Comrades-in-arms
Looking at Nepal’s Maoist revolution through Indian Naxalite eyes

CK LAL in BIHAR

Here in the densely populated Ganga plains, the 10-yard strip separating Nepal and India has never been treated like a national frontier. Land is too precious to leave it as a no-man’s land. Nepali and Indian farmers use it for grazing livestock, playing cricket or even growing vegetables.

But as the Maoist war in the Nepal tarai intensifies, the Indian fear of spillover of violence has begun to change that relaxed attitude. Along with border check-points, the traditionally open dasgaja strip too is now under close security watch. India’s paramilitary SSB (SSB) now pull up rickshaw wallahs if they park their tricycles on no-man’s land.

Security is stricter than before and there is talk here of introducing identity cards and barbed-wire fences to regulate cross border movement. Still, the India-Nepal frontier is probably the most relaxed international border in the world.

The SSB guard does ask you where you are headed as you saunter across but doesn’t even blink when you answer that you are going to Panditji’s paan shop down the road.

On the Nepal side, every shopkeeper is up to date on the latest Maoist exploits. In Bihar, despite media hype about the Naxalite ‘menace’ engulfing 160 districts in 12 Indian states, people along the border seem barely aware of the activities of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar or the People’s War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh. The two merged last year to form the CPI-Maoist but a local teacher isn’t even aware of it.

Even after last month’s Naxalite attack on the town of Madhuban in which 21 people were killed and six government buildings razed (see ‘Spillover’, #254), there is a surprising lack of concern about Maoist activity along the border.

If the local people aren’t the least bit interested, we thought we should try to track down an Indian Maoist to ask if there was indeed collaboration with their Nepali comrades during the attack, as alleged by Bihar police.

EDITORIAL
Democracy in installments
KIRAN PANDAY

Up ahead:

Continued p2
I was an unengaged email from a well-known author and editor, a pahadi janajati, citing the example of the perhaps best-known madheshi figure in the stories. Or as one madheshi journalist bitterly complained during a conference, “When you look at the Madhesis, you ignore madheshi except to portray them in bad light. A reputed organization which has published a series of landmark books on the media’s coverage of dalits and janajatis has not yet brought out a publication on the media and madhesis.

We often complain that Nepal is almost Governed by the media world except when there are stories about poverty, violence, political instability and natural disasters. In a similar manner, pahadi media gatekeepers are doing injustice to madhesis (and many other groups) by what they cover, more importantly by what they omit. The violence of enmity is perhaps even more painful for the madhesis for they are fellow Nepalis—and they would like their compatriots to know them, to hear their voices and heard them discuss discussed nationally just like other Nepalis.

Madhesis are Nepalis and not just the residents of the southern plains.
**WFP REPLIES**

World Food Program (WFP)

Nepal wishes to disagree and argue certain statements made by James Shikwati in an interview from Der Spiegel reprinted in your paper: ‘For god’s sake, please stop the aid’, #250.

JS: ‘WFP is a massive agency of apparatus.’

WFP is a United Nations development agency guided by humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality (to which transparency and accountability are often added). Therefore, it is not political but rather apolitical.

JS: ‘WFP makes no more money than the respective host governments require.’

WFP estimated requirements are based on comprehensive food need assessments which are conducted by food security experts in consultation and coordination with host governments and relevant national civil society actors (ie NGOs).

JS: ‘WFP assistance comes predominantly from highly subsidised European and American food aid.’

A large portion of WFP’s global food purchases (69 percent) is made in developing countries. In Nepal, 85 percent of WFP’s food assistance is locally purchased from Nepali producers and suppliers. JS: ‘WFP food assistance goes directly into the hands of unscrupulous politicians and another portion ends up on the black market.’

WFP food assistance is entirely intended for its targeted beneficiaries, mainly hungry poor rural populations. WFP has set up extensive monitoring and control mechanisms ensuring that the food reaches food insecure households. Such mechanisms also prevent WFP food assistance from being sold in markets. Less than 0.5 percent of WFP food assistance is misappropriated or ends up on markets.

WFP Nepal Country Office, Patan

**MUSEUM PIECE**

As a founder member of Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh and the first director of the Kohinbo Museum I was delighted to see the review of our museum in your paper (‘Museum town’, #255). But it contained some inaccuracies.

Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh was founded in 1990 and our museum was opened in 1997. It provides a guide to Tamu cultural heritage and in particular to our shamanic traditions. It does not offer a detailed description of the different subclusters of the Tamu people. This statement is a misrepresentation of our exhibition and has the potential to create bad feelings. There are different clans in Tamu society, all of whom are equal but there are no ‘subclasses’.

Yanjung K Tamu, director, Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh Museum, Pokhara.

**TERRORISM**

While it is sad that more than 50 innocent people died in London blasts, as a Nepali I am tempted to ask the British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield what is the difference between a bomb blast in a passenger bus in Chitwan and the blast in a double-decker bus in London? If the tragedies were equivalent, there is no rationale for the British government to keep arm-twisting Nepali neighbors to keep the Maoist rebels at bay while it has vowed to ‘eliminate terrorism through determination and resolve’.

Shouldn’t we issue a travel warning to Nepali tourists not to make unimportant trips to London? Shouldn’t we also issue a travel warning to the British government to negotiate and accept the genuine demands of the Maoist people for a just and democratic solution to the context of the British army and the British intelligence totally failing to curb terrorism?

Preeti Kolari, Baneswor

**CASTE ASSISTANCE**

I agree with Manjushree Thapa that the caste system is still very much a part of Nepal society (‘Let’s talk about’, #254) but I don’t agree with categorising people on the basis of their caste and forming opinions on whether they are capable or not. It is ok to be a Chetteri and hold a high position if that person is there because of his knowledge and experience. Just because a person is from a disadvantaged background he is not vested with special treatment incapable of capability and development. The country cannot go ahead with this naya sanskriti type of social baggage.

Raj Bahadur Chand, Seoul

**.bill**

Having seen Ashmina Ranjani’s performance at my college here in the US I am very disappointed to see it was responded to so tepidly. I hope that he received in your review (‘Into the heart of darkness’, #254). It is a full, unpretentious, and highly boring performance and I am quite surprised that a newspaper of your stature has stooped so low.

