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**NARESH NEWAR**

**A**hutan's celebration of its UN-sanctioned concept of Gross National Happiness in Canada next week will coincide with World Refugee Day on 20 June. It will have to answer for the misery of nearly 110,000 Bhutani refugees in Nepal.

Canada is one of the western countries pushing a new formula to resolve the refugee crisis with third country resettlement. Under the proposal, **Photo Feature p8-9** once **EXILE** Bhutan takes back a proportion of refugees, a majority will be 'locally integrated' in Nepal and the rest will be given citizenship by some western governments.

There is compassion fatigue after 15 years, and also concern that frustration among refugees in camps in eastern Nepal could easily be exploited by extremists. Hence the hurry to find a quick solution.

**Continued p4**

# Bamboo curtain

## Bhutani refugees wait for their fate to be decided



ASHOK R SHAKYA

**Times** nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 252

**Q. Is the continued crackdown on the media by the state justified?**



Total votes: 549

Weekly Internet Poll # 253. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

**Q. Is it now time for the Maoists to give up violence and join the political mainstream?**

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## TRIAL AND TERROR

Past cruelty is always eclipsed by headlines of more recent brutality. Time blunts the jagged edges of pain. We have to keep reminding ourselves of the horrific new year massacre of villagers in Nawalparasi by Maoists hunting vigilantes, the murder of popular preacher Pandit Narayan Prasad Pokhrel last month, the recent abductions of children and teachers in Kaski, Dadeldhura and Dang.

Memories of these atrocities were pushed aside by news of the deliberate and pre-meditated terrorist attack on civilians in Madi and Kabhre in the past week, the senseless murder of Campus Chief Ganeshman Palikhe in Pokhara and on Tuesday the slaughter of six family members of two policemen in Dhangadi that included a year-old baby.

There are signs the revolution is now using terror for terror's sake. It has lost what remained of its social and political reform agenda and has degenerated into criminality. Even by the terrible standards of its own past cruelty these recent killings can only be described as crimes against humanity. Yes, 12 armed soldiers in mufti were travelling in the Madi bus but anyone (especially the comrade with his finger on the detonator trigger) could have seen from a mile away that the bus was piled high with civilians.

An elderly Madi farmer said it for all of us Nepalis: "You can't ask forgiveness for something that is unpardonable." Just as the Great Helmsman himself intended, support for the movement now comes mainly from the barrel of the gun—it is no more a genuine espousal of the cause of revolution. The political base of the cadre has eroded, the chain of command is in disarray and the leadership rift is showing fissures right down to the grassroots.

To be fair, the comrades are in a dilemma. Moderate elements within the movement that now see the futility of further violence are incapable of braking or steering this runaway juggernaut. And there is every sign the hardliners are dominant. Indian and Nepali politicians tried in New Delhi last week to convince Maoist ideologues to join the mainstream through a constitutional compromise. But the comrades know that as soon as they put down their bombs, they will be chased out of the villages.

While we wait for the broader political agreement necessary for restarting the peace process, the Maoists would do well to reclaim their political agenda by unilaterally announcing a moratorium on use of landmines, booby traps, assassinations of unarmed civilians and abductions of school children. For its part, the security forces could respond with a reciprocal freeze on offensive action. You don't need to agree on a ceasefire to begin such confidence-building measures. And whoever does it first attains the moral high ground. Such gestures will build the trust necessary to begin the more challenging work of sustainable peace-building. But it needs visionaries.

# Ironies abound

## The twilight zone of Nepali politics is full of paradoxes

There is a limit to which you can bend logic. Take this example: When a leader is appointed twice as prime minister under certain situations prevailing in the country it is considered constitutional. Under the same set of conditions when an anti-corruption body is formed to investigate corruption

GUEST COLUMN  
Bijen Jonchhe



cases and implicates this same person in a scam, the body as well as the move to control corruption becomes unconstitutional.

Prime Minister Deuba used his constitutional prerogative to dissolve the house in 2002, a move validated by the Supreme Court. When the same person was charge-sheeted on corruption charges his followers have taken to the streets demanding restoration of the house that he himself dissolved.

The political parties oppose the choice of the NHRC members because their candidates have not been included as they were in the previous commission. Why should the NHRC be a bunch of political appointees?

Professionals such as lawyers are expected to function without bias or prejudice. But legal practitioners are taking political issues to the streets even on matters on which the Supreme Court had previously given its

verdict. Ditto for journalists. They are demanding the right to free expression. What we do not see are signs of greater objectivity and ethical responsibility in journalism. With the media's rights come responsibilities.

All this, of course, doesn't absolve the state from blame. And one of the most glaring and symbolic lapses is the way Maoist victims are being treated, allowing them to be politically exploited. The government has not been able to refute, deny or correct the negative press the country is receiving domestically and internationally. The ground reality is far removed from what appears in the media, yet the authorities make no effort to set the record straight. Why is the state only talking to a handful of sycophantic state media? There is no point preaching to the converted. The government seems to be dithering on the media ordinance. Why is it hesitating? The RCCC sets the original bail amount in the Melamchi case at Rs 570 million. A few months later, the bail amount is reduced to five million. Has the quantum of corruption suddenly shrunk?

India has been up to its neck in the region's crises: Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan. The Americans and the Europeans have now given it the lead role in solving the situation in Nepal even though New Delhi is implicated in destabilising activities here and elsewhere.

This is like letting the fox guard the chicken coop. Indian media report that officials who have labelled the Maoists as terrorists are facilitating a dialogue with political leaders. This is beginning to look like a love triangle.

So-called Indian experts on Nepal are given more importance in Nepal than our own scholars. Their utterances have more influence on our political leaders than Nepali experts. What makes a JNU professor or an ex-general from the Indian Army a 'Nepal expert'? Can we not learn to trust ourselves on matters that concern our destiny? Does a nation not have the right to choose a polity suitable to its own needs and strengths? Must we blindly ape the west to please the west?

And of our political leadership, the less said the better. When their anti-king street agitation fails to ignite because of lack of political support they rush off to India to cry on the shoulders of their mentors in New Delhi. It is easy to see who the political parties regard as their constituents. The biggest irony of all is the unseemly sight of Nepali politicians acting like birds on a wire to fly off to New Delhi to meet Indian officials.

Our idea of nationalism has been limited to wearing the national dress, speaking our language and boasting of the fact that we have never been a British colony. Is this all there is to it? ●

# How about those who didn't pass?

Frequent felicitation syndrome is a social disease. The more starved a society is for achievers, the more felicitation ceremonies it holds. From the neighbourhood kid who makes a robot to a mountaineer who climbs to the top for the 16<sup>th</sup> time, we really overdo the garlanding and vermilion.

Given our collective addiction for adulation, all 83,747 students who passed SLC this year are being feted. Private sector Plus Two schools woo graduates, distinction-holders are showered with scholarships, there are full-page ads from

STATE OF THE STATE  
CK Lal



schools showing off their toppers. Those who excelled distribute sweets and repeat ad nauseam that they want to be doctors, engineers or chartered accountants.

In all the celebrations, few will think of the 132,556 students who couldn't make the grade this year—a staggering 62.28 percent of all those who appeared for the high school exams. There is something morally wrong with an examination system that declares a majority of its students as failures so early in life. We say it every year and we say it again—stigmatising school children like this is dishonourable and a national tragedy. The SLC certificate is a piece of paper, not an explanation of the abilities and possibilities of a student.

Our education planners are incapable of understanding the trauma of rural students who struggle for years but can't crack a

## It is the state's responsibility to give those who didn't make it another chance

system that isn't designed for them in the first place. The SLC Board has neither the intention nor the ability to evaluate individuals of vastly varying backgrounds with different life-skills.

The best fish-farmer from Saptari, the ablest vegetable grower in Dhading, the most skilled carpenter of Doti and the most experienced mountain guide in Manang may have all failed their exams. They have nothing in common with the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar elite whose children overwhelmingly passed. It is impossible to change power-relations in Nepali society without overhauling the school system.

Even though the structure of schooling is unfair to the unprivileged, dramatic improvements in national education aren't possible in the short-term. It will be unrealistic to do away with the entire examination system immediately. Perhaps we need to tinker with the structure and introduce gradual changes to maximise returns from investments in the public school infrastructure.

The first thign to do is discard the 'failed' tag. Certification should emphasise the strength and weaknesses of a student. Based on test performance, for example, the examining authority can say that Indra's competence in English is excellent while he needs to improve his math. Chandra did well in science but must work harder to improve her Nepali.



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

Rehabilitating 'SLC-failed' school dropouts is much more challenging. Lured by the promise of a better life after school, the students suddenly discover that the doors of opportunities have been slammed on their faces. The temptation to take up the gun and run into the jungles must be hard to resist.

Training school dropouts in employable skills is an option that has failed to grab the national attention. Nepal has dozens of medical and engineering colleges for those who can pay their way but training schools producing carpenters, plumbers, glaziers, electricians, auto mechanics, nurses, housekeepers, bakers, tailors, dyers and painters are rare.

Occupational training requires a

working facility with language and arithmetic but not the ability to memorise answers to literature and social studies questions. 'SLC-failed' youths are best candidates for trade courses and since they are the majority, we must invest in them rather than on those that passed who have other options. Current donor-funded efforts to provide a vocational safety net to the backlog of SLC cast-offs from past years must be taken up as a national campaign.

