Poorer and poorer

It is simple arithmetic: if a country’s GDP growth is less than its population growth rate then its citizens are getting poorer. Nepal’s population is growing at 2.24 percent a year, GDP growth this year will fall to 2.1 percent.

If the inflation rate, which has climbed from 1.7 percent last year to nearly 6 percent this year, is counted it means sharp erosion in purchasing power. Add to that the drop in investment, fall in tourism, plummeting agricultural and industrial production and it is clear that Nepal is getting poorer by the day.

Finance Minister Madhukar Rana, who is preparing the budget for presentation next week, has an unenviable task of paying for more with less.

Remittances from Nepali workers abroad, which served as a parachute for Nepal’s economy, only grew by 3.7 percent this year (compared to 4 percent last year) even though the number of workers went up and money transfer became more streamlined. Nepalis aren’t sending their money home and political instability has spurred capital flight.

Tourism revenue is down 33 percent this year, third country exports have fallen by 20 percent and there is a severe shortage of Indian currency to pay for imports. The Rastra Bank chartered a 757 recently to air-freight Rs 4 billion worth of cash from Bombay that it traded for US dollars. Private banks are awash in cash, but they have Rs 3 billion invested in unproductive sectors like housing and consumer lending.

Continued p4

WALKING THE PLANK: A woman crosses a dilapidated bridge linking Libang to the rest of Rolpa last week, the bridge symbolises the state of Nepal’s economy—ravaged by conflict and starved of budget.
H having squandered the people's trust through their corrupt and uncontrollable behaviour, the unrepresentative leadership of the major parties has been making a beeline to New Delhi to grovel at the feet of their mentors. Why are they seeking the trust of Indian leaders instead of trying to figure out why the Nepalese people aren't trusting them? Upon return to Kathmandu, Girija Prasad Koirala, who announced the Nepal PM's seven party alliance, said: “The future is in New Delhi.”

It was news on FM that chronicled the barbarity of the Maoists, the violence that has been escalating by the day. But the characterisation of agitation in Nepal as a struggle between or even a contest between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ has been repeated so often that the regime now seems to believe its own lies. Take it from: news is broadcast over FM stations in most countries in the world. The Philippines and the Philippines have vibrant community radio networks, all of Latin America listens to FM news, South Africa’s rural broadcast studio discussions that have been agents of social change.

True, our giants neighbours don’t allow it. China for obvious reasons and India because despite being the world’s largest democracy and having a rambunctious press, successive governments have realised the power of radio. Lately our ministers (who otherwise never fire of India-bashing) have started saying that India doesn’t allow FM news. We shouldn’t either. So, if the Indians eat gobar we should too?

Nepal’s community radio stations have now courageously started defying the government’s order with creative forms of protest like reading news through loud speakers in town squares. This week three Kathmandu FM stations simultaneously broadcast a studio discussion conducted by noted radio host, Kiran Pokhrel at Aja Kura, on why the ban on news is unconstitutional. As far as freedom of press is concerned, we have one of the most liberal constitutions in the world. And a Supreme Court ruling in 2001 has set a precedent by declaring the electromagnetic spectrum public property, giving radio the same rights to free expression reserved for print media. The present ban on news is also anti-constitutional because the government is and is being enforced on the basis of a simple letter from the ministry. There are other reasons why the ban is absurd. The print media is allowed to get away with extremely critical content. Private TV stations are broadcasting news unfiltered. Indian news channels are back on cable. And despite the blocking of two popular websites last week, the Internet is totally free.

Why is it that the government is scared of simple old-fashioned radio? The only reason is its accessibility and reach. Our rulers are scared community radio stations will empower the people who will then demand their rights. That’s why they are using this regime’s extreme sense of insecurity.

The Maoists, monarchists and mainstreamers are just arguing about different versions of modernity

Our 3Ms

The Maoists have lived with for over two centuries. They aren’t trusting them? The Maoists have been making a beeline to New Delhi to grovel at the feet of their mentors. That’s not a feudal concept at all. Our monarchy isn’t bothered by noblesse oblige and other traces of feudalism any more. It draws its strength from the divine right theory which implies that whatever the monarch does is right. This belief is in tune with American exceptionalism in world politics. Religion and race are twin pillars of autocratic modernity. This is the version of modernity that seems to have enchanted palace loyalists. Figures that seem to have stepped straight out of sepia-toned snapshots of 1960s argue that modernity is the rule of the. The king himself has defined a 21st century monarch as someone who doesn’t only hear and see but also speaks. The ambition not only to reign but rule as well isn’t regressive. In fact, it’s quite forward-looking—a monarch as a sauver as a guardian King Gyanendra’s pronouncements on the importance of building the nation’s democratic roots. Nobody can question the importance of establishing the people’s sovereignty but very few are willing to bet on its feasibility in the context of competitive militarisation of government and insurgency. Despite its backdrops, the monarchy is an institution that has survived longer than the state. That’s not a feudal concept at all. Our monarchy isn’t bothered by noblesse oblige and other traces of feudalism any more. It draws its strength from the divine right theory which implies that whatever the monarch does is right. This belief is in tune with American exceptionalism in world politics. Religion and race are twin pillars of autocratic modernity. This is the version of modernity that seems to have enchanted palace loyalists. 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CAST ASIDE
Manjushree Thapa (Guest Column, ‘Let’s talk about caste’, #254) needs to get her facts straight before she starts spouting venom all over the place. Shanta Kumar Mallia was never the army chief; he was the previous majesty’s ADC. Furthermore, if she takes the time to look beyond her narrow self-righteous vision on Nepali politics, she might notice that the king’s cabinet members who are also his advisers belong to other castes besides Bahuns and Chhetris. Like everyone else even His Majesty is allowed to have friends and this does not equate them to being his advisers. Self-proclaimed intellectuals in Nepal need to stop accusing the palace for everything that has gone wrong in Nepal. They need to seriously look at what they have contributed to this country besides blaming everyone in sight and writing unresearched articles.

Siddharth Thapa, Kathmandu

* Manjushree Thapa’s ‘Let’s talk about caste’ got me thinking about what should come first: democracy or social inclusion. I guess the answer is both should move ahead simultaneously. Only after that can we create a Nepali society which is more just, democratic, prosperous and free from exploitation. Otherwise nothing can be achieved in the real sense. The two movements complement each other totally: we can’t imagine a caste-free and inclusive society in any authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. History of the past 200 years is evidence. Dalits were excluded from state governance and have been worse off than animals: at least animals are teachable and allowed to enter houses but dalits are not. The Panchayat abolished untouchability but this was done less for their liberation than to distract them from joining the democratic movement. An authoritarian regime will not be acceptable to dalits even if it starts something positive for their upliftment. It will just be another idollop. It was in the democracy period of 1990-2003 that the untouchability issue came to the fore and compelled all policy makers, development workers and rulers, to at least think and talk about it. But, as the parties themselves were not inclusive and just talked instead of doing anything in the real sense, we were excluded during this period too. It is revealing that no dalit ever got a cabinet position during the democracy period. Parties had to start by being more socially inclusive themselves from the grassroots to central levels and putting forward concrete policies and programs for the total eradication of untouchability and exclusion in this ongoing democratic struggle.

