Weekly Internet Poll  # 259. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

How do you rate the new council of ministers with previous ones?

Total votes: 3881

Weekly Internet Poll  # 258

Q. Should the parties respond to the Maoist offer of negotiations?

#258                             29 July - 4 August 2005                       16+4 pages                     Rs 30

It has been six months since King Gyanendra took over in Kathmandu promising to restore peace but in remote district towns across Nepal people are losing even the flicker of hope they had that the violence would soon end.

Since February, I have traveled across Nepal: from Pyuthan, Rolpa, Achham in the west to Terathum and Charikot in the east. In Terathum, Kamala Tamang’s policeman husband was recently killed by Maoists and she is worried about the baby that was born soon after. In Jajarkot, teachers are humiliated, extorted and forced to teach children violence. In Dang and Jhapa, villagers are concerned the army has restricted community forestry on suspicion that money from timber sales was going to the rebels.

Teachers are being forced to tear out and burn pages in new Grade Eight textbooks that carry portraits and the life histories of the royal family. The rebels blame the teachers for being government employees, the state suspects they are Maoist sympathisers and doesn’t trust them. “We have khukuris at our necks, what are we supposed to do?” asks Lab Kumar Rai, a teacher in Khotang.

When they find out we are journalists from Kathmandu, peasants, teachers, traders, tea shop owners, women and social workers across Nepal always have the same question: where is the peace that the king promised?

They were already living in fear of Maoist intimidation, threats of violence, torture and killings. Now, in many places there is also fear of the security forces. The people find it increasingly difficult to tell the two sides apart and they are confused. “We thought the army would go after the Maoists but they are coming after us,” is a common refrain.

Meanwhile…

The rest of Nepal sees no hope in Kathmandu’s continued political paralysis.
**THE FREEDOM TO BE FAIR**

We have been cursed with having to live in interesting times chronicling the past five years of Nepal's life.

What we as a nation have gone through since 2000 we wouldn't wish on any other. It started with innocent disillusionment with our democratic deficit, the political fecklessness of leaders who frustrated our people's trust. Violence ravaged the land, strikes and blockades disrupted life, the massacre of an entire royal family by one of its own. There were torture and disappearances, bereavement and displacement, the horrendous slaughters of innocents, unprecedented religious riots, and then a step-by-step return to mandate/im even as totalitarian rattled the gates. Vignettes are obvious: to speak for the last, the lost and the least. We will be fair, 'A balance of comment fosters debate and expands the public discussion beyond them, it has been a tumultuous journey and an experience without them. It has been a tumultuous journey and an experience curbing those values, and you can't ensure sustained progress without them. It has been a tumultuous journey and an experience.

In our very first issue of this paper in July 2000, we wrote here: What we didn't know then was how soon and severely we'd be captured in our composite supplement in this issue.

The monarchy lost the mandate of its people. The people have spoken. They have weighed in, the people. They have weighed in, the people. They have weighed in, the people.

The price of complacency could be dear. The Finance Minister swore by the Tenth Plan provisions, most of which are ritualistic, stale and irrelevant for a genuine counterproductive. In contrast, we have living examples of successful community initiatives even when politicians were plundering the nation. This is true people power, and it shows what the people can achieve when they have their destiny in their own hands. It is only by supporting such initiatives that the government can be more pro-people than the ones we have had so far. But all indications re the recent regime is anaesthetised with complacency. The price of this will be very high.

**God save the king**

The countdown for a sovereign monarchy has begun.

If there is a dramatic change in party leadership at the hands of the US, its war on the Taliban, the present equation could be dramatically changed. The government therefore is engaged in a rather precarious war of wits. Only by better delivery of development services will it win the people's love, earn their admiration and support of friends abroad, and most importantly, strengthen the monarchy's position. The counter-terrorist force on behalf of poor and powerless Nepal.

As the recent budget is any guide it seems to be business as usual even in these unusual times. No country has developed without today's King the creative energies of its people. The process is about building their capacity and entails much more than allocating a little more money for agriculture or prioritising the Karnali Zone.

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**STATE OF THE STATE**

At the citizens’ rally for democracy and peace at Ratna Park on Monday, some demonstrators chanted slogans that would have been unthinkable until a few years ago. In protests the next day, supporters of Sher Bahadur Deuba used the valiant anti-monarchist language yet heard on Kathmandu’s streets.

Lose majesty, a concept that places the person of the king beyond reproach and makes him above any attack. Now when he's been reduced to a punishable act, has ceased to command respect. Could it be that the days of monarchy as we knew it are numbered? February First was the third and final stage of the creeping coup. Six months later, the king continued to hold all state power but his authority is now completely eroded. On an ideological level, a political consensus is emerging that even a constitutional monarchy may be detrimental to healthy democracy. The prime minister has won the nation's lack of support for the parties on the streets should not be interpreted as support for it. The people are weary of the government only by default because they withhold power from the parties in their present state.

God save the king
LESTERS
In response to Preeti Koirala (Letters, #256), I want to make it crystal clear that it is always unacceptable that innocent people are killed and maimed in furtherance of a political, religious or ideological agenda. The UK condones all terrorism acts without exception. But there is a world of difference between an armed insurrection involving thousands of a country's citizens in classic guerrilla terrain, with political and socio-economic demands many of which are shared by the mainstream parties, and by a Qaeda, which is a world wide extremist network involving a tiny minority, with no coherent negotiable demands or formal structure.

In the case of armed insurrections rejection of dialogue by insisting on labelling the insurgents as 'terrorists' is a recipe for years, maybe decades, of violence and misery. If only Nepal could draw some lessons from the UK where the government, parties and civil society have joined hands to face the terrorists threat—where an unacceptable ideology is combated with education, guns—where international cooperation is embraced rather than shunned and is discouraged by the pursuit of misguided policies.

Keith Bloomfield, HM Ambassador, British Embassy

DOUBLE STANDARDS
In the Letters on ‘India and Nepal’ (#257), Kunda Dixit writes, “At the Oval Office on Monday morning, Prime Minister Singh and President George W Bush agreed that ‘it’s going to be critical for the king of Nepal to restore civil liberties.’ Here is a message for world leaders: Gentlemen, Nepal never asked for your help on democracy. Please wake up and understand that Nepal’s problem is with terrorism. The same type of terrorism that killed thousands of people in New York and the same kind of terrorism that killed 50 something in London. Please do not pretend you care by blinding democracy and terrorism because they do not blend. Ask a Nepali if they want democracy and they will reply ‘no’ and ask them why and they will tell you why. Nepal could draw some lessons of violence and misery. If only they would choose the latter and blend. Ask a Nepali if they want democracy and they will tell you why. As stated by Ashutosh Tiwari (‘Shaving from scratch’, #257) parties should represent the people and vice-versa. Unless and until they do the initial research on people, place, poverty, progress, palace, partiality and their own party policy, survival will only mean standing on a razor’s edge.

