

A photograph showing several soldiers in camouflage uniforms and blue uniforms walking down a street. One soldier in the foreground is holding a rifle. A crowd of people is visible in the background.

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DID YOU KNOW?
Maasai dancers perform to celebrate special
occasions – like a marriage, the birth of a
child or the start of the harvest season. The
dance is called the Mokwinda.

Image provided by Maasai Africa Cultural Project



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FROM THE FRYING PAN

Here we go again: pavements strewn with bricks, roads blocked off by burning tyres, colleges forced to close and chakka jams—scenes reminiscent of years of unstable coalition politics in the late 1990s. An informal poll of bemused bystanders on overhead bridges this week showed people taking the goings on below as further proof that the political parties are back to their old habits. The word on the streets is that the unpopularity of the king does not mean there is more trust in the parties, just as the lack of support for politicians doesn't mean people want an active king.

Desperate Nepalis need a sign that the parties have reinvented themselves as a credible alternative to both Maoist totalitarianism and absolute monarchy before they will come out spontaneously in support. Many still have serious misgivings about handing power back to the same people who abused it so grossly for so many years. And what they see on the streets doesn't give them much confidence that things will be different.

But there is a difference this time: the backlash against crackdowns on democracy is rapidly gathering a republican momentum. The tail is wagging the dog, and elderly politicians who have denied democracy within their own parties are seriously worried the youth-led agitation may spin out of control.

That should actually worry the royal regime even more. Some of the slogans on the campuses this week make 1990 look like a picnic. The king's shadowy advisers (yes, the same ones from 15 years ago) live within earshot of these demonstrations. They must by now be having a strong feeling of déjà vu. Yet, they are stirring all the hornet nests on the tree at the same time: the students, the civil service, civil society, the political parties, the international community. They promised peace and democracy six months ago—we have neither. The royal regime seems to believe its own disinformation about 'no government in the world ever negotiating with terrorists' or 'nowhere in the world is news allowed on FM'.

Democracy was messy but that will pale into insignificance compared to the absolute anarchy we seem to be headed towards. The only force that can prevent us from falling from the frying pan into the fire is an accountable and remodelled political leadership that commands the moral authority to have the people on its side.



PURSHOTAM BARAL/KANTIPUR

Trial and terror

In Libang or London, terrorism is terrorism

The ongoing debate in these pages regarding Britain's position on terrorism raises important views in the context of the conflict in Nepal, London bombings and the IRA statement last week.

GUEST COLUMN
Ajindra Singh



What both sides of the question need to bear in mind is that terrorism, no matter where, must be condemned. This applies at all times and whether it occurs in remote villages of Nepal or in London's melting pot. Although, as rightly pointed out by British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield (Letters, #258) there cannot be a common solution to counter the menace. Nevertheless, any attempt to control terrorism must take into account underlying causes which should then be addressed properly.

Terrorism is always a result of a complex interaction of social, economic, political and ideological factors.

Any counter-terrorism policy based on the assumption that negotiations with terrorists are not possible is doomed to fail, is not sustainable in the long term and is bound to lead to protracted human misery. The protagonists need to keep an open mind to readily identify potential causes of violence. The UK's own experience with IRA terrorism is testimony to this. After 36 years of violence, broken ceasefires, and finally talks and decommissioning, last week the IRA announced an historic end to its armed campaign. There are important lessons that could also be relevant for Nepal:

- Governments often label any rebel armed movement as terrorism without giving much consideration to the actual causes.
- Governments do hold covert talks and negotiations with groups committing 'terrorism' in order to find an acceptable solution.
- It is in the nature of long conflicts that they are punctuated by ceasefires from time to time, these require political will among all sides in the conflict.
- A temporary breakdown of such ceasefires must not discourage attempts at finding lasting peace and shouldn't be labelled as the other party's 'lack of commitment'.
- If nothing else works, the international community should be given the chance to resolve conflicts, especially since terrorism doesn't respect

national boundaries and one country's national security policy can affect another country's security.

● All parties must recognise that there is no military solution to political, social, economic or ideological differences and ignoring this leads to loss of lives and property.

All acts that endanger the lives of non-combatants (and thereby terrorise them) either by the state, groups or individuals, whether by minority or majority of the population for whatever reason, must by default be classified as terrorism and their perpetrators severely punished.

No objective justifies the use of violence against unarmed citizens and using the majority argument should also not render such acts legitimate.