Dharmendra Swarnakar, email

SLC NOT-PASS  
I completely disagree with the letter (Nepali Times, #253) to CK Lal’s column ‘How about those who didn’t pass?’ (#252). Achievers should be rewarded, it’s their reward for diligence and brilliance. But no one deserves to be labelled ‘failed’. Failed in what? There are so many Nepalis who have to walk hours to go to school, have to help in household chores, have to work. How many of these students pass? SLC is not only about personal commitment, you can compare teachers of schools in remote villages with the ones in cities. What about learning materials? The ‘failed’ label sticks to children for life causing serious psychological damage and denying the self-esteem of students (and their families).

Avani Dixit, email

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DINESH PYAKHUREL  
CK Lal’s obituary for Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel ‘Death of an engineer’ (#253) was a poignant example of a country in paralysis. Political parties, king and the comrades, what have they to lose? Nothing. They fight and die for what they interpret as truth. At least after death they are respected among their followers. Who are we civil servants to turn to? We are treated like monkeys in a circus. But Lal should give up his clichéd line of blaming all fellow Nepalis for the country’s ills. Why blame the people who try to make a decent living, feed the hungry stomach only to survive. The rules are made by the people at the top who earn such salaries. Let’s not moralise to people living on meagre government salaries. Why blame me? I also don’t care if there is democracy or autocracy in this country as long as people are provided services and I am paid adequately for doing my job. All I want is food to put on the family table, my life to live and a good night’s sleep. How is this selfish?

S Baskota, email

TOONS  
Thanks for that special treat on cartooning in Nepali ‘Toontime’, #253). They make us laugh, they make us cry, and they pass on vital messages as that mirror society with its bizarre and absurd happenings. And thanks to Nepali Times for giving so much space even since you started publication five years ago, to cartooning and your great talent, Subhas Rai.

Manjul Acharya, Imadol, Lalitpur

GREEN ROAD  
Indeed, the Lamosangu-Jiri road serves as an outstanding model for other mountain roads (‘The great green road’, #254) not only for its technically sound and labour-intensive construction methods but also for its role within the complex and somewhat controversial Integrated Hill Development Program. Indeed, some findings from my PhD thesis shall focus on the wider range of impacts: demographical changes (outmigration from Dolakha was reduced), economic effects (mostly the labour-intensive construction contributed to the money-generating power within the area of influence and stimulated further investment there), concentration of rural service centres towards the road, dramatic increase of over 20 percent of forest cover within the Jiri Khola catchment area that is in sharp contrast to other regions where road access accelerated forest destruction, a denser trail-cum-bridge network supplementing the road and intensive settlement growth accompanied by the need for giving waters along the road. This demonstrates the importance of a holistic view in project preparation and evaluation. About 15 years ago, the Lamosangu-Jiri road was heavily criticised by Dr Toni Hagen as an archaic to Dr Ruedi Hoegger, who was one of the initiators of the IHDP and the road project. Today, we can conclude that more positive impacts could be revealed than formerly visible thus a broader view of the interdependence of causes and effects is mandatory. The net construction costs of Rs 250 million was relatively cheap, it had not been for the unforeseen Chamarrei Khola disaster due to geological/geomechanical and engineering misjudgments that cost an extra Rs 202 million.

Dr Michael Griesbaum, Kathmandu

* Positive articles like Pragya Shreshtha’s ‘The great green road’ are greatly appreciated in these troubled times. Although the success story of the Jiri highway is now over 20 years old, the current catastrophic condition earnestly demands all sides, especially journalists to report on news of accomplishment such as this. Even though the road brought tremendous benefit to the people of Dolakha and Ramechhap districts many more people would have benefited had the road been constructed through Dolahat (from the dusty Dolalghat-Bhumlutar road, all the way up to the Ramechhap border road). All that was needed was a bridge over Sun Kosi. This road would have been shorter, less costly and would have reached the people of three districts instead of the treacherous zigzag up from Lamosangu. Above all, Kathmandu would have handled much less traffic from Ramechhap years ago. Unfortunately, those in power are happy to bask in the glory of the road. If the Panchayat leaders did what best served their own vested interests. Second, with the emergence of democracy in 1990, national interests and nationalism had an even more adverse effect. The escalation of Maoist violence after 2001 dramatically accelerated outmigration. With criminalisation, the scenario for Nepal to be able to construct exemplary roads (albeit not completely well thought out) like Jiri is grim.

Raj Giri, email

CORRECTION  
Due to an editing error, ‘The great green road’ (#254) mistakenly mentioned that the resealing of the road was complete by end-July. Only a 16 km portion will be complete in that time.

B Raj Giri, email

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V WY  
Times 8-14 July 2005 #255 3

L E T T E R S
Down, down, down

Revenue is down not just because of the dip in imports but also due to an estimated Rs 3.1 billion shortfall in tax collection this year. The Deuba government raised VAT by three percent and borrowed Rs 1.4 billion from Nepal Telcom’s savings in order to meet rising military and administrative expenditure but that isn’t something that can be repeated.

The most dramatic drop is in the development budget which has fallen from Rs 37 billion five years ago to less than Rs 10 billion in the first 11 months of this fiscal year (See chart). More worrying, in the absence of people’s representatives in villages and districts, it is difficult to keep track of how the money is spent. It is an open secret in the Finance Ministry and National Planning Commission (NPC) that up to a quarter of the allocation to VDCs finds its way into Maist hands, and 10 percent from other projects. There is little accountability about the rest.

“We know it is happening but we are anyway because at least the money goes to the villages and the people participate in development activities,” one government official told us.

What has got the square-nosed tighter is the suspension of aid after February First, including the Rs 5 billion budgetary support under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Many projects, worth Rs 800 million worth of VDC grants and Rs 600 million for low-priority projects remain suspended since January.

The donors could come to the rescue but the Europeans and British have suspended new aid until development is restored. And instead of reassuring donors, the government has gone out of its way to rebuke them for meddling in its internal affairs. The World Bank is increasingly worried about a runback in economic reforms and the ADB is so anxious about the ability of this government to implement Mehairi that it is maintaining out of patience. Given the donor mood, the government will find it difficult to get the Germans to bankroll the 40 million Euro cost over-run on the Middle Marsyangdi hydro project.