Anil B, Pulchok

THE MEDIA’S ETHNIC GAP
Whether encouraging young children (Letters, ‘Forced March’, #257) to take part in various social and political functions is acceptable is a matter of moral as well as health judgement but to claim that human rights and child welfare organisations are opposing child marches is absolutely ridiculous. In our lawless country, everyone is using children for their own vested interests whether they are foreign (or local) religious organisations, political parties, Maoist rebels or human rights organisations, including Amnesty International (see photos on their website). No one has stopped forcing children to take part under the scorching sun or in the rain for all sorts of (useless) reasons but now that King Gyanendra has assumed executive powers, everyone, including national newspapers, is engaged in the petty business of character assassination.

Bikendra Shashmer Thapa, email

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Bikendra Shashmer Thapa, email
Just like Afghanistan

Kathmandu to Kakarbitta and back

Far eastern economic recovery hinges on the highways being re-opened for business
The monsoon has always been a time when passengers, crew and civil aviation officials keep their fingers crossed. Given Nepal’s terrain, cloud cover over the mountains during the rainy season makes it necessary for a crew to be particularly careful. It is no surprise that most accidents in Nepal are classified as ‘controlled flight into terrain’, and most of them happen during the monsoon season. This monsoon was no different. The rains had barely begun when a Dornier 228 carrying nine passengers and crew had a narrow escape after the aircraft veered off the runway at Lukla on 29 June.

With highway journeys unreliable because of the incessant rain and landslides coming down due to competition, more and more people are opting to fly within Nepal. In addition, there are new operators and for the first time jet aircraft are flying domestic routes.

This monsoon, we have to ask ourselves: are we doing enough to ensure flight safety? Are the pilots given refreshers regarding specific technical issues of monsoon operations and its difficulties? Are ground navigation aids up to international standards? Is the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal doing enough to ensure that there is not going to be another mishap this monsoon?

Most aviation accidents do not have just one cause. We have to ask if cash-starved operators are being serious about flight safety. Are they exerting pressure on crew to complete flights or cut corners? There are plenty of examples of pilots trying to race the rains to a particular airfield to land before the clouds move in.

What is worrying is the growing number of airlines and their airfields in a region which puts air crew under pressure to complete a flight under any circumstances. Delays and cancellations cost money, besides tarnishing the reputation of the airline. Flights should never be forced to fly if their professional judgement tells them otherwise. There is no place here for bravado. When driving rains bring runway visibility below minimum, when mountain passes are covered by clouds, or when there is doubt about en route weather it is no time for heroics. No one is going to applaud a pilot who has a reputation for flying in any kind of weather. But who is checking?

Kathmandu airport is equipped with radar, VOR and NDB beacons but even here, ground navigational aids (navads) are not up to International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards. Given Nepal’s notorious monsoon cover, flights often have to make instrument approaches or divert. CAAN should get out of its donor-dependent mode and make its own choices about what is urgently needed to improve flight safety. A donor-funded VOR-DME beacon at Bhatte Danda on Kathmandu’s approach has never been operational.

If that is the case with Kathmandu, the less said about other airfields the better. Only nine of Nepal’s 40 airports have runways and most don’t have navads. In fact, none of airports meet 21st century standards for equipment and safety. Even if they can’t be totally modernised overnight, they do need urgent upgrades. On top of all the aviation safety issues there is the new added concern of flying into insurgency-affected areas and airports with inadequate security. Helicopters have been fired at and some airfields have closed down due to security reasons. In fact, in an emergency a pilot can’t even land at some of these airfields because they are not secure. It’s a miracle remote area airfields are still being serviced by air. If not, then there is the meteorology department, which needs urgent equipment upgrades to improve weather forecasting.

To be sure, CAAN has been holding workshops to make pilots and air traffic controllers aware of monsoon issues. Upgraded air traffic control have made a difference in aviation safety but a lot more needs to be done. Our controllers and others need advanced training abroad in state-of-the-art safety procedures.

Traffic volume has risen dramatically after the open sky policy. It is easier to fly in Nepal than ever before. We have air traffic controllers who can respond efficiently and with clarity during the old emergencies. As airlines bring in new aircrafts, ground equipment has to keep pace with modern cockpits. At the same time, it is the small airlines like the Twin Otters that face the brunt of these changes. Given the increase in the number of flights and the limited equipment, lower altitude flying and to remote airfields with almost no en route navigation aids is a serious cause for concern.

What is the consequence of increased security spending? What has happened to the asset report on Royal Nepal Airlines? Writing on economics and business is not easy; it requires rigorous research, making and poring over documents and statistics to interpret them for readers. But apart from some harshest Beed addicts, the Nepali readership is not prone to feedback. I could do with more criticism, but it is rather the case that I suffer from silence. But what is worrying is the growing number of airlines and their airfields in a region which puts air crew under pressure to complete a flight under any circumstances. Delays and cancellations cost money, besides tarnishing the reputation of the airline.

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In 20 July, a decomposing carcass of a rhino was discovered near Bhalu Tappa in Royal Chitwan National Park. It was just the latest in a slaughter that has seen the decimation of one-fourth of the park’s rhino population in the past five years.

Chitwan is one of the world’s most successful conservation efforts. It has saved the Royal Bengal Tiger from the brink of extinction, restored the Asiatic one-horned rhino to a healthy population and secured the rich bio-diversity of this inner-tarai rainforest. Rhino conservation was so successful that the park had relocated 24 rhinos to Bardiya in the past 10 years. A lot of that success was because the park was guarded by the Royal Nepali Army.

Poachers sell the horns to small time traders in Bharatpur, Tandi, Kawasoti and Pokhara. These primary merchants then sell the horns to middlemen in Kathmandu who smuggle them to Tibet and China where rhino horns are regarded as aphrodisiacs and sell for Rs 1.5 million apiece. Ram Bahadur has identified his middlemen as Kedar Giri, who is also in jail in Bharatpur after being caught with a horn. A year ago, officials in Chitwan arrested Pemba Lama and Dorje Sherpa with five rhino horns. The police say that the trade will continue unless the government can find a way to revive its anti-poaching role.

Poaching depletes Chitwan’s rhinos and threatens to unravel Nepal’s greatest conservation success story

The no-horned Asiatic rhinoceros

Poaching depletes Chitwan’s rhinos and threatens to unravel Nepal’s greatest conservation success story

Birganj and Kathmandu, but the security has encouraged poachers to change tactics. Most poachers killed before November 2002 fell into traps and were spared to death. Today, poachers use guns. Says Bhatta, “The poachers are armed with guns and their horns are worth a fortune.” Conservationists say that poaching could be reduced by increasing the number of rangers and focusing on the capture of poachers rather than the rhinos.