Instead of addressing these urgent issues we have a government that is obsessed with 'nationalist education', whatever that is. The successful will take care of themselves, they don't need praise. It is the state's responsibility to give those who didn't make it another chance. ●

**LETTERS**

**SORRY?**

Kanak Mani Dixit's piece on Madi's mass murder ("Sorry.", #251) made me emotional, angry and frustrated at the same time. Being a strong believer of the idea of social justice and having suffered from the same viruses of 'anti-feudalism' and 'egalitarianism' that most of our intellectuals suffer, I extended my 'moral support' to the Maoist movement from the very beginning. Finally, there was emerging a force capable of shattering the very foundations of feudal institutions including the autocratic monarchy. Against the backdrop of what the mainstream political parties were doing in Kathmandu, the Maoists appeared to be genuinely fighting for a just cause. I took them as a part of our political evolution. But then just like their countless global counterparts, they gradually became dacoits, murderers, kidnapers or plain terrorists. BP Koirala has eloquently written about this 'phenomenon of the degradation of revolution' in his memoir. Today I mourn not only the death of the innocent victims of the horrible crime in Madi but also the Maoist revolution that seemed so promising at one point in our history. I feel embarrassed to have associated my dreams of an egalitarian society with them. Like hundreds of Pushpa Kamal Dahal's militants, I was young and I was naïve.

*Dr Jugal Bhurtel, Moscow*

● Thanks to Kanak Mani Dixit's description of the aftermath of the Madi bomb. It saddened and angered me. Your front page showed that you too were struck speechless by the carnage. I agree with Dixit's conclusion that the Maoists should 'first, stop attacking civilians and 'next, drop the guns'. Giving up violence is the only solution to the chronic barbarity of the past nine years. In these four words lies the solution to this bloody conflict. Prachanda's "sorry" is ridiculous. Thanks indeed for the coverage.

*Name withheld*

● After killing innocent people in Madi, the Maoists have exposed that they don't have a political agenda. By killing people who did nothing wrong and by picking on those who couldn't fight back, the Maoists showed they are just assassins. The mass murder in Madi was a heinous crime and the Maoists are indeed terrorists.

*Kapeed Joshi, Seattle, USA*

● Kanak Mani Dixit's 'Mass murder in Madi' proved that the Maoists do not respect minimum standards of human rights and the Geneva Conventions. The people must now rethink of the Maoists not as a political force but as terrorists. If they want to prove themselves to be a political force it is not sufficient only to say sorry. They must hand over the perpetrator of the Madi bomb to the International Court of Justice to be tried for crimes against humanity.

*Anchan Bhattarai, Sindhuli*

● As a Nepali citizen living abroad, it is very humiliating to see and hear about all the political parties heading for India to solve our problems instead of sitting together at home to find a solution. It is a shame that our leaders have to rush off to New Delhi. What do they think we are, Sikkim? As long as Nepali politics is ruled by self-centred, short-sighted and uneducated leaders, democracy in Nepal is just like a coconut in a monkey's hand. By now, we all know that the Maoist is not a political party, it is a terrorist group. If the Americans, British and Europeans want to look at Nepal through India's perspective, they should move their embassies to New Delhi. You have no right to sit in our territory and play with Nepal's independence. We have to save this country from cowardly leaders, unfaithful friends and terrorists.

*Usha Sharma, email*

● Prachanda said sorry for the Madi bombing. The people of Madi have replied by saying that is not enough. It's no use saying sorry, the Maoists should stop this madness and find a way to put the genie back into the bottle.

*Pravin Lama, Kathmandu*

● Your paper has published articles blaming the king, parties, Maoists, Americans, Britain, India. Who's left? What has disheartened citizens like us is this endless cycle of blame and criticism. We should all analyse our past mistakes but not paralyse ourselves with inaction for fear that they might be repeated. Developed countries have objected to the erosion of democratic norms but are they not trying to foist their own values on us, fashion us in their image? Why don't they first see how the people are suffering from violence before

lecturing us on giving the reins back to the political parties who messed it all up in the first place? Our party leaders all deserve Oscars for being such good actors, pretending they are not responsible and putting all the blame on the king's court. They better wake up otherwise they won't even know their time is up.

*Sujata Uprety, email*

**TB**

In reply to Ian Harper's letter (#250), we wish to bring to the notice of readers that there is evidence and research produced by the National Tuberculosis Program (NTP) to support conclusions in Naresh Newar's article (TB or not TB, #248). We would like to respond to the three central comments of Ian Harper's letter. First, the NTP has presented strong empirical evidence (from individual patient data) that during the last few years the program has grown in conflict affected mid-western districts at least as fast as in the rest of the country. So far the program has had minimal difficulties operating and expanding in conflict affected areas although the conflict is throwing up logistical challenges, and we need, and are preparing for an ever more challenging context. We appreciate Ian Harper's argument that the operating context requires quality monitoring, which NTP will endeavour to provide whilst remaining confident with the evidence and analysis provided to date. Ian Harper's assertion that 'many health posts are closed or are understaffed as a consequence of the current conflict' is probably true—but the evidence of this (that Ian Harper would agree is needed) is small scale and largely anecdotal. A deeper appreciation of the conflict's impact on health service functioning is needed.

Second, Ian Harper writes about 'a truly prolific growth of TB control in the private sector'. There is evidence that suggests the contrary. Research carried out recently in Lalitpur by the NTP and Nuffield, Leeds University, suggests that where the TB program is working well, the private sector treatment of tuberculosis diminishes rapidly and TB drugs become much less available in private pharmacies. The NTP is notable, in relation to other areas of the national health program, for its active engagement with the private sector. A mature, and ever-growing, partnership is established resulting in the private sector partners adhering to NTP's diagnostic and treatment protocols.

Third, DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment strategy piloted in Nepal in the 1990s) has proved to produce better cure rates than the unsupervised model. The current NTP patient cure rates of over 85 percent suggest that this has been the right strategy to follow. Finally, claims about the relative success of the NTP come from international TB experts who have frequently visited the NTP during the last few years. The NTP is satisfied with their verdict and is willing to share more information with interested professionals.

*KB Shrestha, NTP Program Director  
Susan Clapham, Health Adviser, DfID  
Christian Gunneberg, WHO Nepal*

**ANIMAL KINGDOM**

In 'All beings in the kingdom' (#251) there is an error that needs correction—Animal Nepal does not have the objective of establishing a 'Bureau for the Prevention of Animal Sacrifice'. Our objective at this point is not to completely abolish this religious practice, even though we hope animal sacrifice, like human sacrifice, will soon be a thing of the past. Our focus is on the treatment of animals while they are alive, as well as humane killing. At Animal Nepal we are committed to projects that help animals as well as people, such as the Pet Products for Poverty Reduction plan that was mentioned in the article.

*Jigme Gaton, ANPO*

**100 YEARS**

I've enjoyed reading Kunda Dixit's Under My Hat column for the past eight months in Nepal and appreciate the sophisticated humour. He writes better and funnier in a second language than most Americans do in their own. But I wanted to correct one thing he said in 'Gross Domestic Happiness' (#251). America has been making other countries 'miserable' for at least 100 years, not 50. Who should know than an older American!

*FA Hutchison, en route to China*

● It would be more appropriate if Kunda Dixit's column is renamed Behind My Mask instead of Under My Hat. By the way, is that a gas mask he's wearing in the last edition? Has the atmosphere for the press really turned that bad?

*SS Pal, email*

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आहूक सेवा: ५५४३३३३

# Local integration, repatriation to Bhutan or third country resettlement?

from p1

The refugee leaders, led by leading Bhutani dissident Tek Nath Rizal are not so keen on the plan saying it will divide his exiled community. But given the intransigence of Thimphu and its main backer, India, they really don't have any other option. The Nepal-Bhutan ministerial talks went through 15 rounds but with Kathmandu distracted by conflict, there have been no meetings since 2003.

Diplomats in Kathmandu say pressure is building on Thimphu to make the first gesture of repatriating at least the first group of refugees classified as Bhutanis in the aborted joint verification process and follow that up with more returnees.

"We are pinning our last hope on the international community," Rizal told us in Kathmandu this week expressing disappointment that western governments have allowed the Bhutani king to get away with one of the world's largest ethnic evictions in per capita terms.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been running the camps but has been criticised by human rights groups for not pushing repatriation hard enough. Lately, Bhutani leaders in exile say UNHCR is cutting back on aid to the camps.

"Relief support like food, shelter, health, education and other basic needs have been significantly cut back," says Bhutani human rights activist Ratan Gazmere. UNHCR's Executive Committee decided in 2003 to phase out activities in the camps in favour of promoting assimilation in Nepal and third country settlement for refugees.

"The so-called phase out plan to slash the size of UNHCR's refugee program in Nepal is unacceptable," the rights group Asian Legal Resource Centre said in a recent statement.

In an interview UNHCR's Nepal representative, Abraham Abraham denied there had been a cut (see interview) saying aid had actually increased to \$6 million this year. But activists believe the UNHCR has emergency crises in Africa to attend to and plans to

gradually hand over the Bhutani refugee assistance to other agencies. But that isn't easy.

The UN's own World Food Program (WFP) has been solely responsible for supplying food to the camps, but supplies are running low and unless new commitments are made there will be no food after September. "There are signals that donor support may come but there is no 100 percent guarantee," says WFP's Deputy Director JP Demargerie.

Morale is low among Bhutani exiles and they are worried that the western plan for resettlement and repatriation is already dividing the refugees. Local integration in Nepal is the last resort but Kathmandu is opposed to it saying it will set a precedence for countries to evict citizens and get away with it.

Both the refugees and UNHCR see mediation by third party, especially India, as the solution. After all, India is the first country the refugees entered when they were driven out of Bhutan. "India cannot indefinitely say it won't get involved," says Ratan Gazmere. There is said to be American pressure on New Delhi to mediate on repatriation and it is using the danger of militancy spreading to India's sensitive northeast as an argument.