The government has approached China and the Gulf countries for a fiscal rescue package, sources told us. But Finance Minister Rana who is preparing the 2005-6 budget is to be approved by royal ordinance next week is already preparing for the worst. He dashed off a group email to the Rastra Bank, governor, chief secretary, and the NPC warning them that he was against a donor-driven economy and Nepal should be prepared to go it alone. For many banks this backs to the inward-looking Panchayat years when the slogan was: ‘Domestic market, domestic production.’

Former Finance Minister and NC leader, Ram Sham Mahat is agast. He told us, “It’s not just the political process that is being rolled back, even the economic reforms of the past 14 years are being dismantled.” Former NPC member Yuburam Khatiwada agrees: “At this rate, we will never reap the benefits of economic reforms instituted after the restoration of democracy in 1990.”

The government is designing the budget in a three-year development package that corresponds with King Gyanendra’s commitment in his royal proclamation on 1 February to bring democracy back on track in three years. To do this, the government would like to amalgamate development with security so zonal and district-level development projects like bridges, schools, roads, water supply will be implemented jointly by the military. This is how it is done in Afghanistan, and an NPC delegation recently visited Kabul to take a look. The government’s argument is that the military’s argument is that the lack of development is hampering counterinsurgency operations and it can use service delivery as a hearts-and-minds tool to fight the insurgency.●

IMF concerned

With just a week to go for the new budget, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) representative in Nepal, Sukhinder Singh, has expressed his concern about the slow pace of economic reform in Nepal.

Sing said economic reforms had slowed down even before the February First move and was worried about the lack of progress in banks realising non-performing assets. Singh said the ADB’s call to the IMF for an interim aid in view of the huge outlay on the poverty reduction program could mean a return to the ‘watch’ mode to resume aid.

The comments came as economists warned that Nepal is suffering not just a rollback of democracy but also a rollback of the liberal economic policies instituted since 1990. Singh said the conflict had affected the economy considerably. Nepal’s economic growth rate was going well during the first and second halves of the 1990s but the growth rate started going down after 2001. ●

Mixing development with security

The government wants to win hearts and minds with this budget but donors are not likely to follow the bill.

ANALYSIS by NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

For technocrats at the Finance Ministry, pencilling the next week’s budget is turning out to be very different than all earlier experiences.

This time, they will not have to bend over backwards to downplay or excise controversial security expenses. The government wants a counter-insurgency operation budget. This means not just the increased budget to be spent on security but also development expenditure that it uses as a hearts-and-minds operation.

“Expenditures on security are an investment for peace, in the real sense of the word, and for development,” Finance Minister Madhukar Shamsher Rana told a pre-budget local doner’s forum on 7 June in Kathmandu.

This level of clarity is keeping the budget’s dons smiling and shaking their heads trying to balance various priorities. But because there isn’t enough money to pay for development, let alone security, there is just no way Rana can balance this thin budget without camouflagging some security expenses.

The trouble with military budgets is that once you give in, it never goes down. The recently-dissolved High Level Public Expenditure Commission found that security expenses including defence and the police accounted for almost 17 percent of the total expenditure in the 2003-4 budget, up from barely nine percent in 1997-98.

“It is an alarming situation,” says economist Bidhubendra Pyakurai who headed the commission, “such a rise in security expenses cannot be sustainable especially when your income targets are not met.”

During the current fiscal year, the government’s aim was to increase revenue growth by 18 percent. But latest figures show it has gone up by only 12 percent.

The Royal Nepal Army is all set to revive its Integrated Security Development Program (ISDP) which it did in a half-hearted way in 2001-2 in Gorkha and some other districts. The idea is to move in after clearing the Maoists with health, education, roads and schools to win over the locals.

“We are preparing the budget in such a way that we can take both sides together as was conceptualised in the ISDP,” said one Finance Ministry source.

But this costs money, and the question is where will it come from: from the military budget or the development budget? Since the development budget is 80 percent donor-driven, they are sure to tax a dim view of such items.

Juggling the two roles will not be easy. The Deuba government has brought in what it called the ‘peace budget’ under a scheme that went by the acronym PCBPP (Participation Community Based People’s Project). The idea was to increase development spending by giving grants to village non-governmental bodies. Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari had then said, “We want to use this budget as a confidence building measure to build trust with the Maoists.”

It didn’t work. Even when community-based organisations well out of the government’s control, the Maoists,” said an ISDP publication. “If that is true, the situation is critically getting out of hand.”

The real question for the royal regime is how far the donors will go along with Rana’s idea of military spending as investment. Bilateral donors, especially the Europeans, don’t like it one bit. Multilaterals whose loans are down by 84 percent will also be reluctant. A top Finance Ministry official admitted to us: “Certainly, the development budget depends on what the donors give us.”

Some officials have claimed that they would mobilize ‘internal resources’. But with the revenue-targets unmet, exports, investments and economic growth down, it is unclear where that will come from. In the last few years internal borrowing has grown in direct violation of the Nepal Rastra Bank Act which caps such borrowing to only five percent of the budget. ●

SOURCE: NEPAL RASTRA BANK, ECONOMIC SURVEY. 2005 STANDS FOR FIRST 11 MONTHS OF NEPALI FISCAL YEAR, ALL FIGURES IN BILLIONS OF RUPEES
Cosmic spreads wings
Cosmic Air has been relentless in its expansion, adding two new sectors to its route map this week. Banaras and Kolkata. It will begin flying to Kolkata from 8 July and to Banaras from 9 July. With the addition of the South Pacific 100 jet in May last, Cosmic has continually increased its flight frequency, adding new sectors and pushing the competition further. Cosmic hopes to cash in on the inadequate seats on the two Indian sectors after Indian Airlines pulled out of Banaras and Royal Nepal discontinued Kolkata. It will fly three times a week to Kolkata on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and to Banaras on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. A special introductory fare of buy-one-get-one-free is offered on the two sectors. Cosmic is also seeking the approval from GAAN to operate two extra domestic routes—Bhadrapur and Pokhara—using its jets. Tests were conducted two months ago.

Meanwhile, another private airline, Air Nepal says it plans to bring its first leased 757 from Thailand later this month and commence flights to Dubai and Bangkok.

Lucky deposits
The government issued Rs 80 million a year keeping Lumbini afloat.