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Conservation Officer Shiba Raj Bhatta whose office has counted 94 rhinos killed by poachers last month in Chitwan. The no-horned Asiatic rhinoceros is one of the world’s greatest conservation success stories. It has saved the Royal Bengal Tiger from the brink of extinction, restored the Asiatic one-horned rhino to a healthy population and secured the rich bio-diversity of this inner-tarai rainforest.

Rhinos killed in 2004-05

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Natural deaths</th>
<th>Poaching</th>
<th>Total</th>
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Source: Royal Chitwan National Park

P Ghimire prepared this article with support from the Centre for Investigative Journalism
The method Nepali porters use to carry nearly double their own weight—by strapping loads to their head, walking slowly for many hours and taking frequent rests—is most efficient in the world, scientists have concluded after a long study. The porters can carry up to 20 percent of their weight ‘for free’ using no more energy than if they were carrying nothing.

The researchers, led by Norman Heglund of the Louvain Catholic University, Belgium, calculated the energy efficiency of eight Nepali porters who regularly walk from the capital, Kathmandu, to Lukla. The distance of the weeklong journey is 100 km, with total ascents of 8,000 m and descents of 6,300 m. Heglund says the male and female porters carry heavier loads more efficiently than African women, previously thought to have the most efficient carrying method.

The new findings, published last month in the journal Science, show that Nepali porters carry loads that are, on average, one-third heavier than the heaviest loads that African women carry using the same amount of energy.

Nepali porters use a nami head strap to support a doko containing a load that can be nearly twice their body weight. They also use a T-shaped stick (tokma) to support the load while taking rests. Heglund says porters spent only half the energy that European trekkers carrying backpacks used when either carried more than half (60 percent) of their body weight.

For the study, eight porters were selected from a stream of porters regularly going up and down the steep Himalayan mountain routes. They were asked to walk a 51 m long flat track at five different speeds, carrying six or seven loads according to their ability. The researchers measured the amount of oxygen they used and how much carbon dioxide they exhaled.

The team wasn’t able to say whether the porters are able to reduce the work their muscles do to carry the loads or if they increase their overall efficiency. Heglund points out that professional porters and load carriers around the world carry loads on their heads. Porters in the Andes mountain range of South America and workers in construction sites across India use the method as well.

Despite the porters’ efficiency (Heglund saw a 68-year-old porter carry loads heavier than himself) they face several health risks during their arduous treks. International charities such as the UK-based International Porters Protection Group (IPPG) and Tourism Concern conduct campaigns to raise awareness of the problems because many porters take part in tourists’ trekking expeditions. The problems include risks of slipping and injuries, frostbite and altitude sickness.

“Unfortunately, while we agree that many porters do perform some pretty amazing feats of strength, there are also porters injured, maimed or losing their lives each year due to the cumulative physical stresses placed upon their bodies,” says Elsie James, a Canada-based member of IPPG.

The Nepal chapter of the UK-based Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), which helps people use appropriate technologies to fight poverty, says its future plans include studies on socio-economic aspects of heavy load transport by porters in the Himalayas.

“So far we have been working on alternate means of transporting goods such as wire bridges to cross rivers,” says Anil Subedi, director of ITDG in Nepal. Other means of transporting goods in mountain regions include mules, a local crossbreed between the yak and mountain cattle, sheep and goats.

(SciDev.net)
Bhutanese refugees reject resettlement

The children learn Dzongkha, the official language of Bhutan, and there is less fodder for us," says Bholanath Santaraj Subba.

In an effort to end the deadlock on repatriation, western governments, led by Canada and the United States, have proposed that once Bhutan takes back a portion of the refugees the rest could be resettled in Nepal or western countries. But in recent interviews in Beldangi it was hard to find even one person who would choose repatriation.

"This camp has been our home in the past years, we are grateful that Nepal provided us shelter," says Bhutanese Uprety, a refugee leader in Beldangi, "but it is Bhutan where our heart belongs, there is no alternative to sending us back."

Upetry says the Bhutanese regime has lobbied hard to get refugees like him resettled in other countries and take back only a handful, and he blames the international community for caving into Bhutanese pressure. Deb Raj Prahlad, secretary at Beldangi II, agrees: "We want to be resettled in Nepal, that is the only option we wish for. We will not consider third country resettlement or integration in Nepal."

Prahlad and Upetry also think India can play a key role since they were transported through Indian territory in hired Indian trucks after eviction from Bhutan 14 years ago. "When India stops refugees at its border, can one deny India's involvement?" asks Prahlad, adding, "India holds the key to the resolution of the Bhutan crisis."

For the moment, however, there are other pressing issues like food, shelter and schooling. The budget for clothes was slashed three years ago, donors are now cutting back supplies of basic amenities such as kerosene, foodstuff, bamboo and health care. The huts are in dire need of repair and the roofs leak.

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Spectator sport

As bystanders watched from the sidewalk, anti-King protesters demonstrators set fire to a government vehicle at Bagh Bazar on Sunday (right) while the police stood watch. The anti-regression protests have spilled into the streets in recent days, with demonstrators blocking roads and setting buildings on fire. The police have responded with tear gas and rubber bullets, causing injuries and property damage.

Classless society

Schools across the country are preparing to close down 8-14 December in response to threats from an extreme student group allied to the Maoists. The All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) says it is not responsible for the violence.

Can’t fail this time

A ceasefire is the beginning of the peace process, not the end

ANALYSIS by KUNDA DIXIT

Once there was the political will, everything else fell into place. Even so, there was finger-laying tension on that rainy Wednesday morning this week when it was touch-and-go till the last minute, as ministerial mediator, Nayan Singh Pun, shuttled back and forth between the Maoist leadership and the cabinet room until the ceasefire agreement was done.

The question many are asking is: Why did King Gyanendra and the Maoists decide to patch up now?

The Maoists were beginning to get out of control. A newly-formed army could drag them down. And they were also feeling the pressure from a cadre base that is infiltrated the movement. The political parties deny this. The protests appear to be having some effect: King Gyanendra began meetings with political figures but the parties have refused to meet the king until the ban on protests is lifted.

Why the children?

NARESH NEWAR in BABA

Bahtu Bahadur Regmi can’t bear to look at his two children and their grievous burn injuries sustained during a firebomb attack on their bus by suspected Maoists on 4 October at Lakhani Bridge, 70 km from Simara. At least they are alive, is all Bhakta Bahadur can say. But he is heartbroken as he remembers his wife, Anju, who died trying to save their children as the bus caught fire. They were the last ones among the 55 passengers to escape after the Maoists threw petrol bombs at the speeding bus. The two others who died in the attack that preceded the three-day Maoist bandana were the bus conductor and an employee of Music Nepal.