Rizal has no doubt where the final responsibility lies: "The one country that is not bearing its share of the burden for having chased out its own citizens is Bhutan itself." ●



## "Not enough is being done."



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**Nepali Times asked the Nepal representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Abraham Abraham if his group is cutting aid to Bhutani refugees.**

**Nepali Times:** Bhutanis say there is a big cut in aid for refugee camps by bilaterals and UNHCR.  
**Abraham Abraham:** I don't know where they get the idea because there is no reduction in the overall level of assistance. This is not something that is decided on an ad hoc basis by my colleagues or me. This is decided at the annual session of the executive committee in Geneva where the levels of assistance are decided for all programs worldwide. There is no effective reduction in the level of assistance. We may shift in the extent that we may support one sector more than another.

**There seems to be a communication gap, then.**

Not true. We had plenty of sessions informing refugees why we need to reduce a particular area, which perhaps has been traditionally not providing the desired level of output. We need to concentrate on areas where there is more need for funding.

**Is it true UNHCR is handing over its responsibilities in the camps to other agencies?**

That is not the intention. We don't want to abdicate or give up the mandated responsibilities to bring about the solution. We are trying to bring developmental partners into areas we are working in so they can try and transform some of the relief

assistance into a more sustainable developmental type of assistance in order to have continuity. Otherwise we are talking about recurring expenditure year after year when actually that money could be put into better assistance through input from development partners.

**The bilateral talks for repatriation to Bhutan are at a dead end. Do you think it's time for trilateral or multilateral talks?**

As long as it remains a bilateral process, it will be for the parties in the bilateral process to see whether they would like to involve any other party or not. We would be available to both the governments to provide whatever support they want or maybe looking for.

**The Maoist problem has overshadowed the refugee issue in Nepal. Are there concerns?**

I don't think that the government is not paying attention. We work with them on a daily basis. The national unit for refugee affairs coordinates a lot of work for this to be done. We have no problems in accessing the government. There is no problem in the lack of government interest. I'm sure that government has a lot of priorities but that does not in any way diminish its interest in refugees neither does it restrict me to go to the government when I need support.

**UNHCR is also said to be pushing the Nepal government to agree to local integration.**

We recommend that we have to find a comprehensive solution to the problem simply because all refugees can't go back or may not wish to go back. Therefore what do you do with those who are unable to go back? In that context, the UNHCR applies its traditional approach of seeking possibilities for local integration. To that extent we have mentioned this to the government as we do in most cases of protection.

**But the government is said to be against it.**

The government of course wants to see repatriation of refugees first and to see what other possible solutions there could be such as third country resettlement before it considers local integration.

**What is the status of third country resettlement?**

We are in dialogue with resettlement countries but they too are waiting for repatriation (to Bhutan) before taking up third country resettlement.

**Refugee leaders want India to intervene.**

We would like India to play a role but at the same time we can't insist on the kind of role they can play. What we would like is for the two countries to be able to move forward on the issue of repatriation of the refugees. And if there is any difficulty of resuming the dialogue, perhaps it could also help

**Are Nepal and Bhutan doing enough?**

When you think of 15 years where refugees have been in the camps, I don't think enough is being done. There is need to move forward firmly and with greater commitment and resolve because you can't just keep the refugees in the camps for another undetermined period. This would be both inhuman and criminal.

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## Yamaha set to accelerate

In 1996, Yamaha had half the share in the Nepali motorcycle market. By 2004, competition had caused it to plummet to one third. The Japanese motorcycle giant now wants to spurt ahead with an accelerated sales drive.

"We want to reclaim our 50 percent market share in Nepal," Hiroyuki Yanagi, CEO and managing director of Yamaha Motor India told us. Yanagi was in Kathmandu for a two-day visit to launch Yamaha Club in Tripureswor. As the name suggests it is where Yamaha aficionados can lounge around, exchange biking tips while watching their bikes being serviced. Members also get special privilege cards and to participate in earning point schemes. The launch of Yamaha club coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parent company in Japan.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The motorcycle market in Nepal has been holding steady, says Vishnu Kumar Agarwal of Morang Auto Works, authorised distributors of Yamaha in Nepal. "Customers are middle class Nepalis who look mainly for better quality," says Agarwal. Nine years ago, RX 100 had Yamaha at the top of the Nepali market and new models are still striving to take over. When launching a bike, the media mileage it receives often determines its sales volume. Every bike is given a separate image but the brand revolves around a central design idea. "The global image of Yamaha is sporty, stylish and innovative," explains Yanagi, "and we build bikes based on those concepts." Macho-style bikes sell well in the South Asian market but he says Yamaha tries to stick to safety and environment-friendly features as well.

### NEW PRODUCT

**PETER ENGLAND IN KATHMANDU:** Peter England has started its showroom in Putali Sadak offering a range of suits, blazers, style garments and designer shirts.



**MAMA CHICKEN CRACKER:** The latest Asian Thai Foods product, Mama Chicken Cracker targets all age groups. Surprise gifts in every packet is an added incentive for buyers.



# Looking east

## The west wants a piece of the action in the east, do we?

Less than two months ago this Beed dwelt on 'Action Asia' (#244, [http://www.arthabeed.com/articles/article\\_details.php?id=166](http://www.arthabeed.com/articles/article_details.php?id=166)) and is tempted to discuss it again. People keep asking about the potentials in India, China and Southeast Asia, and will Nepal not benefit from their growth?

**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed



The rejection of the European constitution by France and Netherlands is a pre-cursor to the rejection wave, which means even economic integration will be jeopardised. This will make Europe think ahead. The integration of east European countries in the Eurozone will become more difficult. There are a few core competencies at making the European state a potential leader of the future.

The US is still trying to push its growth in terms of GDP but their knowledge base is becoming an issue. Foreign student inflow is decreasing due to stringent screening norms but American universities are suffering along with the potential loss of skilled manpower for the future. In the next 10 years, it would be interesting to see how many people from countries like China still send their students to the US. Highly educated global workers are already heading for home where they can earn at par and enjoy equal lifestyles.

United States' biggest insurance has been innovation. It lost the car market to Japan but led in technology, it lost the hardware market to Taiwan and



China but continued innovating on applications, constantly staying on top. With an eroding knowledge base that is not being replenished, will that competitive edge remain?

The current situation seems similar to that of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the world looked at the US and Europe for development, trade and business. In terms of geography too, everybody wanted a piece of the pie in those regions. Today, the same is happening with future action poised between China and India's growth, the world is looking eastward again.

These countries together with the South and Southeast Asian countries, provide a marketer's dreamland. It is not selling the seventh pair of sneakers or the fourth tv set to a household. It is selling to households that are yet to have a tv or the first pair of sneakers to an individual. The combined middle-class potential

of the two countries alone surpass the total population of Europe and the US. So does India or China need to look beyond their own territories?

With highly populated countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia also unleashing their own purchasing power, the focus will definitely be on this side of the world. Everybody is watching to see who will emerge the leader: democratically governed India with its known problems or centralised China with its unknown pitfalls.

And here we are in Nepal, wallowing in the muck of our own making, not seeing beyond the Himalaya in the north or the tarai in the south. We have two powerful locomotives right next to us, let's take our wagons out of the sidings and hitch ourselves to them. They will pull us out but we first have to set our political house in order. ●

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# Crying wolf again

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-19 June

हिमाल

If the foolish shepherd in the folktale had not cried wolf the villagers would have come to his rescue when the wolf really appeared. After 4 October 2002, the political parties have announced one 'decisive' uprising after another against regression. During this period common strategies and programs were charted out no less than three times. Obviously, it's not working. The effort to roll back October Fourth has been unsuccessful and the effort to prevent February First met a similar fate.

It has been 38 days since the seven parties announced their 'decisive' pro-democracy movement with a six-point agenda. But like before, this call to rise up is not going anywhere. There is no spontaneous support from the people. The political party leadership has to ask itself why. Congress and UML leaders announced the protests and then promptly left on foreign visits. This has raised questions about the commitment of the political leaders: is democracy just a slogan for them to get back to power? The king has in fact labelled the parties' protest 'the politics of intimidation'.

Nothing is stopping the parties from doing anything to find a solution: pressuring the king, threatening an uprising or shaking hands with the king. The pro-democracy agitation is itself a threat. If a non-violent agitation opens the doors for talks between the king and the parties and a sustainable solution can be found for the country's political, social and constitutional problems, nobody would oppose it. But to use party faithful and the people to serve selfish ends in the name of democracy is dishonest.

If the parties feel that the interest of the people in their rebellion is waning, it is because they have cried wolf too often. But unlike what some factions of royalists say, the people have not taken to the streets because they are fed-up with democracy. When the parties prove that their solidarity can be trusted, more people than they ever imagined will gather in the streets. The people want to be assured about the parties' real intentions: what do the parties and their leaders really want? Are they fearlessly, selflessly and honestly committed to democracy? Will any future agitation save the country from violence and autocracy?

A half-hearted job is never successful. For the king to be able to dismiss the parties' decisive agitation as yet another intimidation tactic is because the parties have given him reason to say so. In fact, many Nepalis would agree. The leaders of the parties need to take this to heart. To announce a new agitation just for the sake of having one is harmful not just for the parties and their politicians but for the entire future of the democratic movement.