Ms Ranjani’s performance was dwarfed by the greatness of the play which mentions that your reviewer portrays and in no way can I describe her description of a cow to the current situation in Nepal. It is an affront to our country and its artistically community to have such feeble performances.

Nepal Bhupal Dhungel, Bard College, USA

**JIRI ROAD**

I just had a visit to Jiri and Charkot last month. This was my fourth visit to Jiri since 1992. I can see the meaningful impact of the road to the whole Dolakha and neighboring districts as mentioned in Pragya Shrestha’s article (‘The great green road’, #254). My conclusion is that building the road is the most important part of the economy of the area in mind as the Swiss did it in the key to this success. I am quite tempted to hear that the district rural road project is expanding to 18 other districts which is another sign of the road’s positive impact. While in Jiri and Charkot last time, I asked myself if the people here would be better off without the road. The answer is definitely not.

And that’s all that counts.

Devi P. Dahal, Training & Employment Project

**LETTERS**

Nepal Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, please give your real names and contact details will be given preference. All letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com
Fax: 917-1-5261013
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPS Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
LESS SEEDS, MORE HARVESTS: Ananta Ram Majhi’s points to weedy rice seedlings, while agriculture extension officer, Rajendra Uprety, examines copious tillers on a field Majhi planted with the new technique in April (right)

The miracle is it’s no miracle

Seeing is believing for rice farmers in eastern Nepal who are reaping bumper paddy harvests from fewer seeds

KUNDA DIXIT in MORANG

On a recent morning, Ananta Ram Majhi was getting ready to transplant another plot of paddy in this tranquil, green village 30 km east of Biratnagar. The monsoon was late and other farmers had delayed replanting but Dan Bahadur was ready. He is one of a dozen farmers in Morang trying out a new method of rice planting that doesn’t need flooded fields, produces stronger plants that don’t need artificial fertilisers and pesticides, and yet yields bigger harvests.

It’s almost too good to be true. This skeptical reporter wants to find a hole in the story to shatter the myth of this miracle rice. But the miracle is that it’s no miracle.

This is not a high-yield genetically engineered rice but the normal muskull variety of local seed. Only the method of cultivation is different: instead of waiting six weeks, the seedlings are transplanted when they are only two weeks old. The field doesn’t have to be flooded, in fact it needs to be drained of excess water. The seeds are planted farther apart so that while a normal paddy field needs 50 kg of seed per hectare, the new method uses less than 10 kg. And the paddy field needs 50 kg of seed per hectare, planted farther apart so that while a normal

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Nepal's first flying school
As the number of military and civilian aircrafts increase, the Royal Nepal Army has decided to get into flight training from Kathmandu airport. COAS Pyar Jung Thapa inaugurated the Royal Nepal Army Aviation Training Centre on Wednesday at the premises of the 11th Brigade on the occasion of the king's birthday. Six pilots are enrolled in the first batch and instructors will be from the military as well as from CAAN. The army will be training its own pilots as well as changing a fee to train civilian pilots.

Apartments in Pokhara
Annapuma Developers have built Fishtail Residency, the first apartment complex in Pokhara. Sprawled on the outskirts with a magnificent view of Machhapuchhre it consists of 63 apartments, three business houses, four community buildings and 70 residential houses.

Easy fares
Indian Airlines has started new fares called 'Easy Fare' for travel to various destinations within India. Under this scheme, it is available for sale on four levels of fares with discounts up to 60 percent on published fares.

New Product
MARKING: NOMARKS, a flagship brand of Ozone Ayurvedics, has launched the herbal cream in 12 gm packs that easily fits into handbags and pockets. It is available now at retail outlets and pharmacies across Nepal for Rs 46.40.

The economics of freedom
Curtailment of economic freedom is detrimental to a nation's growth
Kishanlal R. Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, speaks about economic freedom and why Nepal should not also curtail it.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed
why countries should pursue reforms else run the risk of losing out in the global race for economic supremacy.

Scotland: The Git urges countries to open up their economies more, emphasising on the direct correlation between poverty reduction and economic freedom.

Beijing: Condoleeza Rice tells Chinese leaders to pursue the path of economic freedom.

Studies have shown there is direct correlation between economic freedom and economic growth. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the state of eastern European economies as well as that of most African countries demonstrate this adequately.

Economic freedom also has direct correlation with the system of governance. Again, studies have suggested that countries which pursue pluralism in their political structure provide more economic freedom. The perusal of economic freedom mandates least interference from the state and that happens best perhaps in a democratic political structure. With plural political forces, there is constant check on the government in power.

In South Asia, we have seen that democra- tic India has more economic freedom than militarily-ruled Pakistan. That perhaps also explains the economic growth of India outstripping Pakistan.

Academia has always locked horns in the debate of whether China with its single-party rule might lose its momentum of economic growth to India which has more political freedom.

Nepal's experiment with reforms and loosening of state controls was the reason for higher growth rates early in the decade lead to positive results. The GDP economy in the early 1990s did prove detrimental to a nation's growth. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the state of eastern European economies as well as that of most African countries demonstrate this adequately.

Economic freedom has always proved detrimental to a nation’s economic growth and economic freedom is directly correlated to political freedom. www.arthabeed.com

#256BUSINESS
15 - 21 JULY 2005

HOT IN SOUR: Himalayan Snacks and Noodles Pvt Ltd has introduced Mayos Hot & Sour, the instant noodles' latest flavour. The product is available at all stores.

www.arthabeed.com
Protests that go nowhere

NC leader Narayan Acharya (seen left being released last week) in Budhakot, 13 July

There are still some ambiguities in the common agenda of the seven parties that have been agitating against the royal takeover. The agreement has been unable to bring about a common mission statement. Since there is no uniformity in the opinion and commitment of the parties’ demands, the movement has not been able to convince the people. Forget about the people, the movement has not even been able to attract the parties’ own activists. The process of internal debate within the parties has become very weak. There have been efforts to coordinate but when there is no open debate to generate the necessary energy for the movement, such coordination isn’t productive. Even the NC and the UML have not thrashed out their differences. Every time the parties bring out new protest programs, it appears to be a rehashed version of the same old things. If this is going to be a real movement, it shouldn’t limit itself to the parties. In a genuine people’s movement, protest programs are shaped spontaneously by the people. In 1990, we witnessed how the movement grew organically out of the decay of the Panthayat. Today, it appears that the parties want to keep the situation under their control. They have been strictly regulating days, schedules, slogans and even the speeches. It is becoming increasingly clear that the parties do not want to see the active involvement of individuals in their protest. The role about the parties has been to simply set the schedules and carefully calibrating the level of protest. If they control everything, the demonstrations will just be on paper. If this is going to be a real movement, such coordination isn’t possible anymore. The people have been left out. It is time that it is happening now and that is where things will stay.