We ask four-year-old Rabina who hurt her. “Mabads,” she simply says. Rabina looks at her burnt fingers and touches her stomach which is covered in burn tissue. Her six-year old brother Rabin has burns all over his face, a gash on his head and a deep cut on his leg. “This is a major breakthrough, but there is a big challenge ahead to pull this rabbit out of the hat.” The government has named him chief coordinator in coming negotiations.

All uprooted to be used as a training ground. Government vehicles were set on fire in a protest by youth leaders from an extreme student group allied to the Maoists. The All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) says it is not responsible for the violence.
Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned arbours have not been guilty of destruction to the extent that they have provided cover and beauty for a long time now. They have seemed to have been hasty. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets and air, make possible photosynthesis, the driving mechanism of life. They reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely.

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is measureable improvements in the quality of their lives, Nepalis are unlikely to wait much trusted who have let us down—not once, not twice, but over and over again. Millions of impoverished Nepalis are unlikely to see democracy as a trick. When we look at their faces we don't see anymore freedom fighters. When we look at their faces we don't see anymore political decay hangs heavy in the air. As in 1951, 1960, 1972, 1980, 1990, 2001. As with geology, political pressures welling up within Nepal tend to be painful and complex to manage. And after a decade of tinkering with this and that before the winds of change also washed up the Himalayas and we had our first-ever democratic elections. The Nepal Congress swept the polls but King Mahendra and BP Koirala realised that Nepal was not big enough for both of them. In 1961, democracy was shelved, parliament dismantled and elected leaders put in jail.

Our homegrown 'suited-to-the-soil' Panchayat ideology was sustained by a grand design for development. We were starting from zero, so every plot we built (highways, hydropower, hospitals) were huge achievements. A little over 10 years later, King Mahendra died. It then took 10 more years, despite King Birendra's efforts, to revamp education, for the pressures to build up sufficiently for students to rise up to demand democracy. The crisis was defused by the 1980 referendum in which Panchayat-with-reforms won 55-45. It was business-as-usual for another 10 years but by this time so much pressure had built up that the lid very nearly came off. The 1990 Jana Andolan was the Nepal equivalent of the winds of democracy that swept across western Europe, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The king became a constitutional monarch, he agreed to dismantle the Panchayat superstructure, a new constitution institutionalised political parties and multiparty elections were held. The euphoria of democracy did not last long. From very early on, it was apparent that we could not altogether free the jails, transform the Maoist political system and revise the capital's bylaws. Nepal's 'geo-politics' is what we all need, not rumour-mongering. It is with a sense of openness, the very personification of hope that we must do so to atone for the sins of having been a part of a decadent society. The march of history does not allow long periods of grief. As I write this, King Gyanendra has just ascended to the throne after it was officially announced that King Dipendra "left for his heavenly abode". King Dipendra became perhaps the only monarch in the world who passed his entire reign in a coma. The throne of Nepal is not new to King Gyanendra. The challenges faced by the new king are enough to keep his sharp intellect on edge. There is a chance that facts will emerge as some of the survivors are now said to be out of danger. Restrains is what we all need, not rumour-mongering. The grip is debilitating but together we shall overcome. We must, for we owe it to the future generations of Nepal. The king is dead, long live the king.
Six hours in hell
On 1 September, both the riots and the lack of security response were deliberate

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA
14TH SEPTEMBER 2003

Security agencies had information that Maoist rebels planned to infiltrate Kathmandu on 1 September. Members of a Maoist student wing had met at a hostel in Chabahil on the night of 31 August as news broke that 12 Nepalis had been killed and street protests had already started. Intelligence agencies had information that they were planning to riot the protests to sow chaos and terror in the capital.

If they knew, why didn’t they do anything? Why did the police, which used to be so effective in the past, fail to prevent the violent ‘regression’ riots three months ago, remain mute spectators? Why did the army stand aside and let the mosques, offices and small businesses burn?

The man who has answers to those questions is Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka. But he says he can’t comment because a government commission is investigating the security lapse. “I can’t say anything more. It would hinder the commission’s work. But we will get to the bottom of this,” he promised.

When, and if, the commission finds the real answers, it is doubtful security lapses will be blamed. The commission’s terms of reference is to find out who was behind the vandalism, recommend punishment, assess damage and recommend compensation. In the past week, Khadka has admitted there was “lack of coordination” between the government and security agencies. Senior sources told us on condition of anonymity that the police flatly refused government orders to quell the riots.

Sources told us Khadka rushed to the prime minister’s residence at Baluwatar because the security agencies were not responding to his calls. Even the prime minister found it difficult to get through on the phone and it was only after he reached Commander-in-Chief Pyar Jung Thapa and the police brass that there was some action. By then it was too late. In most parts of the city, the police, army and fire services ventured out only after the curfew went into effect. Deputy Inspector General of Police, Anjali Thakuri, acknowledges there may have been delays. She said, “The investigation will point out the mistakes so they are not repeated in future but it is not about us knitting anyone.”

ANATOMY OF ANARCHY: 10.30 AM The mob arrives at Siddhi Bhawan. 11AM Owner of the building, Nirmal Ratna Tuladhar, pleads with rioters not to harm his property. 11.30 AM Rioters set a fire from Qatar Airways on fire. 12AM Nirmal Tuladhar’s family and friends rush to the basement with buckets of water to douse the flames at Mani Tara shopping centre.

2 September, a soldier guards the charred hulk of the Siddhi Bhawan building during the curfew. Rioters set a fire from Qatar Airways on fire. 12AM Nirmal Tuladhar’s family and friends rush to the basement with buckets of water to douse the flames at Mani Tara shopping centre.
As with geology, political pressures welling up within Nepal tend to be released in a 10-year cycle of social seismicity. Nepal’s ‘geo-politics’ since 1951 has followed this rule. Four years after India got independence, the Ranas finally decided that their time was up. It took 10 years of tinkering with this and that before the winds of change also swept up the Himalayas and we had our first-ever democratic elections. The Nepali Congress swept the polls but King Mahendra and BP Koirala realised that Nepal was not big enough for both of them. In 1961, democracy was shelved, parliament dismantled and elected leaders put in jail.

Our homegrown ‘suited-to-the-soil’ Panchayat ideology was sustained by a grand design for development. We were starting from zero, so everywhere we built (highways, hydro-power, hospitals) were huge achievements. A little over 10 years later, King Mahendra died. It then took 10 more years, despite King Birendra’s efforts, to revamp education, for the pressures to build up sufficiently for students to rise up to demand democracy. The crisis was defused by the 1980 referendum in which Panchayat-will-re-form won 55-45. It was business-as-usual for another 10 years but by this time too much pressure had built up that the lid very nearly came off. The 1990 Jana Andolan was the Nepali equivalent of the winds of democracy that swept across western Europe, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The king became a constitutional monarch, he agreed to dismantle the Panchayat superstructure, a new constitution institutionalised political parties and multiparty elections were held. The euphoria has now been replaced by disillusionment and despair. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application.