## In-house

NC General Secretary Sushil Koirala in *Deshantar*, 5 June

वैश्वन्तर सायबहादुर

National consensus needs work. We need to gather in a legitimate parliament, and this is why we have been stressing it. That demand is not for state power, parliament is the place where the



king is present and so are the representatives of the people. It is a place where we can meet, talk and create an environment for consensus. It is a parliament that will prepare an agenda to try and bring the Maoists into the mainstream. Parliament can bring together all the forces in the country that have remained divided so far. That the parliament is a springboard for the parties to climb the power saddle and to pocket money is distortion. Those who claim that nothing happened in the last 12 years are out of their minds. The consciousness in the people, revolution in media, activities of non-government organisations, construction of infrastructures like roads, irrigation, hydropower and the establishment of universities and technical institutes, these are the achievements of the parliamentary system. It is true that we parties remained divided, but we need to look forward now. The Maoists said they would not speak to an illegitimate government. It is only the parliament that can form a legitimate government capable of holding a round table conference to bring the Maoists in. Our constitution has clearly stated that the government must remain accountable to parliament. By

blaming the parties and suspending democratic rights, one will only close the doors for peace. It is for peace that the seven parties have kept the option of a constituent assembly open. At a time when new elections cannot take place, parliament has to be reinstated. Even parties that opposed the idea are now all for it.

## Double standards

Nispakshya, 7 June

निष्पक्ष

Some ministers in this cabinet have been working really hard to execute their duties but there are some who are still knocking the doors of opposition parties like the NC, UML, RPP and NSP. These ministers feel they need to remain in the parties' good books to ensure they have jobs in the future. They are fork-tongued: when speaking to the king, they say, "Your Majesty, I am the only political figure in the cabinet, it is only I who can break these parties and get their leaders to join the government." And when they are with Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Nepal or Pashupati Rana, they say, "I have joined the cabinet to save it from being labelled Mandales. I have been speaking the parties' language in the cabinet and alerting the king as well."

Even more worrying is that secretaries and other bureaucrats have been just as non-cooperative with the king and his government. They have been leaking information to the opposition and in some ministries, the bureaucracy has bypassed ministers. If this continues, the country will never attain the goals set by the king on February First. They need to be confronted, reprimanded or replaced with new faces.

## Hide, quick

Drishhti, 14 June

दृष्टि

Vice-chairman Tulsi Giri, will not be repaying the loan he took from Nepal Bank Ltd. And it's not just Dr Giri, his wife Sara Giri isn't ready to repay the loan she

took for General Electricals either. After *Drishhti* first published the news about Dr Giri being blacklisted because he didn't pay the Rs 300,000 loan taken from Nepal Bank, it has been learnt that the bank administration received several threats. Dr Giri then desperately tried to hide the evidence. Once the news spread, Dr Giri ordered the Finance Ministry to call a meeting with the working committee of the bank on 12 June. Giri told them to hide all files and ministry officials seriously reprimanded working committee members of the bank for leaking the news. Bank officials say they had tried to reach Dr Giri many times and had even sent several letters to that effect before finally blacklisting him in 2001. Officials of the loan department say the head of the working committee now has all papers relating to the loan. Dr Giri has now halted the proceedings.

A four-member team of the IMF led by Nepal Desk Chief CC Doko who was here on 13 June met Finance Minister Madhukar Shumsher Rana and pressured him to make sure that all borrowers paid back and to take action against all defaulters. On 13 June, the Ministry sent details regarding the meeting of 12 June to the IMF.

## Maoist meetings

Jana Astha, 15 June

आस्था

A Maoist delegation under Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Baburam Bhattarai has been busy meeting Indian political party leaders in Delhi and Nepali politicians currently in Delhi. Most were face-to-face, while a source said Girija Prasad Koirala spoke to the Maoists on the phone. But the Maoist met UML leader Bamdeb Gautam who reached Delhi via Lucknow. Among others that the Maoists met are: NC-D leader Pradeep Giri, Chandra Deb Joshi and Krishna Prasad Sitaula from the NC, Unity Centre Masal's Prakash. However, the Maoists did not meet Masal's Chief Mohan Bikram Singh but his Spokesperson Chitra Bahadur



हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 30 May - 14 June

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

The private media is trying to create a public scare regarding the state of the economy. I wish to state loud and clear that the economy is sound...expenditures in security are an investment for peace, better revenue generation, better development delivery...more national savings and investments as well as protection from damage to infrastructure by terrorists.

- Finance Minister Madhukar Shumsher Rana addressing a local donor's forum on 7 June.

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KC who reportedly poured his angst against the Maoists. The rebel group leaders also had informal sessions with diplomatic representatives of India, America and Britain. The political leaders who met the Maoist duo told them the crisis could not be solved through violence but only by working with the king to bring the army under jurisdiction of parliament. According to one leader present at the talks, the Maoists were not sure that the Indians trusted them.

**HM on FM**

Gorkhapatra, 14 June

गोरखापत्र

Secretary of the Ministry of Communication and Information Lokman Singh Karki has specified that the government is not trying to obstruct press freedom. At a press meet he assured journalists that the communication bill being prepared by the government would not affect the freedom of the press "even an inch". He dismissed reports to the contrary as "rumours". He added: "Everything will be clear once the bill comes out." He promised to discuss clauses in the bill with the press. Karki also denied the government had prevented FM radio stations from broadcasting information related to social awareness. However, political news, false accusations and defamation would not be allowed. Secretary Karki said he

had not seen FM stations broadcasting news anywhere in the world during his travels. He added that the government was only trying to better manage FM radio stations because the main purpose of FM radio stations was entertainment. "We are trying to give FM radios the same freedom they have all over the world," he said.

**Not royal**

Nepal Samacharpatra, 13 June

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

JHAPA—The debate on the king and queen's photographs in textbooks has disrupted schooling in eastern Nepal. The Maoists have ordered schools to tear out the pages containing the photographs of King Gyanendra and Queen Komal in the new curriculum. In Jhapa, Morang, Illam, Panchthar and other districts, Maoists burst into classrooms while in session, snatched away books and tore out the pages bearing the portraits. This has terrorised many students and teachers. According to Nepal National Teachers' Association's Jhapa district President Bonidananda Jha, the Maoists have used the portraits of the royal couple as an excuse to terrorise the schools. Teachers say that the Maoists have threatened to take action against them if the rebels find any book with the photos of the king and queen still intact. They have also threatened any teacher who uses the books and have locked four bookshops.



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# EXILE

## Bhutanis who have never been to Bhutan

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS by **ASHOK R SHAKYA**

**T**hese are the faces of children who have never seen their homeland. Children of parents who were thrown out of Bhutan in 1991-92, transported across India to refugee camps in eastern Nepal. They were born in refugee camps and have never seen the country that they still regard as their motherland. Some of them are now 11 years old.

On 20 June, World Refugee Day, let us try to imagine what life is like for the 100,000 Bhutanis who can't return to the homes, fields and villages of their ancestors. Let

us imagine what it is like never to have seen your homeland. Imagine what it is like to live in someone else's country, forced to depend on charity for survival. Imagine that citizenship is a luxury.

'Exile' is a word. 'Outsider' is a word. Both are just words. When you have to live those words every day you learn not to take small things for granted. Every smile on a school girl's face gives you hope. The alert eyes of a young girl watching her mother on the loom, the deft fingerwork of a grandfather weaving a bamboo mat and passing that skill to the

next generation. Children peeping out of the bamboo window of their classroom. The abundant bamboo of verdant Bhutan is replicated in the camp setting, everything here is bamboo.

This is life behind the bamboo curtain in the refugee camps of Jhapa and Morang. The rest of the world may have given up on them, their own government in Thimphu may hope they will be forgotten. But the Bhutanis here haven't given up and they haven't forgotten. What is surprising to a visitor is

the lack of overt frustration or visible signs of despair.

As a photographer, I toured the camps in search of sadness but found hope. I searched for photogenic misery but found bright eyes and easy smiles. I searched for fatalism but found a vibrant community that is forgiving towards its tormentors. I looked for loneliness but found friendship. In Beldangi, I came across a wedding, life carried on here. They still look back at Bhutan as the promised land they will one day return to. If they don't their children will, of this they are sure.

Unlike the rest of Nepal where the conflict has made people suspicious of strangers, here I was welcomed into homes and offered tea. We can learn a lot from our Bhutani brothers and sisters especially since many of us Nepalis are now refugees in our own land. What does it mean to lose that which is most precious to us—our homeland? How can we come to terms with our suffering and not be guided by anger and revenge?

Whoever did this to such gentle, generous and compassionate people are the ones we should pity. ●





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# Sultans of salsa

“If I didn’t dance, I’d be on double prozac”



KIRAN PANDAY

**DIANE SUMMERS**

The heat is on. The beat is on. Salsa is happening and growing all over the world. Even in Kathmandu at the latest happening place, the Latin Quarter.

Hot orange. Electric blue. Sunshine yellow. Margaritas, blue

as the Tibetan sky. Bodies dance to the beat on the smooth floor. Friday nights, dancers flock to this salsa club inside the white walls of Baber Mahal Revisited. Aged 18-60, it is a united nations at the Latin Quarter but why are they all here?

Katia 28, dressed from head-to-toe in skintight black, dances

to perfection. Slim and lithe, she slips as easy as grease around the floor. French-Canadian, she spends most of her life here dancing—kathak, tango, salsa. Her answer is straightforward. “If I didn’t dance I would be on double prozac.”

A cool breeze wafts through French windows. Binayak in trainers and a baggy t-shirt and pants spirals Salima in multiple spins and she glides to a controlled drop on her back, raises herself on her heel and flips upright, never missing a beat. Over a fresh lemu pani, Binayak, 24, a web designer and a radio jockey explains why he dances. “On the dance floor I can be myself. Dance breaks all the barriers: age, cultural, male-female.” He wipes the beads of perspiration from his face, a solitary diamond earring glimmers in the light. “Dancing is all about connection, communication and respect for your partner.”

Raksha Lama draws up a chair and sits with us. She greets every guest, knows most by first names and radiates non-stop energy. Raksha is the powerhouse behind the Latin Quarter with her husband, the versatile pilot, singer, actor Vijay Lama. Why a

## Step by step

Most of Binayak Shrestha’s friends can’t believe he is a salsa instructor, Nepal’s first. He was an RJ at HBC 94FM when he switched. “I was really inspired by the movie ‘Dance with Me’,” recalls Binayak.