Innocent targets

Samaun, 15 July

BAGLUK—Seventeen high school students from Beni had gone home to their villages for holidays. They never returned. On the way, the Maoists accused them of leaving the village to go to school without their permission. The rebels had told them to study in the village school but the classes had been disrupted because the Maoists themselves had forced Grade Nine students without their permission. The rebels had told the students to return to their schools in the village school. The students had forced away. A student from Bhanu Secondary School who had been forced away from her class without even getting a chance to tell her parents trembles as she recalls. Her parents were even more frightened. The Maoists are obviously doing this as a part of their recruiting drive and to tap young minds which are more malleable. But most of the schoolchildren say they end up out of fear and if it were up to them, they would just return to their studies. The Galmi Baglung head of the Maoist affiliated student union, Sarad Oli, says his group is in a militisation phase and the training of students is a part of that process. The Maoists have already closed down 49 private schools in the region and only one is still running. The Maoists say they take the campaign to work because government schools have improved their SLC records. Out of 38 students who appeared in the SLC from the Nepal Secondary School, 27 passed. But the closure of private schools has increased the enrolment in government schools and there are cases where 185 students study in a single class.

Abuser of authority

Nepal Sarumarhati, 12 July

After Prachanda called on the political parties on Sunday to set up a negotiating team, the parties are learnt to be dark in discussions about how to respond. But the Maoists themselves haven’t set up any such negotiating team of their own. If Girija Koirala is in the team then the Maoists are expected to set up a new team, according to the Maoist mouthpiece Janadhikar. Sources say the Maoist offer for talks came after secret negotiations between them and after Koirala affirmed he was ready to talk if the Maoists stopped attacking political colleagues at the party. Adhikari was released after a few strings were pulled but only on the condition that the managing editor of the paper Baghpati Saha would be produced before the police. Adhikari was taken into police custody without a warrant at 10 AM last Friday on the orders of Regional Administrator Chakraborty. Adhikari, who supports the king’s direct rule, was first taken to the Ward Police Office Birta, transferred to the District Police Office in Parsa and then sent to the Mid-Zonal Regional Administrator’s office in Hetauda that very day. Speaking to colleagues at the Nepal Journalists Federation Parsa, Adhikari said he wasn’t even allowed to call his family members.

Royal bash

Samaun, 14 July

The king arrived a bit late for his 59th birthday bash organised specifically for journalists on 1 July. They stood still as he made his entrance dressed in a white shirt, trousers, black waistcoat and a dhaka topi, expecting him to chat like he did last year. But he walked past them with a serious face that left journalists surprised and disappointed. This year, 15 minutes after he had arrived, he took his place on a throne-shaped chair, impressing that it was not necessary for the king to either listen or find out what was happening in the kingdom. It clearly proved that he no longer saw himself as a constitutional figurehead but as the chief executive. Two years ago, at a public felicitation in Nepalgunj, he declared that he was not possible for a 21st century monarch to be seen only by the people. However, this year, he was ready to talk if the Maoists stopped attacking political colleagues at the party.

Eye for an eye

Editorial in Dhriddhi, 12 July

The action and behaviour of state authorities prove that the country has been pushed back to the 16th century where law was nonexistent. Dictatorial behaviour is dominant. It is the government’s responsibility to oversee the arrest and interrogation of suspects but when it is involved in atrocious treatment of civilians, we need to rethink things. Security forces dragged Rama of Japa out from inside his house and beat him to death in front of her family members. How is this different from the Maoist atrocity that took place in March? When a policewoman and her child were killed in cold blood? The state is literally Citizens, they should not give any excuse to be compared to the Maoists. Rama’s murderer must face justice. The state will show state security as barbaric and uncivilised.

Forced march

Rajdhani, 9 July

Human rights and child welfare groups have spoken out strongly against the government forcing students to march on the streets on various anniversaries and ceremonies. Often, the children have marched under the scorching sun or in the rain and there have been cases of children fainting from dehydration. They also face frequent threats and even violation of human rights. They have asked government organs, schools and others not to use children to march on the streets. Earlier, it used to be political parties, now it is the government that is forcing children to march on the streets using the excuse of one occasion or another.
Himal Khabarpatrika: How has the past five months of the royal regime been?

Dirgharaj Prasai: February First was a result of the incompetence of the political parties. Unfortunately, His Majesty couldn't find the right people.

Even this regime is incompetent, corrupt and in the grip of smugglers and that is why there is no national unity. The euphoria of the royal takeover has now evaporated.

Why do you think the political parties aren't on board?

The king doesn't have people around him who want the parties on board. Why should anyone try to agree with people who are intent just on provocation? That is why the parties and the Maoists haven't come for negotiations. The people around the king want to push His Majesty towards authoritarianism. The RCCC shouldn't have character assassinated Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, who is the most committed democrat. That doesn't help the king.

Maybe you're being critical because you didn't get a position?

I am speaking the truth because I am a patriot, I have to speak against those who are bent on destroying the monarchy. There is no greater danger to the nation than having a monarchy that is not for the country.

British Council Nepal is seeking to recruit a Regional Executive Assistant to provide support to the British Council’s Regional Director for Central and South Asia who is based in Kathmandu. This is a new and exciting post which will work closely with British Council offices in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The aim of the post is to provide logistical and administrative support to the Regional Directorate team both in Kathmandu and in the wider region. This post will also develop and run new communications and management information systems to enable the teams in the region to communicate, share information and knowledge and network effectively with each other.