Today, 10 years after the renewal of democracy, the stench of the promulgation of the Nepali constitution, our ‘grand design’ for development, is getting on everybody’s nerves. It is getting more and more difficult to recognise our erstwhile revolutionaries and freedom fighters. When we look at the trees we don’t see anymore the selfless sacrifice, incarnation and exile that many went through. All we see are the grinning, greedy countenances of leaders who trusted who have let us down—not once, not twice, but over and over again. The euphoria has now been replaced by disillusionment and apathy. Millions of impoverished Nepalis are unlikely to wait much longer for democracy to work its way out of its self-inflicted paralysis. Unless the right vote to lead to measurable improvements in the quality of their lives, Nepal will see democracy as a trick. Radicals from the left and the right, religious zealots and separatists will fill this vacuum.

Today, 50 years after our first taste of democracy and 10 years after restoring it, the moral of the story is Democracy doesn’t come with an indefinite guarantee. It needs to be safeguarded by careful and vigilant application.

To the Editor,

Harivo Ban Nepal ko dhana
28th February 2001

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu’s streets is disastrous, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely.

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**A tribute to history**

By: CK Lal

Friday night, faith died. Belief succumbed to the cruelty of history. Irreparable wounds could not stop the flight of an age towards eternity. The king is dead, may his soul rest in peace. Long live the king, the symbol of Nepal’s unity and cultural identity. It is with this mixture of grief and hope that we are coming to terms with a tragedy too painful and complex to comprehend.

When telephone calls with the ‘news’ woke us in the dead of night, we checked the time. First there was disbelief. “This cannot be true.” We checked the date. There was horror. “This is far too serious to be a prank.” And then the shock sunk in, numbing us. That numbness still persists. And with grief there is now fear for the future. The question on everybody’s mind, that nobody dares speak is, “What now?”

The unpredictability of the future is frightening. King Birendra was a link with the past. He offered a reassuring continuity with the hoary traditions of an age when the king was not just the provider and protector of his subjects but the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He carried the duality of a God-king and a constitutional monarch with a trace of contradiction visible in his demeanour.

King Birendra ascended to the throne during that stage of conflict between tradition and modernity when every step forward was followed by two steps backward. Nepali politics in 1972 was tightly controlled by the palace. The kings were not sovereign, but the very personification of sovereignty. The king could not stop the flight of an age towards eternity. The king is dead, long live the king.

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King Birendra has just ascended to the throne after it was officially announced that King Dipendra was dead, long live the king.

The challenges faced by the new king are enough to keep his sharp intellect on edge. There is a chance that facts will emerge as the new king grows up. As I write this, King Birendra is dead, long live the king. The challenges faced by the new king are enough to keep his sharp intellect on edge. There is a chance that facts will emerge as the new king grows up.

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King Dipendra became perhaps the only monarch in the world who passed his entire reign in a coma. The throne of Nepal is now new to King Gyanaendra. The challenges faced by the new king are enough to keep his sharp intellect on edge. There is a chance that facts will emerge as the new king grows up.
Say it ain’t so, Manmohan
The peace pipeline through Pakistan hits a snag

Manmohan Singh emerged from his meeting with George W Bush in the Oval Office on 23 July with some devastatingly equivocal words. Asked by reporters about the discussions on the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, the prime minister replied: “...there are many risks, because considering all the uncertainties of the situation there in Iran, I don’t know if any international commitment from Pakistan would probably underwrite this”. Incongruous sounding words from a soft-spoken man, but they are harbinger of terrible tidings for a project supposed to energise the Indian economy, help usher peace between India and Pakistan and thereby benefit all Southasia.

Iran has the second-largest reserves of natural gas in the world. India’s galloping economy needs to shift from coal and petroleum to natural gas in order to attain and exceed the magical annual 8 percent GDP growth rate. The cheapest way to transfer gas from Iran’s South Pars reserves is via a pipeline through Pakistan and on to Rajasthan, Gujrat and Delhi. In Islamabad, Gen Pervez Musharraf was enthusiastic and willing to provide guarantees of the pipeline’s flow and mollify Indian worries of a tap turn-off during bad times. What lollipops were offered to the arrezzable scholar saint? It was already clear in March, when US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice addressed a press conference in New Delhi, that she wasn’t too keen on Persian gas whatever its merits. At that time, Pakistani and Indian ministers had said together they would not be deterred by American aversion to everything Iranian. Yet attacking and destabilising Iraq, Pres Bush is now on the lookout for other countries to restore democracy in. It is a terrible thing for a paradigm-shifting project in Southasia to be affected by the likes and dislikes of a president in another hemisphere, harbouring his own anxieties and licking his own imagined wounds. But this president is powerful, insensitive and uncaring, and it was obviously too much to expect sensitivity to peace, economic progress and poverty-reduction in India and Southasia.

There had been an eerie silence of the hawks in Islamabad and New Delhi as the gas pipeline proposal gathered steam through last year. Harboring deep distrust of any kind of rapprochement, they were nevertheless taken attack by fast-moving developments and the emerging possibilities. As long as the project proceeded at a rapid pace defined by the forceful Mani Shankar Aiyar, India’s Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the hawks kept quiet. They feared being left behind by history. Now, the hawks can be expected to crawl out of the woodwork with a chorus of I told ya’s. New Delhi’s raptors are going to say that it was not nice to have ever considered trusting Islamabad on something as strategically critical as a pipeline supporting all industry. What if Islamabad turned off the tap? The hawks there will say it was foolish to have done anything to help the Indian economy anyway, and in particular to have disengaged this issue from the matter of Kashmir. India can, of course, import gas from elsewhere, including via a pipeline from the Daulatabad gas fields of Turkmenistan or the offshore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan, or as liquefied gas via tankers from shore fields of Burma’s Arakan. But the Iranian deal had seemed the most proximate and cost-effective. But besides economic reasons, there was the overwhelming need to use it to buttress peace between India and Pakistan.

Suddenly, there is a hiccup on the road to the peace pipeline. India, the Southasian superpower, seems to have blinked in the face of the world’s superpower. One would have expected India to be made of sterner stuff.