He learnt the basics from Andreas Lehrke, a German who taught salsa in Kathmandu then went to Spain for nearly two months to learn various dance techniques. Binayak was soon researching on the Internet, downloading videos and instructions on various steps and practicing them. He had caught the salsa bug.

It wasn’t long before his expert moves were noticed and he was offered a job teaching salsa at the Latin Quarter. It was a dream come true and Binayak was soon grooving to the beat and teaching people to do the same.

Binayak has one complaint though: “Last year, there were a lot of women in my class and no men to lead them. Now I have a lot of men and no women. It is easier to teach women because this is a dance where the man leads and he needs to know the signals to manoeuvre his partner, it’s talking with your hands.”

Shrestha believes in making his classes fun and has flexible timings to suit his students, who range from eight to 68-year-olds. And he finds it inspiring to have people of such an age range wanting to learn salsa. ●

Aarti Basnyat

salsa club? “It was a decision of the heart. I had taken a few salsa classes and enjoyed it. I love to cook and I had always wanted to open a restaurant. So I thought, why not mix the two: a place to dance salsa and eat. It was a natural fit.”

And the guys don’t seem to think that dancing salsa is for sissies. “For men dancing salsa is a challenge,” explains Binayak. “Men have to lead—so we are thinking what is the next step. How are you going to impress her with the next step? You don’t have to talk, it’s all about communication through your steps and the music.”

Isn’t dance still regarded as

risqué in the conservative family circles in Kathmandu?

“Dancing builds confidence,” explains Raksha. “Dancing in front of others, dancing with men other than your husband and brother is still unusual but times are changing. Young people want to be friends together. Dancing gives them the confidence. There’s nothing sleazy about it, young people come here in a safe environment and build their confidence.” ●

At the Latin Quarter: Dance classes by Binayak at Latin Quarter, Rs 1,500 for beginners. Salsa practice on Wednesday and Sunday evenings from 8PM, Friday nights after 7.30 PM Salsa Sizzler. 4254260

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# Nepal's last hunter-gatherers

Time is running out for the Raute and their nomadic lifestyle

SAGUN S LAWOTI

All over the world, hunter-gatherer societies are disappearing and a similar fate awaits Nepal's Raute.

As with other hunter-gatherers, the Raute are also divided about preserving their old ways or assimilating into mainstream society. And it has been a subject of much debate among the Raute ever since the first anthropological study on the tribe was done more than 30 years ago.

"We would rather die than give up our nomadic way of life," says Bir Bahadur Shahi, one of the three Raute mukhiyas. What is surprising is that the Raute have actually managed to survive and preserve their way of life despite inroads made by modernity into remote Nepal where they live.

In his 1974 seminal study, anthropologist Johan Reinhard says the reason is the Raute's early decision to avoid contact with outsiders which was founded on unshakeable religious beliefs. Reinhard also credits the communal hunting technique for the survival of the Raute culture.

According to the 2001 census, the Raute totalled just 658. They live in the forest, hunt with nets and axes, forage for tubers and fruits, and barter or sell woodenwares that they make in their villages in exchange for food-

grains and tools, among other materials.

The Raute hunt in groups, they share all their food and property evenly. They follow their unique religion, rituals, belief systems and uphold political, social and cultural institutions, including leadership structures and knowledge systems. The closed society that the tribe is to outsiders, they limit socialisation just enough to fulfil their material needs.

As the last of the hunting-gathering community in Nepal, the tribe is proud of its heritage. "We don't want the burden of agriculture, we don't wish to settle down. We want to continue our nomadic way of life. We wish to travel freely and want no harassment in community or government controlled forests," says Shahi.

These were in fact some of the demands that Shahi and other Raute put before the ministers of Home and Local Development in Kathmandu recently.

"The Raute demand is that they should be able to exploit the forest resources free of interference because they have been doing so since time immemorial," says Sarina Gurung, coordinator of the exposure visit which was organised by the National Foundation for the Development

of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) for the 10 endangered ethnic groups, including the Raute.

The Raute's nomadic lifestyle and shifting agriculture is sustainable and never over-exploits the forest, leaving time for regeneration. But it goes against the forestry regulations of the modern Nepali state which hasn't taken into account the needs of indigenous groups.

Some Raute families have been permanently settled in Jogbudha in Dadeldhura but many are not happy there. Anthropologists like Jana Fortier point out that if more of the Raute are forcibly settled, it will lead to the collapse of the most democratic sub-culture in Nepal.

"To settle or not to settle the Rautes is a big question. One has to look carefully at the pros and cons," says Professor Santa Bahadur Gurung of NFDIN, "how long can the Raute remain as they are is a big question."

For his part, Main Bahadur is convinced that he wouldn't change his lifestyle for the world. He tells us: "We are happy just the way we are." ●

**NOMADS IN THE PARKING LOT: Raute Mukhiyas Dil Bahadur Hamal, Main Bahadur Shahi and Bir Bahadur Shahi after meeting government officials in Kathmandu recently.**

SAGUN S LAWOTI



"The sirs who fly helicopters should be more careful"

Main Bahadur Shahi, 52, is the most influential among the three Raute mukhiyas. He told *Nepali Times* he is confident that his nomadic tribe can continue to survive if allowed to practice its traditional lifestyle.

**Nepali Times: You met ministers in Kathmandu, what did you tell them?**

**Main Bahadur Shahi:** We told them we need the forest and only the forest. We don't want agriculture, farmlands and houses. We are happy with our way of life.

**Why don't you want to settle down?**

We like to move about, we aren't happy if we have to live in one place permanently. It would be against our *kul dharma*. Besides if we get sick and die, we would have to burn everything and move on. We don't need to learn farming, raise and graze animals. We don't need to collect fodder. We make *koshi*, *aari*, *madhus*, *khat* (woodenwares) sell them and support ourselves.

**Has the conflict affected you?**

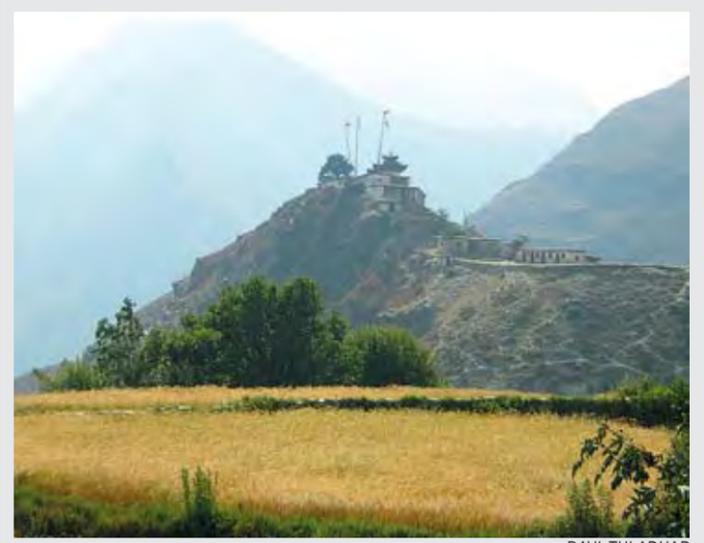
Yes. The sirs who fly the *gaadi* (helicopters) should be careful. What if we Rautes are completely wiped out when they are trying to kill Maoists? However, the CDO has assured us that our areas won't be bombed. Just to be sure, when a helicopter flies overhead we wave our turbans to notify the sirs that we are not Maoists but Raute and to leave us in peace.

**What are the challenges to uphold your customs? What about the newer generations?**

Our lifestyle, customs, clothes, nothing has changed. Even the youngsters will lead the life that we have lived. For, like your children are taught to read and write, we teach our children all the means of livelihood. So our way of life won't change.

**As a mukhiya aren't you worried that the up and coming generation will deviate from the hunting-gathering way of life?**

I don't think so. I'm certain this way of life will continue.



RAVI TULADHAR

## Potent insurgency

Maoists are financing their revolution with Himalayan viagra

KISHORE NEPAL in DOLPA

DUNAI—The villages in this arid and remote district are all empty. No, it's not because of the Maoists. Every able-bodied person is up on the mountains collecting yarsagumba.

This unique Himalayan fungus that grows like a worm out of the soil after the snow melts is in high demand internationally. Called 'Himalayan viagra' for its alleged potency, prices have shot up as China becomes more affluent.

The effect is seen here in Dolpa, where the nearest road is two week's walk away and there is only an erratic daily flight to Nepalganj. Yarsagumba collection started this year from 26 May and is expected to last till mid-July. "This is when we earn, yarsagumba is the district's lifeline," says Laliman Buda, president of the Commerce and Industry Association in Dunai.

All teachers and 44 students of the local college are on leave, farmers and shopkeepers have all moved up to the higher valleys of Tarap. "Officially we aren't closed but we have to be practical," explains Campus Chief Laxmi Neupane, "nobody wants to miss this opportunity, they have to earn enough now to last them the whole year."

Dolpa's yarsagumba harvest draws young people from as far away as Rukum and Jajarkot. And, as in previous years, it has also attracted the Maoists who see the herb as a great tax opportunity. In the absence of government, the Maoists have now monopolised revenue collection from yarsagumba in Dolpa.

Maoist district Chief Ram Bahadur KC 'Yuddha' presented the rebel movement's annual budget in February and noted that there was Rs 180 million revenue from yarsagumba taxes. Last year the government itself collected only Rs 1.6 million from yarsagumba. One Maoist worker boasts that Dolpa's financial contribution to the 'people's war' is the highest in the region.