This is a post for a highly efficient person with initiative and creativity who enjoys systems development as well as taking on new challenges. It is ideal for someone who is a good team-player but also likes working independently.

Apply to:
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Email: general.enquiry@britishcouncil.org.np
Creating opportunities for people worldwide

Kiran Panday
Double traverse in the
Diary of a rainshadow trek

STEPHEN J KEELING

Days 1, 2, 3 and 4.
Fly Pokhara-Jomsom (2,710 m) and the next day reach Muktinath (3,780 m). Climb the dramatic Dzong Dada (5,200 m) that towers north of Muktinath. Tough going with no clear path to the top and great views towards Upper Mustang. Next day ascend Thorung La pass (5,416 m) and then head east and down, overnighting in the dramatic surroundings of Thorung Phedi.

Day 5.
Down to Manang village (3,540 m) with my mind on the challenge of crossing back over the Annapurna massif to Jomsom via Tilicho (lake). Accounts of this trip warn of difficult route finding and inaccurate maps.

Day 6.
Not feeling too well but ‘the thing that drives me’ starts to rumble. I buy a walking stick for the treacherous scree slopes ahead and head for Khangsar village. I find the keeper of Tilicho Base Camp Lodge. He agrees to open the lodge. He promises to follow me out there and points out the way—an improbable-looking route across some distant steep scree slopes. Beginning to feel good as my engine engages. Climbing and climbing and taking in the amazing wild landscape of snow peaks, forests, whitewater streams and anticipating the challenge ahead.

What was driving me on was the prospect of the beautiful wild landscapes and the need to push my limits now and again. I am not suicidal but like a challenge. “Never trek alone!” “Take a guide as the route is arduous and difficult to find.” “Only climb 300 m a day over 3000 m altitude!” You can set aside this sensible advice if you know what you are doing, are fit and the conditions are favourable.

What a fantastic trail through huge scree slopes and along cliff sides. I linger taking in the wilderness atmosphere and the precipitous drops as the lodge keeper catches up with me. We pass scarecrows designed to keep snow leopards away.

Day 7.
The next morning’s pull up to the lake is tough. There is 800 m of lung-bursting altitude to climb with my rucksack feeling like it’s full of boulders. I cross the rim and...what a sight...a huge expanse of azure water surrounded by rock, snow and ice. It is 11AM as I set off towards the other end of the lake. I take the safe route the long way round the eastern side over two high passes. I am slowing down and have to push myself forward. Passing a few blue sheep I soon reach the first 5,240 m pass. The path then peters out and from here the going gets really tough for the next, somewhat challenging, 24 hours. I navigate along the side of a melting glacier to the Eastern Pass (5,340 m). Tentref views of the lake framed by a cliff-sided gully.

At 4.15 PM I lift myself up and set off towards Meso Kanta La (5,121 m) along the large lateral moraines. I make good progress but keep losing the path as I follow the suggested route from the Internet round the north of a shark-toothed peak. I plod on at a pace of about 30 steps and then a minute’s rest.

At 6PM I reach the saddle and look into the valley leading towards Jomsom. The gusting wind and the late hour stop me from lingering. The next part is supposed to be pretty treacherous and so I quickly head down what is the wrong steep scree and boulder-filled gully. A few large stones whiz past. I keep to the side thankful for my 25-rupee stick to negotiate the patches of steep snow and ice.

I feel relief from the drop in altitude (4,700 m). Now it is a
question of finding the route. I can’t make sense of the map and am convinced it is wrong. Anyway, I am heading in roughly the right direction and losing altitude but the indistinct tracks show no human footprints. I have in my mind the need to avoid the risky prospect of stumbling into the army’s high-altitude warfare training camp below Nilgiri in the half light.

Heading further northwest and down I reach the treeline. I keep going by the light of the half moon and at 8PM, stop at a level patch of dusty ground and spread my sleeping bag out for the night.

Day 8.
I don’t get much sleep worrying about a leopard leaping on me. Somehow feel quite rested as I set off at 5.30 AM the next morning. I head down into a ravine clambering through wild forest.

Below I try to work my way downstream but soon find my way barred by a waterfall with no way around. I then head back upstream and pass what looks like a fresh bear footprint on a boulder. I then try to climb out the opposite side up some slatey scree and cliffs thinking that if I come across a bear’s den with cubs I’ll be a goner.

Near the top it gets too risky and I painstakingly pick my way back down. Finally I manage to clamber up the northeast side of the ravine reaching more level ground at about 11AM with great relief. After crossing another ravine I reach a good path and a few hours later, pace into Jomsom feeling relieved and quite exhilarated but puzzled about my route-finding difficulties.

The next morning sitting in Pokhara airport waiting for the connection to Kathmandu I take another look at the map. I laugh out loud as it suddenly makes sense. I pick out the meandering route across the contours I had taken the day before and realise that the Internet route photo was wrong and had sent me to the wrong side of the shark tooth peak. Next time I’m going for a beach holiday in Thailand, although the time after that I’ll be back in the hills.

The first part of the route follows the Annapurna Circuit in a clockwise direction from Jomsom to Manang village. Most people do the circuit anti-clockwise partly to avoid having to climb the Thorung La pass from the Muktinath side as it involves 1,700 m of ascent.

Quite a number of trekkers reach Tilicho from Manang as an acclimatisation trip with all Tilicho Base Camp Lodge on the way. Very few make the trip over to Jomsom from Tilicho and it does help if you know the right way!
Nepal's slide began with the beginning of the insurgency 10 years ago and it was after the royal massacre of 1 June 2001 that things really started hurting out of control.

The person with a ringside seat to all this is Narayan Wagle, the journalist who rose up the ranks to become the chief editor of Kantipur. He taught himself English spending days at the British Council while the People's Movement protests raged on the streets outside.