Bombing buses in Chitwan and London must both be condemned. Likewise, use of security forces to crush an insurgency, whether in Nepal, Iraq or elsewhere, must not be viewed as an ideal counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism measure.

Killing of unarmed civilians whether a villager in Libang or a Brazilian in London is ineffective in deterring terrorism. The only way social, political, economic or ideological differences can be settled is by having constructive debate and dialogue. And this should apply globally and equally to both groups: those advocating terrorism and those entrusted with the formulation of counter-terrorism policy. There is no place for double standards. ●

Ajindra Singh is pursuing a PhD at Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland.

Damned if they do, damned if they don't

Things are fast moving out of control of those in charge

Frustrated by increasing international censure, the royal regime has begun venting anger on students on the streets. But that irritates the international community even further. The regime is damned if it prosecutes republican students and damned if it doesn't.

Unlike the middle age survivors of the Panchayat, this generation has grown up in the relative freedom of post-

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



1990 Nepal. After student leader Gagan Thapa was declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, four students declined to submit bail of Rs 500 each early this week and waved merrily at photographers as they were taken away (pic, above). By their defiance, these youngsters have undermined the legitimacy of the February First order.

Whether malign or benevolent, dictatorships invariably turn out to be oppressive in the end. It's not just their methods, the very existence of

dictatorships needs to be questioned. Our mainstreamers have been found to be lacking in resolve, so younger activists are taking up the struggle on their behalf. Twelve years of limited democracy, it seems, hasn't been enough to break the cultural shackles of feudocracy.

Soviet dissident Nathan Sharansky describes the phenomenon of 'fear societies' under repressive regimes: people don't believe in official propaganda but pretend to do so for fear of retaliation. In all likelihood, very few here really believed that King Gyanendra was interested in holding polls as promised and handing sovereignty back to the people. But the opposition to the October Fourth move was so muted that it emboldened the palace to carry out February First and appropriate all state power.

The legislature, the executive, the judiciary, the media and civil society have one by one fallen prey to Rule by Royal Ordinance under an elastic interpretation of Article 127 of the now-comatose constitution. Yet, the fear society is so

pervasive that the bourgeoisie hasn't yet realised the risk of silence.

Meanwhile, palace propagandists are running a concerted misinformation campaign: "Since the people aren't against the king, they are for his direct rule." Legitimacy by default is being sought in the name of historic necessity.

The exercise to acquire salon legitimacy began soon after the king's ascension to the throne. Palace loyalists ridiculed political parties in public, character assassination of popular leaders became fair game. Rumours about the American ambassador saying this, the Indian envoy uttering that or the UN representative believing such and such were carefully circulated in the run-up to October Fourth 2002 to create the myth that royal intervention may be needed to end fractious politics and face the Maoist menace. In the drawing rooms of the elite, consent was being manufactured for a coup by stealth.

The myth that political parties were somehow responsible for instability in the country has now begun to unravel. Royal

revolving door regimes have come and gone every six months and since February the head of state has also been head of government. Yet the country is in a worse mess. The enlargement of the ministerial council three weeks ago with unsavoury characters was the last straw. Even in the capital's cocktail circuit, the balance has now tipped.

At some point in fear societies, people are no longer afraid. People who had given the king the benefit of the doubt now have no doubt about his real intentions. The takeover was justified for three reasons: restoring peace, controlling corruption and holding elections. There has been little progress on all three fronts. Many people are now convinced this wasn't about bringing democracy back on track, it was about bringing dictatorship back on track.

The heat building up on the streets is also being felt in the leadership of the political parties and has put it in a bind. They are damned if they support their radicalised student agitators and they are doomed if they don't. ●

LETTERS

BLOOMFIELD

Keith Bloomfield's outright denial of double standards on terrorism (Letters, #258) is as interesting as Tony Blair lying about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. How can Bloomfield say Bin Laden does not have a clear political or social demand? The United States made Bin Laden a hero when he was leading 3,500 men to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan and branded him a terrorist when the conflict was over. Is asking British (and other) troops to quit Iraq not a political goal? If Nepal's Maoists' atrocities are to be solved politically, why not also solve the Iraqi insurgents' resistance against foreign occupation? If Bloomfield does not recognise the Maoists rebels as terrorists, then, why did his government send weapons to crush them under the Deuba regime?