In April, the Maoists called on traders to bid for this year's yarsagumba collection. The tenders were opened on 10 May and the Maoists reportedly collected Rs 7.5 million just as deposits. They expect to earn Rs 220 million this year from taxes.

One kg of yarsagumba costs Rs 5,000 in Dolpa and Rs 18,000 by the time it gets to Nepalganj and \$3,000 by the time it gets to Shanghai. Each Dolpali will be lucky if he can collect 1,000 pieces which he can sell for Rs 70. "It is very difficult to see the yarsagumba, you have to have very keen eyes," says a teacher from Tripurakot who collected 500 pieces last year, but stayed back to till his fields this year.

Ever since 2000 when the Maoists attacked Dunai, their first-ever Maoist attack on a district headquarter, and Jufal airfield in 2002, they have established supremacy in Dolpa. The security forces control Dunai, Suligad and Jufal but the rebels hold sway over the rest of this vast district that borders China. The Maoists have been working through their front organisation, the Dalit Mukti Morcha and wiping out vestiges of Hinduism, like the Chhalmasta temple that they destroyed last year.

"The only reason they haven't sacked the Tripura Sundari temple (*pic, above*) in Tripurakot is because they fear a strong public backlash," points out local journalist Bishnu Debkota.

The Maoists tax Rs 800 from government teachers in the district every four months. Although no one admits it, all civil servants, traders, NGO workers and shopkeepers pay the 'revolutionary tax'. Besides this, villagers regularly provide free food and shelter to the Maoists. Teachers and students are made to dig bunkers and trenches to thwart an 'Indian invasion'. In Kalika VDC, which the Maoists consider their district capital, the Maoists are using forced labour to construct an administrative building.

All this high-handedness hasn't gone unnoticed. The villagers of Ralli captured two Maoist workers Bam Bahadur Sarki 'Suman' and Janak Sarki 'Prasiddha' on 9 April and handed them over to the security forces. The villagers fled to Dunai anticipating a Maoist reprisal.

All but two families have now returned home when local human right activists mediated with the Maoist Dolpa Chief, Ram Bahadur KC. After the Ralli incident the Maoists have changed their policy towards locals and the district chief has been replaced by Ram Lal BiKa. ●



MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR in BANGKOK

# Silenced, not forgotten

Suu Kyi turns 60 next week as the world gathers courage enough to match hers

Over the years, Suu Kyi's birthday has become a powerful focal point for human rights groups and critics of the junta to highlight her ill treatment and the ongoing plight of many political prisoners in Burma. There are 1,300 political prisoners in Burmese jails, including parliamentarians, writers, Buddhist monks and pro-democracy activists. Win Tin, a 75-year-old journalist, has been in prison for 16 years.

The imprisonment followed a bloody crackdown on a democracy uprising in Burma on 8 August 1988—the fateful day now known as 8-8-88. The results of a parliamentary election in May 1990, which the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party Suu Kyi heads, won by a landslide, were ignored by the junta. The military government that had ruled the Southeast Asian country since a 1962 coup continued in power with increasing brutality.

The junta's treatment of Suu Kyi, in fact, has come to symbolise its iron-fisted rule. Her latest stretch under house arrest, which began in May 2003, is the most severe of the nine years and 230 days she has spent as a prisoner. She has had no contact with the diplomatic community for months, she has been denied meetings with UN officials and non-governmental groups and all communication with NLD leaders

Peace laureate, to declare: 'As long as she remains under arrest, none of us is truly free.'

Other supporters plan to raise a cry for her freedom by staging protests outside the Burmese embassies in capitals across three continents, including Tokyo, Seoul, New Delhi, London and Washington DC. "This outpouring of support will not be easy for the military regime to sidestep," said Debbie Stothard of the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, a regional human rights lobby, "despite her isolation, she still commands immense support and solidarity."

Though she marks her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday as a prisoner of Burma's military regime, Aung San Suu Kyi will not be forgotten by the Burmese diaspora and her legions of sympathisers across the world who plan to highlight her courage as a champion of democracy on her birthday, 19 June.

Suu Kyi enjoys a moral high ground on the world's political stage. Not only is she a Nobel Peace laureate but is the only one among winners who is still a prisoner. Her plight has prompted South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu, another Nobel

## An open letter to Aung San Suu Kyi:

At the beginning of the third millennium our global society is, thanks to modern technologies, able to easily communicate with anyone anywhere in the world. We are all becoming part of a larger spiritual dialogue that is further evolving our civilisation. Everyone has a right to become a meaningful and authentic part of this dialogue. A great many believe you have been deprived of this basic right because your voice—gentle, gracious and inspirational—resonates with the undeniable and resolute force of truth; a truth that threatens those who deny your right to speak. Internationally, your voice has become an inspiration for civil society and it is a light in the darkness along the way to spiritual freedom.

People from all over the world write you letters and hold you in great esteem because you are a symbol of hope, courage and dignity. They write to you even though they know their letters and words of hope may never reach you. History, however, has taught us that neither walls nor weapons can silence even the most isolated voice of courage and truth. Indeed, the efforts to silence such a voice only make it louder. Please know that we carry your voice in our hearts for all to hear.

Combating attempts, such as this one, to silence the truth is one of the reasons that we, the undersigned, along with others, have come together to form a collective effort known as Shared Concern Initiative. This open letter to you is a symbolic attempt to jointly break through the totalitarian barriers erected so unfairly around you.

With deep respect,

Václav Havel  
Prince El Hassan bin Talal  
George Soros  
Andre Glucksman  
Schwarzenberg  
Hans Küng

The Dalai Lama  
Mary Robinson  
Richard von Weizsäcker  
Michael Novak

F.W. de Klerk  
Desmond Tutu  
Vartan Gregorian  
Karel

have been cut off. Even Suu Kyi's personal physician, Dr Tin Myo Win, has been restricted from meeting her.

"This is an attempt by the regime to completely cut her off and make her politically irrelevant," said Aung Zaw, editor of *The Irrawaddy*, an exile magazine published in Thailand. "There is no news, not a word coming out from her and what she is doing. It was never the case before."

Rangoon's fear of Suu Kyi's popularity stems from the

hundreds of thousands of people who came to hear her during the political campaigns she conducted after she was released from 19 months of house arrest in May 2002. During her one year in freedom that followed, she toured the country and was spontaneously greeted by huge crowds. On May 2003, the junta struck back: thugs linked to the military regime attacked Suu Kyi and leading members of her political party while they were campaigning in a town north of Rangoon. ● (IPS)

# Underground and aboveground

New Delhi is far ahead of other Southasian capitals in urban public transport

One reason the future of New Delhi as the premier Southasian urban centre is assured is its underground mass transit system.

Underground commuting makes a city efficient and multidexterous and that is where New Delhi is headed in the decades

## SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit



to come. Years hence, credit

will be given to those who today are planning the Delhi Metro which is already a three-line network of 65 km.

Calcutta's underground started a decade ago and was the first of its kind in the region. This is a matter of great pride for Bengalis but it has been limited to one north-south 16.5 km track from Dumdum

to Tollygunge. Meanwhile, on the ground up above, the famous Calcutta tram system is in a decrepit state and the less said about the Kolkota buses the better.

The other cities of Southasia are not even thinking of, or are years away from, a true mass transit network. Take Kathmandu, a capital that does not even have a public transport system in place, much less plans for mass transit. There is laissez faire between superannuated buses on cartel-run routes, Mercedes Benz discard minibuses of overland European travellers of the 1970s, and Korean 'micro' vans which have proved useful in tackling narrow winding roads. The electric trolley bus service, gifted 30 years ago by the Chinese is today near death.

The only positive thing that has

happened in the transport scene in Kathmandu is the indigenous development of Safa Tempos, battery-powered three wheelers which carry up to 12 passengers. As would be expected with any local success story, the Safa is now being eyed with distaste by the authorities because it is said to slow down other traffic. This reminds one of Dhaka, where riksa pullers have started facing some heat. The 300,000 rikshas in Dhaka make up what might be called its mass transit system. But when demands of urban efficiency and urban elitism coincide, the uptown bhodralok from Baridhara, Gulshan, Bonani will need to get downtown double quick and the rikshas get in the way.

While the other metros of Southasia suffer from bad planning which comes, firstly, from bad funding, the modernisation of New Delhi's transportation is being funded by a IRs 5 billion infusion from the central government for undergrounds trains and aboveground flyovers. There are to be not one, nor two, but dozens of new flyovers, plus landscaping!

A limited access dual carriageway already connects Noida with Delhi and another is making rapid progress towards Gurgaon, that ground-water guzzling hi-tech stretch spreading onward to Haryana.

And one only has to look at the variety of cars on the roads to see how the middle

and upper classes are making good on Delhi's good fortune. Though the Indian president and prime minister and ministers are still stuck with the senile Ambassador sedans, newer, bigger, faster Daewoos, Toyotas and Tatas are taking to the roads. The old Suzuki aka Maruti 800 ('Mehran' in Pakistan) is slowly migrating to the hinterland on resale.

The Delhi Transport Corporation has a fleet of 2,500 buses, all running on CNG as per the orders of the Supreme Court. The taxis all are fueled by CNG, the three-wheeler scooty remains the standard for mid-distances and the riksa remains the backbone for travel in Old Delhi and the satellite towns and jhuggies. The state government has tried to introduce a new riksa design, made of tubular steel, but it has only caught on in the Nizamuddin and Karol Bagh localities, where they are subsidised. Elsewhere, the tried and tested slanted-seat accordion-hood model is still preferred because (as I realised during a riksa circumnavigation of Humayun's Tomb) the new design is awfully uncomfortable on the posterior. Also, said the rikshawalla, the resale value is low.