Unlike most of his laid-back peers, Narayan was never satisfied with reporting just on the corridors of power in the capital. He'd rather be trekking to remote corners of the country bringing stories of neglect and apathy to the notice of a government in faraway Kathmandu. It helped that Narayan loved to travel and had a spirit of adventure instilled in him by his doting father. Growing up in Tanahun, Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim in the river that after he nearly drowned twice, his parents sold off their riverside property and moved to a farm up the valley, the icy ramparts of the Annapurnas. There, the young Narayan was so fond of taking high dives to swim

Narayan Wagle's first novel drags us to the edge of a country torn apart by the conflict. Nepal's slide began with the beginning of the insurgency 10 years ago and it was after the royal massacre of 1 June 2001 that things really started hurting out of control.

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**Underfed and underfunded**

Seventy percent of child deaths in Nepal are indirectly a result of malnutrition

**NARESH NEWAR**

Despite recent official statements about rising average living standards, grinding poverty and the conflict, the effects of junk food in cities have made undernourishment and malnutrition a serious national epidemic.

Protein-energy malnutrition affects 63 percent of Nepali children which means they don’t get enough food to ensure normal physical and mental development. More than half of Nepali children are therefore physically stunted, and although this is reversible if the child starts eating enough after age two, they may suffer learning disabilities as well if undernourishment persists.

Hunger increases their susceptibility to diarrhoea, measles and acute respiratory infection. Diarrhoeal dehydration alone causes an estimated 30,000 child deaths every year as undernourished children are weaker and more likely to be brought down by the vicious spiral of disease and malnutrition. Combined with worms, undernourishment is seen by many as Nepal’s primary health concern for children.

“Global studies have shown that malnutrition is an underlying factor in 55 percent of all child deaths. Since the rates of malnutrition are very high in Nepal—South Asia is the worst in the world, worse than Africa—we can assume that the situation is similar or worse,” says UNICEF’s nutrition expert, PO Bhumi Nepali. Malnutrition hits many Nepali children even before they are born because their mothers don’t have adequate food while pregnant. Between 30-50 percent of Nepali children are born underweight, below 2.5 kg.

The need to combat undernourishment doesn’t get as much attention from donors or the government as it deserves. Protein-energy malnutrition, they say is much more serious than Vitamin A, iron or iodine deficiency. Surveys have shown it is responsible for 70 percent of child deaths through related illnesses. “Malnutrition doesn’t get priority because it doesn’t yield visible and immediate results,” explains Dilli Raman Adhikari of the government’s Child Health Division.

“The government has to introduce more nutrition wards and programs to specifically deal with malnourished children,” says San Paneru of Nepali Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF), which runs nutrition rehabilitation centres in Kathmandu, Mechi and Bheri.

“Usually, sick children are discharged from hospitals after having had other diseases treated but their malnourishment remains neglected,” says Paneru, “this causes relapse and leads to other diseases and often death.”

Child health experts have pushed for school feeding programs and it was implemented with donor support in coordination with the Health, Education and Agriculture Ministries. But it was phased out in 1990 due to lack of coordination. Nepal’s target to reduce malnutrition by half by 2015 is therefore not going to be met.

A UNICEF report says that even with 6.2 percent of annual reduction of malnutrition, it will take another 26 years.

**A hungry war**

Nutrition experts are concerned that the conflict has worsened the state of child malnutrition. “The constant migration and displacement of villagers has made the problem even worse because it is the children whose food habits we have to change once they arrive in the cities,” says Pradeep Silwal of World Vision International Nepal which has been working in several food deficit districts and villages with nutrition projects. Silwal adds that the parents won’t be able to afford green vegetables or enough rice, so the children are fed dry and non-nutritious food lacking in proteins.

In Maoist-affected areas like Kailali, Jumla and Dailekh a recent security ban on transport of food items, clothing and shoes is sure to make the situation worse. In Diktel and Khotang in the east, a Maoist ban on transport of food items is causing a severe food shortage. Even in Kathmandu, the internally displaced are under nourished.

“Scarcity of food due to constant road blockades cause severe crises, especially in deficit areas,” says World Vision’s Indra Bhandari. This is already evident in Humla which has the highest hunger rate in Nepal, with 90 percent of the children suffering chronic malnutrition.

The problem is getting worse because whatever nutrition projects that remained are gradually phasing out as more organisations shift towards conflict-related humanitarian and relief work.

**Junk food malnutrition**

Lakpa Sherpa’s staple diet while growing up in Solu Khumbu was instant noodles.

By age 13, she was so addicted to it that she had lost all appetite for regular meals. Her mother didn’t detect Lakpa’s deteriorating health because she had four other children to look after. Last month, Lakpa collapsed from severe stomach pain and headaches. She had become weak and weighed barely 19 kg. She was flown to Kathmandu for treatment. Her condition has improved steadily afterwards at the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC) which has helped over 1,000 malnourished children.

“Protein-energy malnutrition, a chronic form of undernourishment, indicated by stunting and underweight. It is usually the result of lack of food but can also be caused by the wrong kind of food: as, in Lakpa’s case. Lakpa is lucky to have survived because her family could afford to fly her to Kathmandu. Many other Nepali children aren’t so lucky.”

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*NARESH NEWAR*

*15 - 21 JULY 2005 #256*
**Brown man’s burden**

Who is to distinguish between a young Muslim of ‘Pakistani’ ancestry and a young Muslim of ‘Indian’ ancestry both living in Leeds?

In the autumn of 1980, at the height of what was known as the Iranian Hostage Crisis, when over 50 Americans had been taken in by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini’s radical followers in Teheran.

In the US, Jimmy Carter was in deep trouble in the last days of his presidency and anti-Iran hysteria was at its height. I was at the Criminal Court of King’s County (Brooklyn), New York, City, as a journalist student covering a murder trial. I asked a question of the prosecution bench, and the government’s counsel turned around and lashed out, “Where’ve you from, Iran?”

George W Bush would say ‘Sad-damn’. There was no reporting for me that day in Brooklyn.

The gentleman was of course making the characteristic mistake of the ugly insular American who can be found even in ultracorporatist New York: that anyone who is white is right, all blacks are former slaves and brown people forever the unreconstructed alien.