In clear conscience
Krishna Pahadi’s incarceration and release has lessons for the business community

whether or not he was jailed illegally. But tomorrow, some of them might be summoned to Police Headquarters to be told that their business licenses are being revoked or that company registrations are being cancelled or that they have to cough up steep fines for displacing the powers-that-be. Such a scenario is easy to imagine because the nightmarish consequence about keeping quiet when the government routinely bases its decisions on coercion and whims is that it feels holder to strike anyone anywhere at any time. Ultimately, what such a government does is reward those close to it, while making all other businesses fall far short of potting the invisible hand into the visibly grabbing hand, binding all to inaction. Political correctness was also a signal that the government had set its priorities. When activists are jailed, journalists’ work lives are curtailed and scholars are not allowed to travel abroad, all that the government succeeds in doing is in attracting negative publicity. In today’s 24/7 media where all the news that’s fit to search appears on Google, the long-term costs of incurring bad publicity far outweigh the short-term benefits from jailing people like Pahadi.

In recent years, rising global consumer activism has narrowed the distance between human rights concerns and hard-nosed business considerations. Ten years ago, for example, the bottlenecks almost fell out of Nepal’s carpet industry due to child labour issues. If today, unless garment companies enforce worker-friendly compliance procedures, they can’t sell clothes to international buyers, Businesses are increasingly being asked to either help mitigate human rights violations in countries where they work or risk investor’s wrath.

In such a charged context for doing business, let Pahadi’s case be a catalyst for Nepal’s businesses to come together. Let his walking out as a free man be symbolic of the environment in which Nepal’s businesses really thrive—without governmental arbitrariness and harmful worldwide publicity for Nepal.
Helpless and hopeless

Eight months after their uprising, the brave women of Dailekh are fending for themselves

ARUNA UPRETY in DAILEKH

For those living in Kathmandu Valley the rest of the country may as well be another planet. All they care about is that things are ok inside the Ring Road since February First. There may be an indefinite banda in Doti, all schools may be closed in Kailali, healthposts in Bajura may be without medicine, but one villager became so fed up. We had given them food when they asked for it. But when they wanted our children, we couldn’t stand it anymore. One day, they asked to participate in a meeting and we went armed with sticks. They began lecturing us from the roof of a house but we surrounded them and questioned them about all they had done to us. They started preaching their ideology again but one villager became so enraged that he beat them up. We captured and handed them over to the district administration. Since then, they have not returned. Still, we have to be careful. I sent my sons to Nepalgunj.

The Dullu uprising was a milestone and a lesson in courage for the whole country. But eight months later, few political parties spoke out for the women of Dailekh, the government in Kathmandu long ago. For the women of Dailekh, the revolution has not ended.

Kaphangpa, 21-year-old Kumati Shahi recalls that day in November when revolution turned into resistance: “We were fed up. We had given them food when they asked for it. But when they wanted our children, we couldn’t stand it anymore. One day, they asked to participate in a meeting and we went armed with sticks. They began lecturing us from the roof of a house but we surrounded them and questioned them about all they had done to us. They started preaching their ideology again but one villager became so enraged that he beat them up. We captured and handed them over to the district administration. Since then, they have not returned. Still, we have to be careful. I sent my sons to Nepalgunj.”

On the day of the revolution, the women of Dailekh stood up against the Maoists when the rebels stopped them from celebrating Dasain and tried to recruit their children. But when the rebels hunted down six members of a family they thought were ringleaders of the Dullu movement, the other villagers fled in panic with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

“We had a house, a piece of land and a quiet life but it all feels like a dream now, they took away everything,” says Kancha Devi, 20, a farmer.

“We have no more hectares to share,” says 21-year-old Kumati Shahi who fled with her child after her husband was killed.

Twelve already nine-months pregnant, recalls Kamala mother of five, “my labour pains began five, while we were on the trail to Dailekh Bajar, it delivered him right there on the road, my fifth child, he is now seven months old.”

The pain of Dailekh’s displaced has not eased with time. The women have empty eyes. Could that be the same country, the Nepal that we used to know?

Preksha Lamal, a teacher, tells us, “The Maoists wanted me to join their militia. I refused and fled here but they beat up my pregnant wife and she suffered a miscarriage. She is still in shock. I can’t even go to meet her and she’s too weak to walk here.”

Even villages who once used to agree with the Maoists’ goal of liberating the district from the feudal clutches of rulers far away have been let down. Once more, savages have turned themselves to be just another group using the people to propel themselves to power.

“They talk a lot about working for us common folks but they do just the opposite,” says Jhna Rokaya, a teacher from Dullu.

Kumati Shahi recalls that day in November when revolution turned into resistance: “We were fed up. We had given them food when they asked for it. But when they wanted our children, we couldn’t stand it anymore. One day, they asked to participate in a meeting and we went armed with sticks. They began lecturing us from the roof of a house but we surrounded them and questioned them about all they had done to us. They started preaching their ideology again but one villager became so enraged that he beat them up. We captured and handed them over to the district administration. Since then, they have not returned. Still, we have to be careful. I sent my sons to Nepalgunj.”

The Dullu uprising was a milestone and a lesson in courage for the whole country. But eight months later, few political parties spoke out for the women of Dailekh, the government in Kathmandu long ago.

Some names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.
Regional Museum Pokhara

The Regional Museum in Naya Bajar is a sad waste of government resources but not a waste of time. Built on prime land, the museum could have incorporated more than just life-size models of different ethnic cultures of the region. Models, photographs, objects and artefacts related to the everyday life of different ethnic cultures chiefly Gurung, Thakali and Tharu along with relevant information are displayed. But that’s about it. The tour ends abruptly with a life size replica depicting, aptly, a death scene.

Opening hours: Everyday except Saturdays.
Entrance: Tourists Rs10, SAARC Rs 5, Nepalis Rs 2 (cameras extra)

International Mountain Museum

Funded and built by the Nepal Mountaineering Association, the International Mountain Museum is in a class of its own. It is dedicated to mountain dwellers worldwide and offers a glimpse of life in the mountains as well as the history of expeditions.

The Mountain People Gallery consists of models of the lifestyle of different mountain peoples of the world. The Mountain Gallery has fascinating geological facts pertaining to the origin of world mountain systems. The Mountain Activities Gallery has exhibits of actual equipment used for historic climbs. Pioneer explorers like Ekai Kawaguchi and late Toni Hagen have been given special sections, which they truly deserve. There is even a section on the yeti. ICIMOD has a gallery with conservation as its main theme. The museum is working on a three-dimensional scale model of the entire Himalaya.

Opening hours: Everyday except Saturdays.
Entrance: Tourists Rs100, expats and SAARC Rs100, Nepalis Rs50, students Rs10.

Tamu Ghodio Museum

You’ll have to find your way to this one if you’re interested in the detailed life of Gurungs/Tamu people. Established in 1990 by the Tamu Priy. Lhu Singh and located on a ridge overlooking the Seti River in Shakti Ghat, Ranipauwa this small museum offers a detailed description of the different subclasses of the Tamu people. On display are ritual objects of Tamu shamans, models of different ceremonies related to their cultures and prayers in the Tamu language. The gumba/museum also serves as a public meeting place for the community and any rituals they need to conduct.