It is 45 degrees in the shade in Delhi as I write this in Kathmandu's cool. For the sake of the pampered, perspiring Dilliwallah, it would not be a bad idea if the Supreme Court of India could also order that public buses be air-conditioned. ●



# Swinging by

The perfect swing is a myth, it's the basics that matter

All golfers know that a good golf swing is vital to playing golf well. I come across many good players who constantly strive to perfect their swing. Interestingly, most golf instructors agree that the perfect golf swing is a myth. Just look at the many professionals who perform so well with lousy swings. What, then, is the secret?

Having the basics right is most important. Those professionals with lousy swings have good basics: the grip, their set-up and aim.

**TEE BREAK**  
Deepak Acharya



They also have great timing and rhythm on every swing, which allows the club to travel on the same plane at the same speed. Then, they have tremendous

confidence and faith in their swing. Finally, they have a swing that they can consistently repeat.

Let us be realistic though, practicing at the professionals' level is not practical for weekenders. That is why, even with all the right attitudes and beliefs, they just can't produce the same result. Taking this into account, I decided to share some thoughts that I believe will help give you an advantage in advancing your golfing abilities.

A good golf swing starts with a good rhythm. You cannot make a good forward swing unless you take your time going back. Going back slowly sets up proper rhythm and motion. A back swing that is too fast almost always has the club and body working against each other, inviting poor shots. The object of the golf swing is to create speed on the down swing, not on the back swing.

A fast back swing leads to bad movement. A good back swing starts with the arms and shoulders, not the hands. You don't want to pick up the club at the beginning of the takeaway. You want to draw away in one smooth motion. As the club starts backward, the left shoulder and hips turn naturally to allow your weight to transfer to the right side. Once the shoulder stops turning, that is the end of your back swing. If you try to swing the club even after the shoulder has stopped turning, you are over swinging creating a negative club speed and inconsistent swing.



The object of the down swing is to return the club head to the ball with maximum controllable speed. Just as a back swing that is too fast is no good, a down swing that is too hard will cause bad golf shots. There are many theories on what should start the down swing. Most players who think about clearing the left side (left shoulder and hip) by dropping the hands (using the left hand) on an inner path create a more consistent swing with smooth body motion.

To complete the swing you must have a good finish. The finish in the golf swing, unlike baseball, needs to be high, not left. I see most beginners find it more natural to finish low and left, causing topped shots and having difficulty getting the ball airborne. In the finish, the weight that was transferred to the right side in the back swing must now be transferred to the left side. A good finish has the centre of your chest facing the target and your hands are high, close to your left ear.

The golf swing can be considered simple but is often complicated by too much thinking. Understand the proper technique, don't ingrain bad habits and you will have a lot more fun playing. On another note, don't forget to sign in for the Seventh Gokarna Open, which will be played on 25 June at Gokarna Golf Club. Details are available at 4450444, 4451212. And the first prize is a Star Cruise sponsored cruise holiday! ●

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)



The New  
**SIRION** MPV



Hansraj Hulaschand & Co (P) Ltd.

Showroom: Thapathali, Tel: 4244254, 4258717, 4238372, 4267783

## Chopper on Chomolungma

Government says the highest helicopter landing never happened. Why?

**ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY**

It was a mystery from the start: a helicopter sets a world record by touching down on the summit of the world's highest mountain but its manufacturer doesn't brag about it till nearly a month later. No press conferences, no victory lap in Kathmandu, no major international media blitz.

It is now clear that Eurocopter test pilot Didier Delsalle did land his specially-fitted Ecureuil Astar 350 B3 helicopter on top of Chomolungma on 14 May but the first understated announcement came only on 24 May on the company website without the summit pictures.

Now, a month later, the plot thickens. The Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) which gave a month-long permission to Eurocopter to conduct 'test flights' in the Everest region says Delsalle has submitted a written statement saying he landed on the South Col, 1,000m below the summit.

"The pilot wrote to us saying he did not land on the summit

definitive photographs and videos of the summit landing ([www.eurocopter.com/everest/](http://www.eurocopter.com/everest/)). It turns out Delsalle landed first on the South Col on 12 May for practice, then on 14 and 15 May on the summit. The video taken by a fuselage camera shows the skids on top for three minutes and 50 seconds which is nearly two minutes longer than required by Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) the body that needs to recognise the record.

FAI General Secretary Max Bishop told us that the record had not yet been ratified since the final evidence had yet to be studied. In an email, he said: "As per FAI rules the claiming authority—in this case France—has up to 120 days from the date of the attempt to put together the claim file." FAI reportedly had staff at Lukla last month which points to a well-planned attempt to break the world record. Why, then, the hush-hush and the denial from CAAN?

The mysterious chopper, its dubious landing and the secrecy surrounding the whole

people knowing what was really going on. "The fact that the French didn't announce it here but waited to get back home gives a shade of doubt," says aviation expert, Hemant Arjyal, "but CAAN probably doesn't have any rules about helicopters landing on Everest either."

Bhumi Lama of the Nepal Mountaineering Association told us, "The permission, whether it was to perform a test flight or to land, was granted by CAAN, they need to clarify what happened."

Eurocopter is making a big promotional splash about the Everest landing at the Paris Air Show this week. "To reach this mythical summit definitively seemed to be a dream," Delsalle is quoted as saying in Lukla on 14 May, "it was difficult holding (the helicopter) there against the wind."

That doesn't sound like someone who landed only on the South Col. Whether they had the permit or not, it is clear a new world record was set last month on Chomolungma. ●



while they went around claiming they had made the highest landing, how can they give two different statements?" asks Keshab Raj Khanal, of CAAN's Air Transportation Directorate.

Indeed, why is Delsalle making contradictory statements? Khanal said regulations didn't allow him to show us the statement. There are other questions: did Delsalle have permission to even land on the South Col? Given Nepal's current political setup could the flights have taken place without a green light from the Royal Nepali Army, which operates its own fleet of Ecureuils? Eurocopter is a subsidiary of the EADS group which also owns Airbus and its website has now posted

expedition set off wild speculation on mountaineering chatsites about the legitimacy of the claim which were only laid to rest when the photos and videos were posted on the site last week.

The only explanation, one senior government official told us privately, is that Eurocopter did not actually have permission to land on the top of Mt Everest and needed to get all its staff and equipment out of Nepal before announcing it. "If that is the case, they have to compensate the Nepal government," he added, "maybe we should ask for two Ecureuils."

The authorities are tight-lipped but it is clear that the company couldn't have pulled this off without some senior



**WE HAVE TOUCHDOWN:** The Ecureuil's skids cast a shadow on the top of Chomolungma (left, top), the helicopter approached the summit, Delsalle with the Nepali flag and champagne at Lukla airport after setting the new world record.

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



**KE GARNE? WHATEVER.**  
But be a heroji and go plant something.  
"The trees that are slow to grow bear the best fruit."  
Moliere (1622-1673) French actor & comic dramatist  
Next change: Our Heroji considers an afternoon of gardening over on Pulchowk Avenue.  
#72 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

**ABOUT TOWN**

**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**

- ❖ **Himalayan Faith** Photos by Louise Hoile at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel, until 22 June.
- ❖ **Flora and Fauna of Nepal** Photos by Prajwal Pradhan at Bluestar Hotel, Tripureswor, 1PM-7PM, until 30 June. pradhan@enet.com.np
- ❖ **Floral paintings** in aquarelle by Neera Joshi Pradhan at Park Gallery, Lajimpat, until 30 June. 4419353
- ❖ **Light and Life** Photos by Kishor Kayastha, until 9 July at Lajimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Raku Pottery** by Gopal Kalapremi for sale at Lajimpat Gallery Shop, Rs 2,000-Rs 3,000. 4428549

**EVENTS**

- ❖ **One Day Dharma Talk** by Losang Namgyal at HBMC on 18 June, 10AM-4PM. 4414843
- ❖ **Suite Habana** Film poem by Fernando Pérez at NTB, Bhrikuti Mandap on 19 June, 5.30 PM.
- ❖ **The Nepalis of Tibet** Talk by Mark Turin at Martin Chautari on 19 June, 3PM. 4256239
- ❖ **World Refugee Day** on 20 June.
- ❖ **International Music Day** on 21 June.
- ❖ **The Sherpas of Khumbu** by Frances Klatzel on 24 June, 9.30 AM at Shakar Hotel, Lajimpat, Rs 100.
- ❖ **Monsoon Masquerade Party** on 24 June at Latin Quarter Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited, 7.30 PM, Rs 750.
- ❖ **ASMAN's Supper Theatre** Dear Liar starring Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah, 1-2 July at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4471957
- ❖ **Intercultural Exchange Program** Every Wednesday at Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali, 4.15 PM. 4250871
- ❖ **Tai Chi** Demonstration and meditation at Swayambhu. 4256618
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Garage sale, pet practices and more. 4215068
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999
- ❖ **Art workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Saturdays. 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibar Mela** Saturdays at Bakery Café, Dharara, 2PM and Chuchepati, Boudha, 3PM.



**MUSIC**

- ❖ **Fusion Friday** with 1974 AD at Moksh on 17 June, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Party Night** with DJ Cabu on 18 June, 8.30 PM, Rs 150 at Moksh.
- ❖ **Fete de la musique** on 21 June at Bhrikuti Mandap. 4241163
- ❖ **JCS Trio of Cadenza** Saturdays, 8PM at 1905, Kantipath. 422 5272
- ❖ **Live The Duo** at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangri-la, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Live music** Courtney Preston and Agnes Quimpo at Indigo Gallery on 24 June, 7PM. 4413580
- ❖ **The Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle, Thamel, 7PM. 4701208
- ❖ **Ladies Nights** Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music, one free drink. 4256622
- ❖ **Fusion Mondays** at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Live Music** at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Jukebox** Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs, Lajimpat on Wednesdays and Saturdays, 8PM.