Without doubt, following the tide of brown immigration to the United States since the 1970s from Latin America, Southasia and West Asia, Americans are today better educated as to the nature and content of world humanity. But at moments of crisis, the deeply held prejudices and the inability of the occidental to distinguish ‘Islamic radicals’ rather than ‘terrorists’. Nor will the reaction be limited to brown-skinned people who are Muslim. For who is to distinguish a Pakistani from an Indian, a Southasian Sunni from the Ayatollah to Osama, with a brief diversion at Sad-damn.

For who is to distinguish a Pakistani from an Indian, a Southasian Sunni from the Ayatollah, a Sikh from the Afghan, or a Southasian Muslim from a Jew?

The way in which ‘Islamic radicals’ are seen when over 50 Americans had been taken in by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini’s radical followers in Teheran.

The inability of the occidental to distinguish Osama bin Laden’s headgear from the Sikh’s turban made life unbearable for a while for the Sikhs all over, and among the first to be murdered by vigilantes in the US.

The way in which ‘Islamic radicals’ are seen in the west will have changed subtly with the London attacks of last week, and there will be a simultaneous shift in how all Southasians are perceived outside the subcontinent. The 9/11 attacks were all carried out by young Arab men, mostly from Saudi Arabia. The only link to Southasia then was through Osama’s network, which extended to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the case of the attacks on the London trains and bus, all suspects thus far are of ‘Pakistani’ ancestry.

**SOUTHASIA BEAT**

**Kanak Mani Dixit**

While Southasians have suffered acts of terror often enough, this is the first high profile attack in a western capital by radicals of Southasian descent. It is certain that the worldliness of London, the political clout of the Southasian community in Great Britain, as well as the deeper links between the European island and the subcontinent will not deliver the kind of primitive reaction we saw after 9/11. But there will be a subtle shift in the way that we are perceived and it will once again force the Southasian community in Great Britain, as well as the deeper links between the European island and the subcontinent, to consider each other as more similar than dissimilar. Nationalisms cannot get us too far in the world, we are perceived and it will once again force the Southasian community in Great Britain, as well as the deeper links between the European island and the subcontinent, to consider each other as more similar than dissimilar. Nationalisms cannot get us too far in the world.
Sweeping through  

Improve your swing and get the ball flying  

Ever watched weekend golfers sweep their drives successfully off the tee, then fluff their fairway woods no matter how hard they try? Well, they have the right key but don't know when to use it again. In today's game where courses are getting longer, it's imperative to be able to hit fairway woods well. It's also a lot easier to hit a fairway wood than a long iron. Not having these shots in your armoury will inevitably leave you short of the green on any long hole, giving but a slender chance of making par. So why aren't those three and five wood fairway shots getting properly airborne? Generally, woods are designed to hit the ball almost on the upswing. In fact, it's just the opposite of how iron have been designed (to hit the ball on the downswing). The driver is the largest and longest of the woods and is most effective if used to hit the ball on the upswing. Thus, the long tees are used to lift the ball up above the ground. Fairway woods are also designed to be used in such a manner. The action is to almost sweep the ball with a shallower or more horizontal angle of approach than the irons.

Here are some tips to get you started:

- The first step is to make sure you have the ball correctly positioned in your stance, somewhere opposite the inside of the forward foot. If the ball position is too close to the centre you tendency will hit it downward and the effectiveness of the club is reduced tremendously.

- Next, work with practice swings without a ball until you can consistently sweep the grass in the location opposite the inside of your forward foot as opposed to taking a divot or swinging in the air above the grass. Relax your arms and hands and feel the club swinging more freely, it helps rather than gripping with your hands above the grass. Relax your arms and hands and feel the club sweep the grass in the location opposite the inside of the forward foot.

With your practice swings, get to the point where you can sweep the ball with a shallower or more horizontal angle of approach than the irons.

Considering how much Nepalis are shooting each other lately, you'd expect shooting as a sport to be much more popular than it is. Shooting and swimming are two compulsory sports in the Olympics but shooting never received much recognition here. Still, Khishore Karki, president of the Nepal Shooting Association says, “Shooting has come a long way and now we are trying to get new equipment to promote it further within the country.”

It was recognised as an official sport only after 1980 but it has come to the fore in the past two years after Nepali Sharpshooters got experience at international tournaments.

There is evidence of increased interest. The participation of both male and female players in this sport is high and the Nepali team also managed to bag the bronze medal in the 8th SAF games. National player and runner-up in the recent Birthday Cup Tournament, Sangeeta Karki says, “We want to see shooting made more professional with better equipment.”

Training and the fact that the only professional shooting range in Nepal is in Kathmandu has limited accessibility. Then there is the additional problem of costly equipment. Most of our national level shooters, so far, come from either police or army backgrounds. The top two female shooters, Saraswati Baniya and Sингита Karki, winner and runner-up in the air pistol category of the Birthday Cup, are both from the police. But Asim Yadav, who won the Best Air Rifle in the Birthday Cup Open Shooting Competition is a civilian gem enthusiast.

“I come from the turai and the men in my family have always been interested in shooting, they used to go hunting but I've liked it as a sport,” says Yadav. Saraswati Baniya got interested after she joined the police force. “Shooting is a part of my job, I enjoy it but can understand how it would be difficult for a civilian to take it up,” she told us. And even though she is from the police she says she doesn't get enough time to practice. “Regular intensive practice only happens right before a tournament, which is not enough,” she adds.

Says Karki, “It does need more exposure but we have to be careful about the people we select to train or accept membership from because of the country's volatile situation.” The sport is already being promoted in schools and colleges with an inter-college tournament in the pipeline.

The Nepal Shooting Association is on the lookout for new players and is increasing the participation of schools and colleges. “We are not only looking for younger and newer players to send to tournaments but also encouraging the sport by making it more accessible to those interested,” says Karki.

Shooting is not as easy as it looks. It needs a lot of focus and concentration, says Yadav, adding: “It helps me stay fit because it requires both physical and mental fitness. Without clarity of the mind, taking a shot can be very difficult.”