B Raj Giri, email

● The dubious and patently self-serving definition of terrorism offered by the British envoy exposes the western hypocrisy in their dealings with the Third World. Terrorism is simply the use of intimidation and violent methods against a legitimate state and civil population, it does not matter who the target is, what the intention is or how many people are behind the attack. An evil such as the taking of human life cannot be justified because 'thousands' of people support such killings. For example, hundreds of thousands of Hutus were involved in the slaughter of Tutsis, does the size of participation and support make such crimes democratic and legitimate? The contorted logic coming out of this English fellow is this: those who attack us are terrorists, those who kill Nepalis are freedom fighters. My question to the English queen's emissary is this: what was the crime of the thousands of dead Nepalis that you are going out of your way to legitimate and protect their tormentors and killers? I also challenge Bloomfield to prove his assertion that those who attacked Britain are just a few individuals.

Patrick McGuire, Thamel

● In response to my letter citing clear double standards of Britain in dealing with al Qaeda and the Nepali Maoists, Keith Bloomfield has given an even more doubtful response. He says there is a difference in '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 al Qaeda, 'which is a worldwide extremist network involving a tiny minority, with no coherent negotiable demands or formal structure'. How can an extremist outfit with a worldwide network involve only a 'tiny minority' and without 'formal structure'? Why look at the bombings by one extremist outfit with an outdated ideology in London and another in Chitwan with different glasses?

Preeti Koirala, Baneswor

● From the perspective of a victim, it hardly matters whether terrorist activities are caused by an armed insurrection involving thousands of a country's citizens or by al Qaeda. One is not a lesser evil than the other. Even in Northern Ireland the British paramilitary had to kill about 4,000 people, mostly civilians, in the 1960s-90s until the terrorists were forced to tone down their agenda. As a Nepali I am concerned that Bloomfield's remarks can further mislead our international friends about the brutality of a movement which does not have any social base. If he still thinks that the political parties represent the popular voice in Nepal and their willingness to join the Maoists is the certificate of their political worth, then one really wonders how Nepal's international partners can help the Nepali people.

Diabya B Gurung, New York

● When Keith Bloomfield denies having double standards on terrorism he proves precisely that he has double standards. When the bombs explode in London killing innocents it's terrorism, when they explode in Nepal killing innocents it's an insurgency.

M Ramesh, email

● The majority of Nepalis feel and share the pain of the British people and pray for the families of the victims of the London terror attacks. We have faced similar outrages for 10 years now. But Britain must be careful not to violate civil liberties and human rights while fighting terrorism otherwise the UN may table a resolution under Item 9 in Geneva. Nepal may also be forced to cut some of its aid to Britain but because we have a 'special relationship', we may maintain our 'non-lethal' aid of supplying Gurkhas for frontline service in the British Army. Nepal stood by Britain for 189 years, putting down a mutiny in India and sacrificing our youth in two world wars. How can it cite a 'special friendship' while desecrating the blood of our noble ancestors who fought shoulder to shoulder as friends? Britain should be restraining the Europeans and helping the Americans in their Nepal policy. Never has a country had more ungrateful friends than you...

Rabin Rai, ex-British Gurkha

● Exploding a bus packed with civilian causing the deaths of more than 40 men, women and children in Nepal is not an act of terrorism for Britain. The Maoists have killed more than 800 civilians 450 soldiers, 350 policemen and 130 personnel from the armed police force over the past 18 months



and yet it is hard for the British to see the Maoists as terrorists. Will it take a nexus between the Maoists and those responsible for the London bombings on 7/7 for the Maoists to be recognised officially as terrorists? The United States State put the CPN-M on its terrorism exclusion list but Washington's closest ally and partner Britain does not see the Maoists as terrorists.

Rahul Thapa, email

● If it isn't acceptable that innocent people are killed in the furtherance of a political, religious or ideological agenda, does that still mean the difference between armed insurrection and al Qaeda somehow justifies it? How did the British government first respond to IRA activities? Isn't it part of the diplomatic code not to comment on the internal matters of other countries?

Akshyata Maskey, email

BIHARI K SHRESTHA

Bihari K Shrestha in 'Support by default' (Guest Column, #258) makes a veiled attempt to appear objective but still seems to have problems with political parties. He hears 'near delirious utterances' by the parties but is deaf to threats against them by ex-generals. He objects to the international community's demand that the parties be restored to power. The parties are still the most legitimate representatives of a majority of the people in the country. Why does the issue of corruption start with 1990 and end with October 2002? What about the 30 years of Panchayati raj which

we are about to embrace again, thanks to the king's ambition to rule absolutely and without accountability? On India's role, Shrestha seems to suggest that since the southern neighbour has closed its eyes to Bhutan's autocracy and the Burmese junta, it should support Nepal's king's ambitions.