**FOOD**

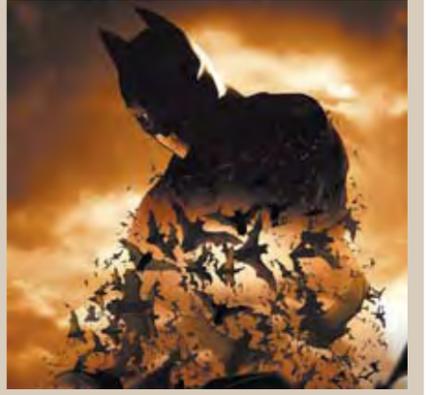
- ❖ **Mango Masti** Tropical treats at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Daily Delite** Lunch at Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat, Rs 399 on weekdays, Rs 499 on weekends. 4412999
- ❖ **Goan Food Fest** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, 6.30 PM, Rs 799. 4248999
- ❖ **Crosskitchen** European and Indian cuisine at Lajimpat. 9851083806
- ❖ **Boire and Manger** at Vineyard, Baber Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Bawarchi** The Restro Bar for Nawabi cuisine at Lajimpat. 4436673
- ❖ **BBQ Lunch** at Le Meridien, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 4445550
- ❖ **Barbeque lunch** Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Special Combo** Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- ❖ **Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn. 6680048
- ❖ **Arniko Special Lunch** at Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Exotic Seafood** at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Delicacies** at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijyantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

**GETAWAYS**

- ❖ **Malaysia Dream Holidays** Special offers for June. 2012345, malaysiaiaholidays\_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Star Cruises** Available in Nepal. 2012345, starcruises\_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Get one night free** at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742
- ❖ **Wet & Wild** Weekend package at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** Best time to be in Shivapuri. steve@escape2nepal.com

**Quest Entertainment**

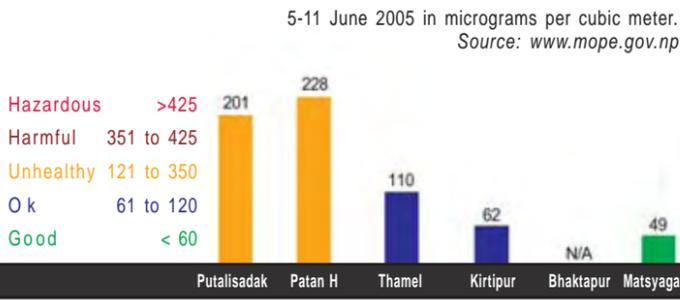
Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* explores the origin of the Batman legend and the Dark Knight's emergence as a force for good in Gotham. In the wake of his parents' murder, disillusioned industrial heir Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) travels the world seeking the means to fight injustice and turn fear against those who prey on the fearful. He returns to Gotham and unveils his alter ego—Batman, a masked crusader who uses his strength, intellect and an array of hi-tech deceptions to fight the sinister forces that threaten the city.



Call 4442220 for show timings [www.jainepal.com](http://www.jainepal.com)

**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

The occasional showers that Kathmandu received last week helped lower the pollution in the Valley. Although the concentration of PM10 particles that are small enough to enter the human respiratory system still exceeded the national standards near busy streets, in residential areas they were within standards most of the days.



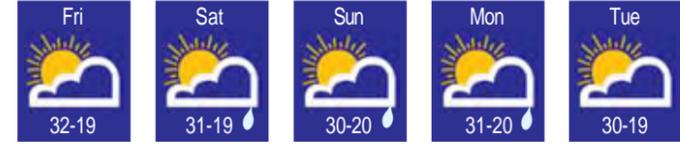
**NEPALI WEATHER**

by MAUSAM BEED



The Indians who have their own weather satellite and computer modelling to forecast weather have said the Arabian Sea branch of the southwesterly monsoon is stuck over the Western Ghats but the Bay of Bengal arm is active and has advanced into eastern Nepal as can be seen in this satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon. Their conclusion is that although the monsoon is running a week behind schedule, it will bring normal precipitation. Let's hope the second part is true. As the mercury level soars close to a decade's high and humidity makes matters worse, there is great anticipation building up. Kathmandu Valley should see the first showers over the weekend and the Big Burst midweek next week.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**



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KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

**CITIZENS' PEACE VIGIL:** Arun Parajuli, 9, lights a lamp at the Maitighar Shanti Mandal on Wednesday to commemorate the 246 Nepalis who were killed in the conflict during the month of Jeshth. Of them, 13 were children.



KIRAN PANDAY

**JOURNALISTS' JAM:** Journalists blocked the main airport road for nearly 30 minutes in front of the CDO's office on Tuesday to protest the arrest of 50 journalists on Monday who were released overnight.



KIRAN PANDAY

**RESURRECTION:** The stumps of gum trees along Pulchok that were cut down last month have refused to give up and prove there is life after death.

They didn't set out to be radical but perhaps it is the name of the program (*Pothi Basyo* on Kantipur Television) that has given people the impression that Loonibha Tuladhar and Deepanjali Lama are fire-breathing feminists.

"We were given the afternoon musical slot but we thought why not try a packaged program," says Loonibha with the same bubbly exuberance as her tv persona. In the beginning, the duo was nervous but people in the editing room started rolling with laughter while watching the first episode. "That is when we knew it worked," recalls Deepanjali.

*Pothi Basyo* soon got a weekly slot with the two playing different characters in every episode. The stories are a light-hearted and self-deprecating look at Nepali gender relations with both women and men ending up as the butt of jokes.

"We opted for a sitcom format, we love improvisation and have lots of fun doing what we do," says Deepanjali. And it shows. The on-screen energy flows easily to viewers who have rewarded the program with high ratings. Often working within a rough outline, the duo used to wrap up shooting an episode in 15-30 minutes but since the cast and crew have grown bigger, it now takes two days. "But we still

# Hen-pecked

have a blast on the sets," says Loonibha.

Fame comes at a price. Loonibha and Deepanjali are teased when seen in public. "It is difficult sometimes. People call me *thulo pothi* and her *sano pothi* or *broiler kukhura* and *local kukhura*," shrugs Loonibha, "we've learnt to take it."

Deepanjali never expected such instant recognition and says she is now ready to take a backseat from all the limelight. This season on, she plans to let Ranju

Lamichhane take her place in *Pothi Basyo*. Ranju has acted in serials including *Tito Satya* and Nepali feature films *Basai* and *Ko Holo Mero Mayalu*. But she is still nervous about filling Deepanjali's shoes as she says, "It'll be difficult because I know people will begin comparing me with her and she's been doing such a great job." ●  
Abha Eli Phoboo

*Pothi Basyo* on Kantipur tv on Saturdays, 7.30 PM.



KIRAN PANDAY

**DON'T MESS WITH US:** Ranju Lamichhane, Loonibha Tuladhar and Deepanjali Lama.



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# This is not the ten o'clock news

This is Radio Nepal. This is not the ten o'clock news read by Sarah Yonzon. [Fifteen minutes of various instrumental numbers based on patriotic songs from a bygone era.] Welcome back, now, we will entertain you with the headlines which today is sung to the tune of *The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Music*.

● The Underfinanced Ministry has rejected reports in the anti-national private media that the country is bankrupt. "This is categorically and

## UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



completely false," the Ministry spokesperson said, "it hasn't

happened yet, we are still working on it."

In a pre-budget statement he added that the economy had never been more robust, it was growing at five percent per annum, poverty had been reduced by ten percent points and the Rastra Bank was using airliners to fly out Nepal's dollar reserves to Patna to buy 35 tons of Indian currency in IRs 100 denomination notes. "The problem is just that we can't boast about all these things since they were all achievements of the previous democratic governments," the spokesperson said on condition that we cover his eyes with a black strip. He denied the ministry didn't have money to meet the military's growing demands saying all ploughshares were being converted into swords. "We must look at military spending as an investment with a very high rate of returns," the spokesman added.



KIRAN PANDAY

● Girija Prasad Koirala returned from New Delhi on Wednesday amidst a tumultuous welcome that snarled traffic on the Ring Road for an hour while he waited to be arrested, but no one bothered. A visibly miffed Koirala said he had gone to India for medical reasons to have his head examined, and this also gave him the opportunity to pick the brains of various Indian leaders. "We saw eye-to-eye on almost everything," Koirala said, "they are just as short-sighted as us."

● A pilot for the French aviation company, Eurocopter, is embroiled in controversy over his first-ever solo ascent of the world's highest mountain without Sherpas, without crampons, without muesli and in a heavier-than-air machine. The Ministry of Mountaineering and Profiteering has refused to recognise the feat because the expedition did not pay the \$60,000 royalty for Everest expeditions composed of less than six members and did not go through the correct Red Channel at airport customs to declare his chopper.

● The Loyal Commission on Corruption Control has charge-sheeted God for a series of misdemeanours and remanded Him in custody for another week while the prosecution investigates if He broke some of His own Commandments. The list of charges against God include breach of trust for letting the country go to pot despite repeated assurances to the contrary, not answering the peoples' prayers, not keeping proper accounts of cash and kind offered to His representatives at Pashupatinath and for willfully defaulting on the borrowed time that He is on. In a hearing at the LCCC Tuesday, the Holy Ghost argued that He did not recognise the temporal tribunal and besides, as Supreme Omnipresent Being, He enjoyed divine immunity from prosecution. He said he would take it up in person with the IMF Rep. The presiding judge rejected this saying the court's jurisdiction in this case was set by the principles of Supernatural Justice. Whereupon the Almighty threw a tantrum and unleashed a thunderbolt on Harihar Bhaban which was safely absorbed by several lightning rods from the state media. God was later mobbed by reporters outside the LCCC's premises and was asked if He would resign. "That's a thought," He is reported to have said in His infinite wisdom.



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