Opening hours: Monday-Friday, 10AM-5PM.
Entrance charges: Rs 10 for adults, Rs 2 for children below 10, cameras extra Rs 5.

DECORATIONS: Medals at the Gurkha Museum (opposite), Malayan Butterflies in the Annapurna Regional Museum and (above) clay models of shamans at the Gurung museum.
Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey has worked under three kings, served as minister six times in various governments and has been in the parliament for 20 years. He spoke to Nepali Times about King Gyanendra’s persona and says it is not true that Nepal is internationally isolated.

Nepali Times: How is it different, working with King Gyanendra?
Ramesh Nath Pandey: What I have seen with His Majesty King Gyanendra is great clarity of vision. He is a monarch who knows what he wants to achieve. He talks with conviction, there is no ambiguity, he listens to people and I have seen the people he meets are very impressed with his personality. Both in Doha and Jakarta recently, His Majesty’s addresses were very well received, the delivery was forceful and superb. He convinced the international community that his commitment to multiparty democracy is total. You have to look at it this way: the monarch has made this commitment to his people and the international community is standing witness. There should be no question that these commitments will be fulfilled.

Is King Gyanendra a hands-on king?
You know, this is my sixth tenure as minister. I must say, I have never seen cabinet meetings conducted with such efficiency. First of all, they always start punctually, there is no sidetalk, we get down to business and stay focused on the agenda. His Majesty listens very carefully to all shades of opinion and takes copious notes during the discussions. He encourages all the ministers to speak their mind and in fact decisions can be postponed if we can’t come to an agreement on things. Sometimes the cabinet meetings go on till 10.30 at night. In earlier governments I often encountered prime ministers who tried to impose their views on the cabinet but His Majesty listens to the ministers and decisions are taken after thorough discussions. And after the cabinet meeting, there are more confidential discussions with just the ministers present.

How about his personality?
On a personal level, His Majesty often shows genuine concern and humanity and always has a personal touch. His bottom line is always: “Esle janata lai dukkha huna hundaina.” And I have never seen any leader work as hard as he does. He reads a lot, not just newspapers and magazines but books. And he is on the Internet a lot. If I bring him something that I think he should read, usually I find he has already read it. Last year he asked me if I read a particular book on international relations that he had just finished. I hadn’t and I quickly ordered it. I have now been on two foreign visits with His Majesty and when I am summoned to the front of the plane during a flight, I always notice that His Majesty has been working, he has piles of paper on his desk.

There are critics who say that February First has increased Nepal’s international isolation. From my short time in the government, I can assure you that this is not the case. Not everything that happens gets out. For example, I went to New Delhi to explain our position which was that the threat of terrorism is genuine, the fate of Nepali democracy is at stake and that South Asia was vulnerable to instability in Nepal. I have met all the ambassadors here, some of the countries have understood the ground realities and have concluded agreements, we’ve had more foreign dignitaries visiting Nepal in the past five months than in the past 15 years. I think the international community has understood that terrorism has grown because of the lapses of the past 15 years, that His Majesty is committed to multiparty democracy and that the future of democracy in Nepal is related to stability in South Asia.

But not all is well in relations with one of our neighbours. If relations are based on trust and mutual respect and a recognition of sovereignty there are no problems. Take China for instance, it is an all-weather friend and even since diplomatic relations were established we’ve never had problems. I am making another visit to China soon. With India, it is important that Nepal’s aspirations should not be undermined. February one was taken decision according to the needs of the country and India should recognise that. In fact, we are fighting terrorism whom India itself calls ‘terrorists’. Democracy can’t be exported. From our side we have nothing but goodwill towards India. We have wasted 50 years because of the Indo- centricism of our politics. Economically visible projects were not implemented because the opposition party would always term the party in the government as ‘pro- Indian’. I met the Indian foreign minister and I told him let’s not waste anymore time. But sometimes it is difficult for us to figure out what India really wants.

Some analysts have found fault with our diplomacy. They say we have not been able to sell the changes in Nepal to the donor community. HM’s visit to Jakarta was very successful and productive in restoring Nepal’s image. He articulated his political vision and it was seen as the authentic voice of Nepal. The bilateral talks were very productive. Last month’s royal visit to Deha gave added stature to Nepal’s position and HM’s meeting with the Emir of Qatar and others paved the way for two very important agreements to be signed. The visit to UAE was also characterised by special warmth, the entire cabinet was present during His Majesty’s audience with the UAE leaders. The visits were triumphs of Nepal’s international relations, we have to remember that Nepal is a country with the oldest tradition of foreign relations in South Asia because the rest of the region was a British colony.

How about within the country? There appears to be a political stalemate. His Majesty has publicly asked the political parties to say that they are against terrorism, corruption and that they will maintain fiscal discipline and work together for early peace so we can have elections. I have

Salutations to
His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev
on the auspicious occasion of his
59th Birthday.

May His guidance always take us in the right direction.

Surya Nepal Pvt. Ltd.

CIVIL HOMES
CIVIL PROJECTS
CIVIL SAVINGS & CREDIT
Co-operative Ltd. Family

PROMOTED BY BANKERS AND ENGINEERS

Happy Birthday, Your Majesty

MIN. BAIRACHARYA
talked to the parties before and I am willing to talk to them again. But even while peace and security are restored, there are certain things we can do right away: we can depoliticise the bureaucracy, we can start working on economic development through positioning ourselves as the bridge between the two economic giants, India and China. In several meetings in Jakarta, Singapore and Doha with the business communities there interested in investing in Nepal several of them told us so-and-so ministers in the past wanted so much in bribes. We have to overcome this negative publicity, and do more to attract foreign investors as a way to boost economic activity by paying more attention to economic diplomacy.
We extend our heartiest felicitations to His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

On His 59th Birthday

On the auspicious occasion of His Majesty's 59th Birthday

Hearty Felicitations & Best Wishes for a Long, Happy and Prosperous Life to

HIS MAJESTY KING GYANENDRA BIR BIKRAM SHAH DEV

Best wishes for a long, happy and glorious life to

His Majesty The King
Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

Chairman: Padma Jyoti • Vice Chairman: Dr. Roop Jyoti

Jyoti Group, Jyoti Bhowan, Kantipath, Kathmandu
The Kenyan economics expert James Shikwati, 35, says that aid to Africa does more harm than good. The avid proponent of globalisation spoke with Der Spiegel about the disastrous effects of western development policy in Africa, corrupt rulers and the tendency to overstate the AIDS problem.

Der Spiegel: Mr Shikwati, the G8 summit at Gleneagles is about to beef up development aid for Africa...
Shikwati: ... for God’s sake, please just stop.

