t take long for Bluebird after it opened in Tripureswor in 1985 for it to become a hit. People liked the competitive prices, the convenience of shopping under one roof at a time when one had to go all over town looking for household items. I think the reason for Bluebird’s success was that it made shopping fun," recalls Kamal Keshari.

The dynamic duo love their jobs but they also love to travel. "We usually get out of the country to relax because if we stay here, the socialising can become hectic," says Kamal Keshari. They also love books, food and music. In fact, music is also an important part of Binod’s business life—he is the director of Hits FM. Besides business, Kamal Keshari is an active social worker and is the second vice president of the Association of St Mary’s Alumnae Nepal and a member of the charities Bal Bhojan and Tewa. What gives her a real sense of achievement is being able to find sponsors for the 250 children who go to the Mary Ward schools.

On Bluebird’s 20th anniversary this week, we asked the Tuladhar’s whether it works, having your spouse as a business partner. They laughed. "People say married couples shouldn’t work together, but for us it has worked perfectly," says Binod. Adds Kamal Keshari, "We completely depend on each other, we discuss things before we make a decision. We share similar mindsets and are careful not to tread on each other’s toes."  

Aarti Basnyat
KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Kathmandu’s air quality data from the past three winters show that there has been a slight improvement in the Valley’s air quality over the years, although overall particulate matter is still worse than WHO standards. The improvement is most significant in Bhaktapur where old polluting brick kilns have all been replaced with cleaner ones. The pollution level in Pokhara is however more or less constant. The difference is that the local people of Bhaktapur raised their voices against the pollution from the kilns and forced the government and the kiln owners to switch to better technology while the Kathmandu residents did not seem to care much about the air. On World Environment Day 2005, let’s get together and raise our voices against the polluted air we breathe every day.

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

The mercury is setting record maximums, soaring to 34-degrees in Kathmandu Valley. We need to bear with atleast another two weeks of this before the monsoon breaks. Thankfully, we see in this satellite picture taken on 4 June, 2012 breaks. Unfortunately from where they monsoon fronts edging into south west of the country, the monsoon breaks are also edging into the Valley. We need to bear with atleast another two weeks of this before the monsoon breaks. Unfortunately from where they monsoon breaks are also edging into the Valley.

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UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

A copy of the controversial daft media edict has just been leaked to us by a highly-placed government source. A quick perusal of the said document reveals that under its provisions everything that ever happens in this country will heretofore only be divulged on a need to know basis, meaning that if there is a need to know anything then you'll be told there is no need to know it. In other words, as they say in legal parlance, the law is a bitch. Having received this leaked manuscript and sworn to keep it secret, allow me in the national interest to go right ahead and reveal to all and sundry the contents of the said daft bill:

WHEREAS there exists a need to foster a culture of transparency and accountability in public authorities by giving effect to the right of freedom of information and thereby actively promote a society in which the people of Nepal have effective access to information to enable them to fully exercise and protect their right, the media is henceforth not to be referred to as a watchdog but a lapdog.

REAFFIRMING that such freedoms come with strings attached and even though the truth must be adhered to at all times, during extraordinary circumstances exceptions shall be made, such as when the truth is:

(a) Uncomfortable
(b) Embarrassing
(c) Actually what happened, or
(d) Affects the morals of uncivil servants

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ALSO, that subject to provisions of Subsection (2) of Section 3 and Section 4 of the Constitution, every citizen shall have a right of access to official information from the state media, the aforementioned state media shall therefore cover all official functions in a prominent manner and repeat the entire proceedings without expunging any visuals panning across the audiences even if they (the audiences) are in an advanced state of unconsciousness. The clip shall be broadcast during three segments of the morning news:

(a) The Main Points of the News
(b) The News in Detail, and
(c) The Summary of the News

And the whole thing shall be repeated in its scintillating entirety in the evening news broadcast. Failure to do so will result in an immediate angry phone call from the official in question to the incumbent director of the state media, hereinafter referred to as 'The Mouth Organ'.

NOTWITHSTANDING the provisions of Subsection (2) the people's right to information shall not be curtailed on any of the grounds therein unless the disclosure is of the following categories:

(i) Concern national security, which means everything about politics, economics, culture, history, geography, biology, maths, environment, energy, development, aviation, communications, speeding celebrities on motorcycles, foreign relations, traffic violations by DSPs and protests by Maoists' victims
(ii) Jeopardise Nepal's friendly and fraternal relations with the world's fellow-pariah states
(iii) Freedom of thought is hereby banned, and anyone thinking subversive thoughts will be liable to persecution
(iv) The Reporter's Club shall henceforth be restricted to pure entertainment with Rishi Chumals as the stand-up comedian
(v) Weather reports that predict delays in the monsoon since they may adversely affect national morale
(vi) Humour will be barely tolerated but satire is banned with immediate effect.
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