US nukes gas deal

PRAFUL BIDWAI in NEW DELHI

India, one of the world’s big gas guzzlers, is caught between securing future petroleum supplies and opting for nuclear power. In recent years New Delhi has been gravitating towards oil and gas with frenzied attempts to tie up supplies from far and wide. Last year, it moved to sign a deal for a 2,600 km natural gas pipeline from Iran through Pakistan. The $ 7.4 billion project would have ensured energy into the future and peace between India and Pakistan. (See main story)

Yet after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Washington 10 days ago, there has been a shift from gas to nuclear. This is strange considering that nuclear power accounts for under three percent of India’s electricity.

Singh also signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with President George W Bush under which the US has agreed to sell nuclear materials and technology to India, and pledged to relax export restrictions and other controls in the global non-proliferation order. India will, in return, identify and distinguish civilian and military nuclear facilities from each other and place the civilian ones ‘voluntarily’ under IAEA safeguards, while toughening export controls.

If it goes through, the Bush-Singh deal will open avenues for imports of civilian nuclear materials into India, which is running out of uranium as its old mines get depleted and new mining projects face popular opposition.

In an interview in Washington, Singh raised doubts about the viability and bankability of the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline project—widely seen as the prime minister’s effort to placate Washington. The US has repeatedly opposed the pipeline deal, warning that it will have to impose sanctions on any project that helps Iran, a member of Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’.

Politically and strategically, the Indo-US nuclear deal fits with current geopolitics. By contrast, the oil pipeline would have helped Southasia’s economic cooperation and political solidarity. It could also be a breakthrough in India’s relations with Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan would have made $ 500 million a year as transit fees for imports of civilian nuclear materials into India, which is running out of uranium as its old mines get depleted and new mining projects face popular opposition.

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Government Spokesman and Communication Minister Tanku Dhakal in Kathmandu, 19 July

The government has done a couple of important things in the last five months. It has been moving ahead with the objective of liberating Nepali society from terrorist activities and establishing peace in the country. We have also made the administration more efficient. The RCCG has been formed and actions taken have been made public. The people have begun to receive government services and facilities. After the historic royal move of February First, the country is moving in a positive direction. The government is doing its best to fulfill the desire of His Majesty. Local elections will be held soon because His Majesty has clearly stated it in his speech. The election commission is an independent body and the government is ready to extend any cooperation the commission would need. Polls would be free and fair, everybody should be assured about that. The political parties need to move ahead according to the people’s sentiments. In democracy, people are centre stage. Since election is the best medium for the people to express their opinions, political parties will lag behind if they remain detached from the elections. If they believe in democracy and wish to see the beginning of a democratic process, they will have to take part in the elections. They have no alternative.

It talks about an alliance between the seven political parties and the Maoists is just to scare the government, the idea will not work. It must be remembered that the same political parties did not hesitate to call the king as ‘terrorists’ when they were in power. Interpol too has issued a red corner notice against the Maoists. I do not believe that the Maoists will move ahead with such a group. If they do, it will be very unfortunate for them.

We have been conducting studies on ways to make the communication sector effective. The FNJ has alleged that the government is making amendments in the broadcasting law. I am the communication minister and I am saying that the issue is still under discussion. It has not been finalised.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Fake federation

UML Leader Pradeep Nepal in Dhanushindri, 24 July

Democracy and the press nurture each other. That is the experience of our country. We don’t have to look at other countries’ histories to know that autocracy takes the press downhill while democracy ushers in development. If we count the downsides democracy ushers in, we know that autocracy takes the press downhill while democracy ushers in development. If we count the downsides democracy ushers in, we know that autocracy takes the press downhill while democracy ushers in.

Obviously, this federation will serve as the royal mouthpiece. The king is trying to set up a barrier between monarchists and democrats. Those who are allowed to give everybody a choice—the king or democracy. As if the two can’t coexist. But few had guessed that the king would even try to divide civil society into democratic and monarchist camps. The king has proved the thoughts of even such a minority right.

Since the Federation of Nepali Journalists and those affiliated with it raised their voices for peace, democracy, press freedom and human rights, the king went ahead to set up his own federation with sympathizers who would help him hide the present conditions in the country. Except for the capital, the rest of the country is reeling under violence and conflict. The Nepali press is now facing a challenge. This new fake federation of journalists will be churning out propaganda. All journalists need to remain vigilant against these efforts to subvert press freedom.

“FM stations aren’t allowed to broadcast news even in the most democratic countries”

FM stations aren’t allowed to broadcast news even in the most democratic countries

One needs to be clear about the fact that FM radios need the permission to broadcast news. FM stations aren’t allowed to broadcast news even in the most democratic countries. Even in neighbouring India, the government doesn’t allow FM stations to air news. So it is wrong to ask us to allow news on FM here.

Son-in-law

Desantri, 24 July

The government has been endangering Nepal Telecom’s business by backing the king’s son-in-law Raj Bahadur Singh to launch his mobile service company Spice Nepal. The future of Telecom’s prepaid and Code-Division Multiple Access systems are uncertain. It is clear that by restricting its services the government is doing everything to destabilise Nepal Telecom just to benefit said son-in-law’s company when he launches his service. Due to government negligence and vested interests, Nepal Telecom has already suffered a loss of Rs 110 million. But even after Spice Nepal is launched, the government still shows no signs of giving the company a fair chance to survive.

Whose side?

Prakash, 25 July

Until four years ago, the security forces did not have a camp in Arghat, a market town sandwiched between Gorkha and Dhading. At the time, the Maoists used to walk about openly and constantly intimidated the local people by extorting them and asking for free meals and lodging. But when the security forces arrived, the Maoists took refuge in secure places and started corruption. This decision can jeopardise the regime.

Min Bajracharya

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Without a resolution of the crisis and a quick return by the palace to constitutional norms, there will be growing civil unrest and discontent in Nepal with the institution of monarchy.”


SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

“Without a resolution of the crisis and a quick return by the palace to constitutional norms, there will be growing civil unrest and discontent in Nepal with the institution of monarchy.”