Stop! The industrialised nations of the west want to eliminate hunger and poverty. Such intentions have been damaging our continent for the past 40 years. The richer people and countries of the west have squandered our inheritance. They should finally terminate this awful aid. The countries that have collected the most development aid are also the ones that are in the worst shape. Despite the billions that have poured into Africa, the continent remains poor.

Do you have an explanation for this paradox? Hydroelectric projects are financed (with the aid money) corruption and complicity are promoted. Africans are taught to be beggars and not to be independent. In addition, development aid weakens the local markets everywhere and dampens the spirit of entrepreneurship that we so desperately need. As abstraction it may sound: Development aid is one of the reasons for Africa’s problems. If the west were to cancel these payments, normal African people wouldn’t even notice. The functions they would be hard hit. Which is why they maintain that the western world should stop turning without this development aid.

Even in a country like Kenya, people are starving to death each year. Someone has to get help.

But it has to be the Kenyans themselves. When there’s a drought in a region of Kenya, our corrupt politicians reflexively cry out for more help. This call then reaches the United Nations World Food Program—which is a massive agency of hangers who are in the absurd situation of, on the one hand, being fighting against hunger while, on the other hand, being faced with unemployment were hunger actually eliminated. It’s only natural that they will willingly accept the aid and help. Although it is not uncommon that they demand a little more money than the respective African government originally requested. They then forward that request to their headquarters and after long, several thousands tons of corn are shipped to Africa....

... corn that predominantly comes from highly-subsidised European and American farmers....

... and at some point, this corn ends up in the harbour of Mombasa. A portion of the corn often goes directly into the hands of unscrupulous politicians who then put it on to their own tribe to boost their next election campaign.

If they did that, many jobs would be immediately lost on the front because our farmers money would be wasted. It was made possible because many countries are collaborating more closely, said Barry Cable, director of ESCAP’s Transport and Tourism Division, at a ceremony marking the crossing of the ‘Silk Route of the Modern Age’, was crossed into force. First opened for signature in April 2004, the agreement has been signed by 27 countries including India, China, South Korea, Vietnam, Burma, Sri Lanka and Cambodia, has also ratified. Developed by the Bangkok-based Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a United Nations agency, the 141,000 km long road is expected to greatly enhance intra-regional trade and tourism.

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If the World Food Program didn’t do anything, the people would have been starved to death. I don’t think so. In such a case, the Kenyans, for a change, would be forced to initiate trade relations with Uganda or Tanzania, and buy their food there. This type of trade is vital for Africa. It would force us to open up to the world while making national borders—drawn by the Europeans—en more permeable. It would also force us to develop laws favouring market economy.

Would Africa actually be able to solve these problems on its own? Of course. Hunger should not be a problem in most of the countries south of the Sahara. In addition, there are vast natural resources: oil, gold, diamonds. Africa is always portrayed as a continent of suffering but most figures are vastly exaggerated. In the industrial nations, there’s a sense that Africa would go under without development aid. But believe me, Africa existed before you Europeans came along. And we didn’t do it that poorly either.

But AIDS didn’t exist at that time. If we were to believe all the horror reports, then all Kenyans should actually be dead by now. But, now tests are being carried out all over the world and it is clear that the figures are exaggerated. It’s not more than a few thousand Kenyans that are infected. All of a sudden, it’s only about one million. Malaria is just as much of a problem but people don’t really talk about it.

And why’s that? AIDS is big business, maybe Africa’s biggest business. There’s nothing else that can generate as much aid money as shocking figures on AIDS. AIDS is a political disease here and we should be very skeptical.

The Americans and Europeans have frozen funds previously pledged to Kenya. The country is too corrupt, they say. I am afraid, though, that the money will still be transferred before long. After all, it has to go somewhere. Unfortunately, the Europeans’ devasting urge to do good can no longer be countered because of court orders banning construction on the site of the ‘Ayodhya’ that are drawn up by a minority government and depend on support from coalition partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that opposed the Ayodhya building project. Tuesday’s attack is immediately brought rapprochement between the US and hardline organisations that support it. It also resulted in quick consultations among top council leaders who decided to drop the ‘demand’ from the list of 44, which is the sum total of His government’s interest in the land. The US will not, at any cost, allow the US to bring the Ayodhya back on the political contet.

BOKASSA, cynically summed it up by saying, “The French government pays for everything in our country. We ask the French for money. We get it and then we waste it.”

Following World War II, Germany only managed to get back on its feet because the Americans poured money into the country through the Marshall Plan. Wouldn’t that qualify as successful development aid?

In Germany’s case, only the destroyed infrastructure had to be repaired. Despite the economic crisis of the Weimar Republic, Germany was a highly industrialised country before the war. The damages created by the tsunami in Thailand can also be fixed with a little money and some reconstruction aid. Africa, however, must take the first steps into modernity on its own. There must be a change in mentality. We have to stop perceiving ourselves as beggars. These days, Africans only perceive themselves as victims. On the other hand, no one can really picture an African as a businessman. In order to change the current situation, it would be important not to allow the doctors to ever make their money. They will only make their money if we sell them our continent.

If they do that, many jobs would be immediately lost .... jobs that were created artificially in the first place and that distort reality. Jobs with foreign aid organisations are, of course, quite popular, and they can be very selective in choosing the best people. When an aid organisation needs a driver, dozens apply for the job. And, though it’s unacceptable that the aid worker’s chauffeur only speaks his own tribal language, an applicant is needed who also speaks English fluently—and, ideally, one who is also well mannered. So you end up with some African biologists driving an aid worker around, distributing European food and forcing local farmers out of their jobs. That’s just crazy!

Interview by Thilo Thielke, translated from German by Patrick Kessler.
Out of control

Peace and security

Editorial in Drishti, 28 June

While the government is blustering it’s trumpets about dramatic improvements in the country’s peace and security situation since 1 February, the Maoists have stepped up ruthless attacks across the country and even coordinated attacks in India.

Recent Maoist attacks in Khotang, Bardia, Bhojpur, Ghorhaut, Simikot, Simla, Archankhanchi and other places show the hollowness of the government’s claims.

After February First and the sideling of the centrist parties, palace extremism and Maoist extremism have intensified. This polarization between republicanism and royaltyism is leading to a prolongation of war. The brutality of the killings like Modi and Kiran making us wonder whether the two warring sides are just out to defeat each other by massacring civilians.

If, as is being publicized, it is indeed true that the Nepali Maoists garnered up with the Indian Maoists to carry out a joint attack in India then things can only grow worse. For India, which has been patiently waiting for a premise to intervene in Nepal, the Bihar incident can become a strong motivation. The current government, rather than trying to find out the truth behind the Maoist involvement in the attack in India seems to be busy assessing this incident as a pleasant opportunity to convince India to resume the supply of military hardware that had been stalled following the royal takeover.