Now, with the establishment of the shooting range at Birendra International Convention Centre, new equipment on the way, new tournaments in the pipeline and a new committee in place, Nepal should be earning shooting medals soon.
“Lato ko dhesh ma gaando tendori.” (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNCAQOD, the United Nation’s Association of Carboniots

FESTIVAL AND EVENTS

- Brief Encounters Photos by Holly Holzer at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 30 July, proceeds go to Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, 4216848
- Walk Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, 4248999

EVENTS

- Reggie Party Speed dating at 1905, Kantipath, on 15 July, 7PM with DJ session. 4225272
- Weekend Retreat with teachings by岷yen van Eer, 16-17 July, 10AM-6PM at HBC MC, Thamel, 4148483
- Guru Punimta 21 July.
- Bhoj Ke Oon Jasto at Jai Nepal on 21 July, 9AM in aid of Kantipur City College's Educational Tour 2005. 4430239
- Photography Workshop Seven days with Nepal’s experts, 21 July at The Bakery Café, Sundarmancha, 7AM. 4268818
- Feel the Drizzle Monsoon mete at Hotel Yak and Yeti on 30 July, 10AM-8PM, free entrance. 9851043268
- Call for entries Film Society Nepal 05, submission deadline 31 July. www.himalaassociation.org/ftsa
- God Dance of Kathmandu Valley Tuesdays at Hotel Vaja, 7PM.
- Intercontinental Exchange Program Every Wednesday at Goethe Zentrum, Thapahallal, 4.15 PM. 4258071
- Tai Chi Demonstration and meditation and on Wysamabhu, 4566518
- Fun in the Sun at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la, 4142999
- Art workshop for kids at Buddha Gallery, 4414689
- Rugby Practice Saturdays, 4438939, ckg@hot.com
- Sanibar Mela Saturdays at Bakery café, Dharara, 2PM and Chuchepati, Boudha, 3PM

MUSIC

- Interpretations of JS Bach’s Suites for Solo Cello by cellist Frank Berinde at Darbar Hall.
- The Music of Prehistory with Steve Farnell at Club Himalaya, 3PM.
- Fridays best of U2 and more at Mojik, 8PM. 150, 5528212
- Shades of Blue Tuesdays at Mosik, Pulchok, 7.30 PM.
- JCS Trio Saturdays, 8PM at 1905, Kantipath, free entrance.
- The Duo Live at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila, Lajimpat.
- The Good Time Blues Band at Rum Doodie, 4701208
- Jazz smoking Wednesdays at Jai Nepal on 21 July, 9AM in aid of Kathmandu Valley who have finally planted rice one month late. Central Nepal got its first real monsoon rains this week. Ironically, it was a stronger-than-usual circulation of the Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon that kept the Bay winds at bay. Now, the Bay of Bengal sector is active again and as this satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows, a heavy mass of rain-bearing clouds is headed towards central Nepal. The pressure patterns are also favourable and the rains should be dumped right across the midlands this weekend with the chance that July precipitation may be normal after all.

NEPALI WEATHER

- Better late than never, that is the feeling among paddy farmers in Kathmandu Valley who have finally planted rice one month late. Central Nepal got its first real monsoon rains this week. Ironically, it was a stronger-than-usual circulation of the Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon that kept the Bay winds at bay. Now, the Bay of Bengal sector is active again and as this satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows, a heavy mass of rain-bearing clouds is headed towards central Nepal. The pressure patterns are also favorable and the rains should be dumped right across the midlands this weekend with the chance that July precipitation may be normal after all.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Although the pollution levels along busy streets such as Pulsat Sadak are still above national standards on most days, the air in residential areas, suburban and rural areas of the Valley is now fairly good, thanks to the monsoon rains washing down the pollutants. The most harmful are dust particles below 10 microns in diameter which lodges themselves deep within human lungs. Even the air in busy streets is breathable on days when it rains heavily. Expect this phase with clean air to last for a couple of more months before the dust starts kicking in again.

3-9 July 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter. Source: www.mte.gov.np

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Trouble is being reported in Jai Nepal on 21 July, 9AM in aid of Kathmandu Valley who have finally planted rice one month late. Central Nepal got its first real monsoon rains this week. Ironically, it was a stronger-than-usual circulation of the Arabian Sea branch of the monsoon that kept the Bay winds at bay. Now, the Bay of Bengal sector is active again and as this satellite image taken on Thursday morning shows, a heavy mass of rain-bearing clouds is headed towards central Nepal. The pressure patterns are also favorable and the rains should be dumped right across the midlands this weekend with the chance that July precipitation may be normal after all.

GIZMONDO

- Seasonal rates valid till 21 October at Le Meridien, 4541212
- Go Karting at Tiger Karts, special monsoon offer, 4361500
- Overnight Stay Breakfast and swimming for Rs 999 per person at Godavari Village Resort, 5560675, 5560775
- Malaysia Dream Holidays Introduction offers for first four flights of Air Nepal International to Kuala Lumpur. 2012345
- Star Cruises Available in Nepal, 2012345, starcruises_marco@polo.com.np
- Fun Free offer at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742
- Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia, special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Shivapuri Heights Cottage Best time to be in Shivapuri. July Rainfest 2005.
- Special Summer Package at Tiger Mountain Tharu Lodge. 4431050, pragyaj@tigermountain.com
DANCING IN THE RAIN: A cultural group performing a traditional dance was caught in a monsoon downpour as it made its way to the inauguration of the National Film Festival at BICC on Monday. KIRAN PANDAY

FRONTLINE REPORTERS: Nine journalists from the districts came to Kathmandu to share experiences in conflict reporting this week at a seminar organised by Himal Association. (From l-r, back row) S Khanal, Sankhuwasabha, K Tamang, Chitwan, T Pandey, Kalikot, M Poudyal, Surkhet, JB Pun Magar, Butwal, (Front row) N Karki, Pokhara, D Chaudhary, Jajarkot. Abha Eli Phoboo

ANTI-BANNERS: Student activists of the eight-party student union alliance tear down a banner felicitating the king on his birthday during a protest on Sunday at Baneswor. KIRAN PANDAY

TIGER, TIGER BURNING BRIGHT: The premiere of Satya Mohan Joshi’s play Bagh Bhairab being performed by Auroham Theatre group at Gaurakul on Monday. KIRAN PANDAY

Fatima the healer

Fatima Younoos is 62 but she is still poking needles into four dozen patients a day. This tireless acupuncturist has steadily gained a reputation as a healer and her clinic, Hua Tho, is crowded with patients. “This is not my business but my life,” says Fatima who runs the centre with her son, Jamal Younoos, a medical doctor.