The arrival of a team from the marketplace for a month and cut off forces? Not only did they unarmed civilians or the armed for security and protection: the question is, who is responsible soldiers by the militants and of civilians of doing nothing to children. The army accused the kicked and beat up everyone in the market area with more soldiers returned to their barracks instead other soldiers who were nearby were shopping for groceries. Four soldiers in cold blood while they harassing them. Last month, Himal Khabarpatrika, Regional Peoples’ Education Division for Rukum education curriculum doesn’t seem that different the royal portraits saying they teachers not to use books with They have also ordered in front of school children. They haven’t made an issue out of parliamentary parties textbooks. Even not been publicly debated, of millions of textbooks has king, queen, crown prince including pictures of the king and queen of Nepal, but the portraits of Marx, Mao and Prachanda. The Social Studies curriculum for Grade 1 says: ‘Students should be able to recognise the flags of the communist party, the people’s council and fraternal people’s organisations, to recite the names, place and date of births and deaths of Marx, Lenin, Mao and the date and place of birth of Prachanda.’ In Grade Three, teachers are asked to make sure that students know the title story of Prachanda. The head of the Maoist Regional People’s Education Division, Comrade Tufan Singh, says: ‘We are proud that the students will be recognised. By the Maoist party and is currently working as a freelance writer. Former Maoist leader Pushkar Gautam, in addition to working with an NGO, writes about the Maoists in different magazines and is widely read. Due to various kinds of accusations levelled against them by the Maoists and security forces, many who have defected from the party prefer to keep their identity secret, fearing reprisals. One former Maoist district leader says, ‘The Maoists are always playing the victim card. If anyone denounces them, they say they have left the party. And if they do not provide something valuable to the Maoists, they are treated as traitors.’ Maoist leaders and activists from the ranks of the district or central leadership, who have first hand experience of leading battles against the government, are seen leaving or severing ties with the Maoists in three ways. First, by waging an ideological rebellion. Second, creating scandals inside the party like financial misappropriation, tax evasion or corruption. Third, by leaving themselves be arrested by security forces and later surrendering to them. According to sources, even though those leaving the party might have been compelled to leave or stripped of party membership after being involved in some kind of scandal, they often say that they had left the party of their own free will. And those who defected before being involved in some kind of scandal, are often not arrested by the authorities. The Maoists maintain that nothing is as black and white as the Maoists depict it. Mandab Karki, who claims to have split with the Maoists because of ideological differences, says, ‘No matter what they say in public, in reality they are not only tolerant of, but actually encourage, their own kind of political violence.’ Party defectors sometimes get into criminal activities, other times in minor jobs to survive, and some former party members are still ideologically Maoists even though they are not active.
Researching kuire researchers

Studying Nepal is a labour of love for UK academics

There are three ways to describe Pratyoush Onta. By training he is an historian. Ten years ago, for his PhD dissertation on Nepali nationalism, he examined how Bhanubhakta was anointed a Nepali language icon by Darjeeling-based activists in the 1930s, by using then available printing presses, literary magazines and newspapers to disseminate nationalist ideologies.

That work set Onta off on the path to become a media specialist. In the last five years, together with Martin Chautari colleagues, he has produced 11 books on the state of Nepal’s media, including a history of Radio Nepal. When I asked why he studies media, Onta replied that he wants “to help lay social science foundations in what is still a little studied discipline”.

Onta’s other identity is that of a questioning public intellectual who is interested in how knowledge is created and shared, and what that process means to us as Nepalis. He has hosted programs on radio, written newspaper columns, moderated discussions at Chautari and continued to be mapped, produced and shared in the UK—almost 200 years after the Nepali report in 1811. As such, the book is not likely to be of interest to laypersons. But to those interested in the minutiae of scholarly life, Onta has provided a useful detailed scenario of how knowledge about Nepal continues to be mapped, produced and shared in the UK—almost 200 years after William Kirkpatrick first published his Nepal report in 1811.

To others, the investment is greater and the potential returns are smaller’ in Nepal according to David Seddon, the investment is greater and the potential returns are smaller’ in Nepal according to David Seddon, the investment is greater and the potential returns are smaller’ in Nepal. As he studies media, Onta has provided a usefully detailed account of what pushed these scholars into it? Recent PhDs tend to be fluent in one or more of Nepal’s languages and familiar with research papers coming out of Nepal. As the standards of social science research rise here, it’s safe to say that we are seeing the last days of kuire academics parachuting in to shoebox locally collected interview files into ready-made theoretical frameworks. Indeed, as Rhoderick Chalmers and Mark Turin imply, it’s become increasingly important to study what native scholars are publishing and to engage as equals in critical dialogues with them.

All interviewees agree that in peaceful times, a ‘high per capita cultural diversity’ made Nepal an attractive, safe and easy place to conduct field work. In post-conflict Nepal some day, some of them hope to obtain funds to do research on conflict management, forced migration, war trauma, coping with violence and healing and psychotherapy. Most are concerned that Nepal has become risky as a site, giving them no choice but to send students to other countries for fieldwork.

This book provides a window to understand some of the personalities and institutions that are shaping research on Nepal in British academia today. It also gives a sense of the relative diversity of Nepalese-related work that those with interdisciplinary and even non-academic career paths are exploring today. Researchers will find the bibliographies that accompany the interviews handy references.

My only quibble is that since the book adopts a checklist approach to asking questions, it does not give us controversies and disagreements that surround various theories and interpretations. Even after reading all the interviews, the image of Nepal Studies as an academic field is that it is still in its cataloguing phase—not yet intellectually bubbling over with ideas and insights that would attract the most ambitious graduate students.

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Four-ball
Golf for these brothers is a family game

W hat’s a four-ball? you might ask. The answer is pretty straightforward: four people playing golf together. But four brothers in a four-ball? Believe it or not, we have such a group here in Kathmandu whose members play together now and then. I can assure you it’s not at all common to find a four-ball comprising of brothers.

Three brothers of this family religiously visit the course almost every day. Yeshe Tsering (60), Lobsang Tenzing (58) and Lobsang Tashi (52) not only golf together, they go out in the evenings as a group as well. sumoṃpam says, “Before you ask us, we do this a lot. We have been doing this for many years now. It’s not only just us brothers, our cousins are also close to us and we are all good friends, and it feels great.”

In Nepal, joint families are common but it is not often that we see them sharing interests and circles of friends. This group of brothers sure look like an encouraging exception to the social rule of discord that is so prevalent nowadays.

Eldest brother Tenzin Choegyal (62) is not who the photo below, is known to be a workaholic. He plays just occasionally and sometimes joins his two sons on Saturdays to complete this dream four-ball. When I caught up with them recently, Tenzin was once again away on a business trip. I cornered the ‘younger’ threesome over a cup of tea after their daily round and gleaned some reflections of their golfing experience.

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In Nepal, joint families are common but it is not often that we see them sharing interests and circles of friends. This group of brothers sure look like an encouraging exception to the social rule of discord that is so prevalent nowadays.

Eldest brother Tenzin Choegyal (62) is not who the photo below, is known to be a workaholic. He plays just occasionally and sometimes joins his two sons on Saturdays to complete this dream four-ball. When I caught up with them recently, Tenzin was once again away on a business trip. I cornered the ‘younger’ threesome over a cup of tea after their daily round and gleaned some reflections of their golfing experience.

Lobsang was a runner-up in the recently held Gokarna Open Golf Championship and has dropped his handicap to 21. After a smile and a pause Lobsang adds, “I know that I can’t be a champ after having started this game so late, however I am so pleased to get some exercise daily.”