Sambhav Sharma, New Baneswor

NO-HORNED RHINO

Thank you for P Ghimire's 'The no-horned Asiatic rhinoceros' (#258) which succeeds in highlighting the grave plight of the greater one-horned rhinoceros in Chitwan. While it is indeed true that the current conflict has taken a toll on security in national parks like Chitwan, the onus of saving Nepal's rhinoceros does not lie solely with the Royal Nepali Army. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation strives to address the critical issue of poaching on-the-ground and on the national level with support from partners like UNDP, KMNTC, ITNC and WWF. Community-based anti-poaching operations have come into their own with the support of the government and organisations like WWF but they are not nearly enough to stop poaching.

The illegal trade in wildlife is a global problem driven by market forces of supply and demand. As conservation efforts strive to keep endangered species like the rhinoceros from extinction, there is immense pressure from buyers and users across the world from the Middle East to South East Asia and China. Nepal is not only a notorious transit route but also a supplier. In the current socio-political climate, what Shiba Raj Bhata says in the article is unfortunately on the mark: new poachers easily replace those who are arrested. The

news even in the most democratic countries', #257). FM stations broadcast news all the time. All over the world. In the US a major source of alternative and progressive radical news is low-power FM stations all over the country. The Communications Minister is woefully ignorant or a deliberate prevaricator. In either case, he obviously isn't the man for the job.

Hilary Dirlam, email

● I am not surprised at the education level of this minister. If you censor your own country just to keep in power it leads to such ridiculous statements. Nepal has a lot of excellent professional journalism. Every government in Nepal should be proud of this fact.

From my own experience as an inhabitant of a very democratic country I can tell your minister that press freedom is part of the lifestyle of a democratic country. Irrespective of how you spread this news, either through newspapers, FM stations, television or through peaceful demonstrations.

Leopold Höglinger, Nussdorf, Austria

DUNG CAKE

Re: 'Cowdung takes the cake', #257. While people like Amrit Bahadur Karki, Jagannath Shrestha and Sundar Bajgain deserve credit for their book on biogas and for making the program the success that it is, it will only be fair also to remember those who also had a hand in getting this program off the ground. Indeed, SNV Nepal has been the main promoter of gobar gas through engineers—Wim van Nes and Jan Lam at the Gobar Gas tatha Yantra Bikash Company in Butwal. Govinda Devkota, who used to oversee the research section in that company, got a RONAST award. Ram Krishna Pokharel of the Gobar Gas Co, Rajesh Shrestha and me at SNV-Nepal backstopped the BSP. Other early contributors to the program should not be forgotten.

Adarsha Tuladhar, email

RICE

I found it interesting that in the same issue of *Nepali Times* (#256) you had an article on malnutrition ('Underfed and underfunded') and the rice intensification system ('The miracle is it's no miracle'). Isn't it a pleasant coincidence that you have the problem and its antidote in the same paper? Now, all it takes is for the government to get over its skepticism about this 'miracle' rice, use it to boost harvest and feed the children.

Ina Petersen, email

DON'T GET IT

Either Kunda Dixit is being forced to be more and more indirect in his satire because of censorship or he has lost his grip. Either way, I don't get his jokes anymore. What's so funny?

Janardan Adhikari, email

● Thanks to Kunda Dixit for providing us Nepalis who are living abroad a true picture of what is going on Nepal through the medium of satire. But it must be difficult to come up with such hilarious stuff when things are so depressing. Good thing the "higher up authoritarians" don't have a sense of humour otherwise they may actually not like it.

Dinesh KC, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5521013
Mail: Letters, Nepali Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Peter Thomson, UK

RADIO ACTIVITY

I wonder how the Communications Minister can get away with such a total falsehood ('FM stations aren't allowed to broadcast

Kathmandu's banner man

No national day is complete without Laxman Khadka's banners



MALIKA BROWNE

MALIKA BROWNE

It's 2 July and a small bearded figure in a white kurta is shinnying up a telegraph pole at Pani Pokhari, unfurling a huge banner across the street. The banner, in English and Nepali, congratulates Jorge W Bush (sic) on the forthcoming US national holiday and is signed Cleaner of Nepal, Laxman Singh Khadka.