Should it indeed be established that the Bihar incident was a joint-operation of Indian and Nepali Maoists then, more than harming India, it will affect the ruling class of Nepal.

Despots everywhere end up making the same mistake of using war as a protective shield.

Suicide behind bars

Editorial in Kantipur, 29 June

With three detainees committing suicide in military detention within three months, serious questions are being raised over the claims of the Maoists, that they are using using army barracks as detention centres. The possibility of torture in custody can’t be ruled out. In the first place, detention of civilians in military custody is illegal. Even the law brought in to tame the Maoists does not allow the use of barracks as detention centres. Section 9 of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance 2001 says that the places of detention should be humane although military detenues can’t do anything but. It is the duty of the state to respect and protect the basic human rights of detainees. Nor is the army able to go beyond the limits that prevailing humanitarian laws envisage. The government cannot deny them their basic human rights. But the above law even when it comes to dealing with those involved in Maoist violence.

First, the army must stop keeping civilians in custody. It is solely for the civil administration and the police to order arrests and detentions. In the meantime, authorities should refrain from preventing detainees from meeting their family members, doctors and legal advisors. Lack of transparency in terms of arrests and treatment of detainees only feeds suspicion toward the integrity of the state.

The Royal Nepali Army (RNA) has carried out internal investigation on some cases of human rights abuses and a few perpetrators have had action taken against them. But because of undercover detentions enforced by the RNA, it has not been able to investigate into cases which are admitted to be still ongoing. Instead it is carrying out joint security operations, which certainly is a daunting task. Notably, to contain any internal conflict, the army needs support and cooperation from the people in general just as it needs well-trained and skilled troops. It is imperative for security agencies to win the people’s trust. To do so, they need to show their role as the lawful, humane and transparent.

The RNA must immediately launch an internal probe to arrive at the questionssurfacing about the increasing suicides in its custody. Also, it should not forget that these cases are directly related to its credibility. An independent and legal investigation appears to be a must, particularly in the backdrop of recent incidents in military detention as well as the report issued by the human rights commission.

(Nepalnews.com Translation)

Back to the village

Nepal Samacharpatra, 1 July

TAMKHA—There is now hustle and bustle these days in Guilmi as political party representatives who had left their home district start to return. The seven-party alliance, especially the NC, UML and NCP-D have been rebuilding their networks in the villages here. UML district leader Kanal Shrestha says the people have always believed in democracy but the party leaders have been afraid of going back to their constituencies. “We may have made some mistakes but the February First other than using army barracks as detention centres. The possibility of torture in custody can’t be ruled out. In the first place, detention of civilians in military custody is illegal. Even the law brought in to tame the Maoists does not allow the use of barracks as detention centres. Section 9 of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance 2001 says that the places of detention should be humane although military detenues can’t do anything but. It is the duty of the state to respect and protect the basic human rights of detainees. Nor is the army able to go beyond the limits that prevailing humanitarian laws envisage. The government cannot deny them their basic human rights. But the above law even when it comes to dealing with those involved in Maoist violence.

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Seven parties:
“The itinerary is like this...first day informal meeting...second day discussions...third day give speeches here and there...fourth day we go around the city...fifth day...”

Speech: Revolution empowerment program

Sunday, 7 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“I’ve become much stronger in my ideals.”
NC leader Narhari Acharya after his release from a six-month long detention since 1 February, in Kantipur, 5 July.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Peace Secretariat

Jana Aastha, 29 June

administration’s pressures. Only six newspapers in constantly under surveillance. file stories secretly and are far west, journalists have had to have begun developing the center for conflict management and peace.” The Secretariat has a workforce of 21 staff.

UML
Kantipur, 3 July

CPN (UML) cadres have suggested the party leadership go for a decisive agitation without being trapped in what they call “charade of the royal palace”. That was the conclusion of the district and zonal committees of the party. The UML in preparing for its central committee meet beginning 30 July. The meeting will discuss this issue and hopefully, reach a conclusion. The leadership of the party had asked lower-level committees to suggest ways to re-strengthen party organisation and the party’s vision for the resolution of the February First crisis. UML cadres suggested that ideology, not the individuals, be the basis of restructuring the organisation. Secretary of the Central Secretariat, Amrit Kumar Bohara said, “There has been no suggestion from the committees for changes in the leadership or for a general internal change but we have stressed that the working style of the leadership should be rearranged in order to make the party’s approach dynamic and active.” Some UML leaders including Bara De Guinta have demanded an overhaul of the leadership.

BB in trouble
Kantipur, 3 July

Mohan Bikram Singh, general secretary of CPN (UML) Party) has quoted Baburam Bhattarai as saying be and his supporters are at risk of being killed. At a secret meeting with party leaders in Kathmandu on Saturday, Singh said that Bhattarai told him during meetings in New Delhi that he was worried about himself and his followers’ safety. “They are not safe,” Singh said. Bhattarai told Singh that even through he had been sent by the party to cultivate diplomatic relations with India he had not been

CHILDREN AGAINST VIOLENCE: School children from Harinarang with the Red Cross flag at the Madi bomb site. Ameeta Singh, a boy and his friend, (below) who helped the wounded in Madi.

Madi’s Young Citizens
Himal Khabapati
30 June-15 July

It was a shocking sight, especially for the young school children of Harinarang, to see so many dead bodies lying around everywhere after the Madi bus bombing last month. But their instinct to help fellow Nepalis galvanised them into action to help as many survivors as possible. This was the day when the country saw the bloodiest attack by Maoists militants on innocent civilians. But while the country was still reeling from the shock, a group of 25 students from Madi bravely provided immediate relief to survivors.

“We needed to control the bleeding of many people by bandaging them,” says Ameeta Gayak, a grade eight student who also works with the Junior Red Cross Circle. The students lifted the injured passengers and put them in tractors and ox carts and dispatched them to the nearest health centre. Others were engaged in securing the area by placing ropes to avoid any more risk to the survivors and to prevent them from losing their money, jewellery and other belongings. “We carried our Red Cross flag and suppressed our emotions in order to help them,” says Ameet. “We managed not to show any weakness to the wounded people,” adds another student Hari Krishna Lamichhane.

At first, the students became afraid when they saw guns and ammunitions clips lying on the ground but later they handed over all these to the five RNA soldiers who were there. Encouraged by the brave children, adult villagers also joined in to provide help. Bishnu Maya Poudel, a 55-year-old resident, helped the children even though her son and daughter-in-law were lying on the ground after the explosion. Fortunately, both had survived. Daughter and a friend of Baskon Hingh at Sarnath had fainted after she found herself under the heap of bodies. But when she regained consciousness, she collected herself and helped an injured child and her sister-in-law. She had searched for her brother but found him dead. Such voluntary and brave spirit displayed by the students of Madi was so overwhelming that it led to the ICRC calling them ‘model citizens’. While the Maoists displayed inhumanity and terrorism, the Madi villagers spread compassion and humanity.