Says Yeshe, “I knew I have added 10 more healthy years to my life after having started this sport. I play nine holes five days of a week and 18 holes two days. These early morning nine holes rejuvenate me and help me stay in high spirits at work.” Yeshe plays off a 19 handicap and has won senior titles a couple of times. He is very particular about being punctual with everything he does.

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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The monsoon is relaxing off what it should be lasting hard this time in July. This month is going to be the first month with deficient rainfall, with Kathmandu Valley recording half the normal precipitation quota for July. The low pressure system that would bring us moisture from the southeast has drifted southward allowing intrusion of drier Tibetan air. However, a breakaway faction of clouds from the Bay will succeed in bringing temporary showers as seen on Thursday morning through an over-active monsoon from the Bay of Bengal. The low pressure system around the Arabian Sea will move eastwards bringing temporary showers.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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Virus™

"Viruddh" is the story of a person (Jitin Abraham) who accidentally witnesses a criminal act and in an attempt to intervene loses his life. It is also about an ordinary 60-plus couple, Vidyaadhar Patwardhan (Amitabh Bachchan) and Sumrita (Sharmilla Tagore), who are forced to search for faith in human values and society after the death of their only son. They are faced with the most testing time of their lives.

New Billboard Alert #666

Last week, depending on the rains, Kathmandu’s air quality fluctuated significantly in various places. Though the concentration of PM10 particles that are less than 10 microns exceeded national standards along roadides on most days, the air quality in residential areas was fairly good. The average PM10 level in the Valley rose by 37 percent from the previous week.

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Tuki-free country

Babu Raja Shrestha does not give up easily. Nearly a decade ago, when he started his solar tuki (lamp) project, everybody told him to drop the idea. It was not feasible they said, especially in the rural communities where he wanted to replace kerosene lamps with solar tuks.

“I was positive this idea would work,” says Shrestha, who installed his first Solar Home System in Pulimaran VDC of Tanahu. Today, Babu and his Centre for Renewable Energy project have been able to reach 80,000 households in 72 districts.

He says, “There is more demand now as people realise this is cheaper than kerosene.”

Babu is now steering a “light for all” campaign to completely eradicate the use of kerosene-based tuki. Nearly 2.4 million of the country’s population still do not have electricity at home, they burn about Rs 8.1 million worth of kerosene every day just to light their lamps. “We have to discourage the use of kerosene tuks in our county,” says Babu, who adds that he won’t rest until all non-electrified homes have solar lamps.

Babu graduated as an aeronautical engineer from Russia and worked in Germany. He returned to Nepal from Japan in 1989 when the controversy of the Arun hydropower project was at its peak. Babu has applied his engineering skills to a range of environmental protection initiatives. Besides bringing solar electricity to thousands of homes in villages, he also helped design a three-wheeled electric-powered vehicle for use on Kathmandu’s streets as part of an initiative to combat pollution caused by gas-powered vehicles.

Babu’s involvement in solid waste management began in 1998 when he was asked to rescue the city of Biratnagar from a mismanaged waste disposal plan. His initiative has encouraged citizens’ participation in waste clean up and reduction efforts. For his remarkable achievement in waste management, Babu was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship to continue his work towards promoting a clean environment.

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TEN STARS: The Nepali Tara program announced its Top 10 in Bhaktapur on Monday after which the finalists performed live.

MOCKERY: Members of the Upper House and House of Representatives participating in another mock-parliament session at BICC on Tuesday where they debated the Maoist proposal for negotiations.

OFF TO JAIL: Sher Bahadur Deuba being mobbed by the media after the RCCC sentenced him to two years in jail on corruption charges. Rishi Dhumala is seen delivering a karate chop on Deuba’s bodyguard.

WOMEN POWER: Student supporters of the NC-D confront police outside Padma Kanya campus on Wednesday while demanding the release of Sher Bahadur Deuba and Prakash Man Singh.

DASHING OFF: Former US Senator Thomas Daschle addressing a press conference organised by the National Democratic Institute in which he was strongly critical of the king’s February First move and his new ministerial lineup.
Ever since prehistoric man sat at his cave entrance gnawing at a mastodon bone and looking up to the sky at birds swooping and frolicking high above the Rift Valley he has wondered: can man ever do the same, can he one day also swoop and frolic like the birds? As it turned out, the answer was in the affirmative.

Recent great strides in civil aviation have meant that very soon there will be multi-storey aircrafts the size and shape of Soaltee Hotel equipped with casinos and jacuzzis where man can realise his dream to swoop and frolic with co-passengers while flying from Point A to Point B.

I don’t know about you, but I can’t wait for the Airbus A380 to come into service. The plane is so spacious that manufacturers are offering an on-board gym, in-flight astro turfed jogging track along the aisles, and an outdoor soccer field on each wing. And that is just on a two-storey plane. Wait till they roll out the 10-storey condominium megajumbo with its own high-speed lift, penthouse suite, escalators and basement parking.

It’s not just size that matters; it’s also endurance. They are now making ultra long-distance airliners that can keep flying round and round the world without landing anywhere. Airline operators know that they lose money every minute that a plane is on the ground, that is why they will love this plane because it never needs to touch down. This week Air Thrombosis and Fly By Night Airlines announced large orders for these new jets which they will use to carry that special breed of airline passenger like me who doesn’t really care where he is going as long as he is earning air miles.

There is one small problem, and that is the fidgety passenger who may get bored, drink too much and become unruly. The trick is to keep him occupied so operators on long haul flights are planning special post-graduate courses in marine biology and an option to pursue in-flight doctorates. And if that doesn’t work, flight attendants are provided cattle prods to zap rowdy passengers in cattle class. Since these flights are so long, the plane also comes with a fully-equipped flying hospital with diagnostic clinic to treat passengers who grow old enroute.

The other trend in aviation is no-frill airlines which have democratised domestic air travel in Nepal despite regression. It is an unstoppable trend, and the wave of the future. The trick is for budget airlines to go for high volume and slim profit margins by dispensing with most cabin services like food, drinks, in-flight entertainment, seats, tray tables, overhead lockers and lavatories.

I recently took a flight from Kathmandu to Delhi on Rock Bottom Airlines (Mission Statement: ‘If you pay peanuts, you are a monkey’) and I must say, I didn’t miss any of the amenities that I have come to take for granted on normal airlines, like barf bags and life vests. The plane takes off on full power and climbs to cruising altitude after which the captain switches off the engines and glides to his destination to reduce cabin noise and save fuel.

The planes have no seats because hungry passengers ate all the foam padding, so even in economy passengers can relax on 180 degree slumberettes on the cabin floor. Other cost-cutting measures include eliminating the cabin crew and co-pilot, harnessing passengers with chutes and dropping them at designated waypoints to save on airport landing charges, and providing oxygen masks on a first-come-first-serve basis.

But I don’t mind all this as long as they credit my air miles.