Part-Nepali and part-Chinese, Fatima has studied Tibetan herbal medicine which concentrates on enhancing spiritual goodness, and Chinese acupuncture. The knowledge of both has enabled her to help patients heal naturally without side effects. “People think acupuncture is a painkiller but in Chinese medicine, we say it is like a tree; we check both the inside and the outside. It is not about killing pain but long-term healing,” she says.

“I’ve always had foreign patients but Nepalis have slowly opened up to acupuncture,” adds Fatima. “Now, even pani-puri wallas come here.” But unlike airfares within Nepal, foreigners and Nepalis both pay the same for treatment. Explains Fatima: “The first thing you learn in Chinese acupuncture class is to treat all patients equally.”

There are 12 different lines in the body according to Chinese acupuncture and these help find the problem and its cure, which involve skilful and specific use of needles. “The cure for a disease differs from person to person according to its origin. It’s like road traffic, you need to check the jam, open up the clog and then make the system stronger. Eighty to 90 percent of the people I have treated have got better,” she adds.

Fatima says she has never stopped learning. And everyone is amazed at her energy and youthfulness. “The answer is simple: I love my work and it keeps me in shape,” she says, “I learn a lot from each patient, they are my real teachers.”

Fatima Younoos is 62 but she is still poking needles into four dozen patients a day.

About a decade ago, Mr. Gomez was looking for a good Italian restaurant to impress his girlfriend (now wife) on a date. A friend recommended Al fresco and the rest, as they say, is history.

A haven for Italian cuisine lovers, Al fresco now boasts of an exotic new menu featuring some old favourites of the ‘Gomez’ with an exotic selection of delectable new dishes that have made the cut. Discover, as the Gomez’ have, Kathmandu’s only authentic Italian dining experience.

Visit www.alfrescomountain.com for reservations & details. Ph: 4271999 Ext. 6129 Lunch: 12.00PM - 2.00PM, Dinner: 7.00PM - 2.00AM.

For more information, contact: Abha Eli Phoboo

Fatima the healer

Fatima Younoos is 62 but she is still poking needles into four dozen patients a day. This tireless acupuncturist has steadily gained a reputation as a healer and her clinic, Hua Tho, is crowded with patients. “This is not my business but my life,” says Fatima who runs the centre with her son, Jamal Younoos, a medical doctor.

Part-Nepali and part-Chinese, Fatima has studied Tibetan herbal medicine which concentrates on enhancing spiritual goodness, and Chinese acupuncture. The knowledge of both has enabled her to help patients heal naturally without side effects. “People think acupuncture is a painkiller but in Chinese medicine, we say it is like a tree; we check both the inside and the outside. It is not about killing pain but long-term healing,” she says.

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This country is changing so fast, things are in such a state of flux, there is so much uncertainty about what is around the bend that one can’t really blame the ordinary man on the street for feeling a little confused with Kathmandu’s rapidly changing traffic rules.

What’s illegal today (for example making an unauthorised U-turn at Darbar Marg) could suddenly and without warning be legal between midnight and two in the morning, but very well revert back to being illegal again from the crack of dawn onwards. That is why as responsible drivers we all need to be alert about the rules and regulations and keep abreast of changes so we know when we can break them without getting caught. And we in FM radio feel it is part of our public service mandate to issue bulletins every 15 minutes to apprise law-abiding drivers of the latest changes in traffic rules. So, to drive everyone around the bend, here is the 9.45 PM Traffic Rules Bulletin for Thursday:

1. After officially banning motorcycle pillion riders on Friday morning, and then immediately unbanning the ban, followed by a weekend during which it was both banned and not banned, traffic police has finally decided to end the confusion once and for all to categorically state that pillion riding is in fact not banned but if you are caught riding tandem on a motorbike you are liable to have your basic human rights violated on the spot. The head of traffic police has been quoted as saying that it is just a “humble suggestion” that citizens not ride two to a bike, just like all the other traffic rules in this country such as not driving on the right (wrong) side of the road. So, to recap: two people on a bike is not allowed but three, four or even five is ok.

2. Compared to pillion riding, the rules on helmets are simpler and much more straightforward but we’ll repeat them here anyway just so there is no ambiguity. A motorcyclist is allowed to wear a helmet provided it has a clear visor but if he has a shaded visor he isn’t allowed to wear a helmet even if his pillion passenger is wearing a helmet with or without a visor and regardless of whether it is shaded or clear. Everything understood so far? Right. To continue: however, if the pillion passenger who shouldn’t be there in the first place isn’t wearing a helmet with a visor and the child sitting on the fuel tank is wearing a fancy hat and pink plastic sunglasses, then the driver is allowed to wear a visual provided he’s not wearing a helmet. Terrorists are not allowed to ride pillion and, but if they insist, should refrain from wearing helmets so they can be easily recognised at checkpoints. People wearing turbans, heads of state and government and security personnel can do whatever they like.

3. The municipality is building another half-dozen overhead bridges in Kathmandu and Patan. These are actually billboard stands and not for pedestrians who should continue to try their level best to cross the road at street level.

4. The Pulchok Road is closed for vacuuming at rush hour every day in order to cause maximum inconvenience to commuters. Says a Roads Department engineer: “If we did the resealing at night no one would know we were doing our job repairing roads.”

5. And now the question you’ve all been meaning to ask: What is the status of the ban on using mobiles while driving? Answer: Motorcyclists can use prepaid mobiles at any time but pillion riders can only receive free postpaid mobile calls for pro-monarchy phone calls provided they are wearing seatbelts and no helmets with shaded visors.

Fine print: These traffic rules can change without warning, so stay tuned for the next bulletin in 15 minutes.