Programme Coordinator
IUCN Nepal

REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES: The Programme Coordinator will report to the IUCN Nepal Country Representative (CPR) on all programme and administrative matters, and to the Regional Programme Coordinator, Asia on all programme coordination matters.

RESPONSIBILITIES: Under the guidance of the IUCN Nepal Country Representative and in collaboration with the Programme Coordinator, will coordinate the IUCN Nepal Programme at the country level to ensure effective and timely development, planning, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of all the projects and coherent programme for IUCN Nepal.

The main responsibilities are:

1) Programme and Project Planning, Monitoring and Reporting
2) Programme and Project Development
3) Capacity Development in Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

DUTY STATION: The position of Programme Coordinator IUCN Nepal will be based in IUCN Nepal Country Office in Kathmandu.

DURATION: The initial contract will be for a period of 2 years with long term prospects for the right candidate.

QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS REQUIRED:

The successful candidate will:

• An advanced degree in natural resources management or relevant field of study with appropriate experience.
• At least 5 to 7 years of experience and competence in management and coordination at a senior level, experience in project implementation and execution or relevant project work of high quality.
• An understanding of technical and institutional complexities in the Asia Region and projects in particular and experience in project coordination and management.
• Pertinent technical background and appropriate managerial skills.
• Excellent communication, writing and presentation skills in English.
• Proficient in the use of MS Office (Word, Excel and PowerPoint).
• Fluency in spoken English is essential. Knowledge of Nepali will be an added advantage.

Interested candidates should send their applications and CV along with the names of two referees by 5 August 2005 to: Human Resources Unit, IUCN - The World Conservation Union, Asia Regional Office, # 63 Sukhumvit 39, 10110-Bangkok, Thailand. Tel: +66 2 662 4061; Fax: +66 2 662 4390; email: iucn@iucn.org. Contact: http://www.iucn.org

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A tortured past and torturous future

The UN is sending a special envoy to report on the rise in torture cases in Nepal’s conflict

NARENDRA JHA

The UN is a security agency that has been trying to protect the human rights of people in conflict situations. It has sent a special envoy to Nepal to investigate the rise in torture cases. The envoy is expected to report on the situation and recommend measures to prevent further abuse.

However, many activists believe that the UN is not doing enough to protect the rights of the victims. They say that the UN should take stronger action to ensure the safety and well-being of those affected by the conflict.

Despite the challenges, the activists remain hopeful that change is possible. They believe that by working together, they can bring about positive change in the country.

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FACT FINDER: UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Manfred Nowak, is visiting Nepal in September to investigate torture cases.

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Nima Dorje Lama was lucky he survived, others never made it out alive

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Nima Dorje Lama was in bed when a security patrol hanged on his door in Rayle of Kabhre district on the night of 4 November 2003. Thinking they could be Maoists, they didn’t go to open the door right away. When he did, the soldiers arrested him on suspicion of being a Maoist. They found a pressure cooker in his kitchen and some rice. That was all the evidence they needed.

Lama, 38, was taken to a security camp in Mahadevi near Kholbe and then to Singha Nath Gan in Bhaktapur. He was stripped naked and beaten mercilessly. He was taken to the ICRC’s Malpi and Rosi Khola and then to Kathmandu two years in army detention in Kailali when he refused to pay Rs100,000 and join them.

Dorje’s father Ram Bahadur Lama approached the Tamang Gheung, an organisation that looks after the welfare of the Tamang community, which contacted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It was able to get Nima’s messages to his father. After he returned from hospital to the army barracks, he was kept in isolation until 2 March 2004 and then transferred secretly to Central Bhaustang Jail. But his family members had no idea of his whereabouts.

“Even the CID said I didn’t know where my son was being kept,” says Ram Bahadur. The ICRC looked for Nima in Nakkhu and Dilhi Hajar and finally found him in Bhaustang where he was able to meet his father and family members—his wife and three children.

The Tamang Gheung with the help of Amnesty International took Nima’s case to the courts and he was released due to lack of evidence. “I was innocent. They tortured me to the point where I was committing suicide,” says a subdued Nima Dorje, “financial compensation is meaningless, they have to admit they made a mistake and apologize.”

Nima Dorje once worked in the army as a porter in the RNA’s lowest rank but quitted in 1999 to open a shop in his village. Till then the murder of its VDC chairman Rayle hadn’t seen any rebel activity. A majority of the villagers in this dairy-farming region are Tamang and most are either employed in Kathmandu or working in India. The only sign of any rebellion here is graffiti painted on the walls of the local health centre. It now looks like non-Tamang residents who had an axe to grind against Ram Bahadur told the army that Nima was a Maoist.

Nima Dorje says he owes his survival in solitary confinement to his faith, he spent his time reading and helping renovate a gumba inside the prison. Ram Bahadur used to travel from Rayle to Central Jail twice a week with food for his son and those visits kept Nima’s morale up.

For someone who suffered injuries at the hands of the very force he once served, there is in Nima Dorje a surprising lack of bitterness. He also disagrees with the Maoist’s path of violence and says: “Both sides are wrong, they should solve this without violence and keep ordinary people like us out of it.”

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The 2002 TADA gave special protections against human rights violations, such as the Public Security Act, the Public Offence Protection Act, the State Crimes and Penalties Act, the Public Offence Act and the State Crimes and Penalties Act. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been working in Nepal since 1996, the centre has treated nearly 3,430 arrests in 2002, the highest ever recorded over the nine-year period since 1996. A joint study by CVICT and National Human Rights Commission showed that most of those detained end up being tortured despite constitutional guarantees and ratification of several international human rights treaties. The report was recently submitted to Manfred Nowak, the special rapporteur on torture of the UN Commission on Human Rights who is scheduled to visit Nepal in September.

“Special rapporteur takes the initiative of approaching governments with a view to carrying out visits to countries on which he has received information indicating the existence of a significant risk of torture or an actual risk of torture,” says advocate Mandana Sharma of Advocacy Forum which with CVICT have been speaking out on the issue. According to an ongoing custody monitoring in 16 districts, all individuals detained under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) have been tortured.

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“The special rapporteur takes the initiative of approaching governments with a view to carrying out visits to countries on which he has received information indicating the existence of a significant risk of torture or an actual risk of torture,” explains David Johnson, senior human rights treaty.

Activists want an independent body to investigation torture cases and say the government should repeal or revise laws that undermine constitutionally guaranteed protections against human rights violations, such as the Public Security Act, the Public Offence and Punishment Act, the Anti-State Crimes and Penalties Act and TADA.