No national day or major event would be complete in Kathmandu without one of Laxman Singh Khadka's banners. Whether it is celebrating the friendship between Japan and Nepal, UN-Nepal relations, or congratulating Queen Elizabeth on her 79th birthday, the banners have become a Kathmandu institution.

For the short-sighted, Khadka brings his message down to street level by wearing a kurta which matches his banner. He has two hundred such kurtas and he proudly claims he has never re-used one the following year. The day we met Khadka he was between Popes. The banner commiserating the death of John Paul II had just come down and he was looking for a suitable spot for his banner hailing the appointment of Benedict XVI.

Laxman Khadka has been putting up banners (a total of 100, he estimates) around Nepal for almost 12 years. His first was for Buddha's birthday in Lumbini. His second was for the American national day. "I wanted to do something good for the nation. Everyone is doing things for profit or money. People think I get paid for wearing these kurtas but I don't get a single paisa from anyone."

An energetic 57-year-old, Khadka is a farmer from Tintana VDC. He has four children and used to be a driver in Kathmandu before giving up work to concentrate on politics. His only income is from a small piece of land owned by his family. Every morning he wakes up at six and has tea. Then he goes out, "to scold

political leaders, even though they never listen to what I have to say. I'd like to be a minister but I'd be confused about who I would work for: the public or the king."

Khadka writes the text for his banner, gives it to his daughter to translate into English and then takes the text to a sign painter in Baneswor. Each banner costs Rs 5,000. How does he pay for them? "I get credit from the sign painter and friends help me out."

He claims to have always been an independent politician and to be working for the good of the country. "Japan, South Korea and Singapore were all built by their own people. But Nepal can't do it on its own. We need help from outside. Nepal is landlocked, which is a big problem. I'm for democracy and zero corruption. On His Majesty's birthday this year I asked him whether he wanted me to go to India on his behalf as his prime minister. He smiled but didn't say anything."

I ask Khadka whether, in this age of increased security around embassies, he is ever prevented from stringing up his banners. He replies that although hanging banners is illegal, no one has ever told him he can't. "And anyway, everyone from high-level officials down knows me, so they know what I'm upto," he laughs.

Indeed, Khadka is an enthusiastic participant in public events. Last year, following the resignation of Surya Bahadur Thapa, he held court at the palace gates waiting to hear whether his application for the post of prime minister had been successful.

When he isn't putting up banners, Khadka likes to direct traffic. He is often seen at Narayan Gopal Chok at rush hour, cheerfully signalling with his arms and waving to acquaintances. "I like to direct traffic as part of my social work. Traffic police have to stop drivers to look at their licence and ask for bribes."

So what happens to his banners once they have had their day? "My house is too small to keep them all there," he says. "Sometimes we rip them up and use them for cleaning the house. I'm always in search of new occasions for a new banner. I was going to make one after the London bombs but didn't have enough money." ●

Chitwan's young conservation crusaders

Low on resources but big on energy, the area's youngsters fight poaching with a door-to-door campaign

PRIYA JOSHI in CHITWAN

Shahi Chitwan Ratriya Nikunja Madhyawarti Chetra Mrigakunj Upabhokta Samiti
Dwara Gathit Upa-samiti Banyajantu Chori Shikar Niyantaran Yuba Aabhiyan.

That is the long name for a group of energetic young Chitwan college students who in a short time have made their mark fighting poaching in Royal Chitwan National Park.

To make locals more conservation conscious, the group visits schools, puts up street plays, holds *dohori geet* concerts, slide shows and even has a *guleli sankalan* campaign where boys and girls hand in the slingshots, which they use to kill birds. But protecting the areas flora and fauna isn't so simple.

Due to the on-going conflict, poaching and illegal harvesting of natural resources have greatly increased in Chitwan. The group's volunteers, in their late teens and early 20s, have learned that poachers often take shelter and gather information on the whereabouts of animals from locals living near the park. Residents are fooled by poachers who arrive incognito in sleek Pajeros, offering drinks or cash. Others are dressed as sadhus or act like deaf-mutes.

To prevent locals from getting hoodwinked and exploited by poachers, the young men and women have launched a *ghar-dailo* program, going house-to-house in the buffer zone surrounding the park to inform villagers about the benefits of conversation and warning them against poaching and other illegal activities.

"Only if we talk to them one-on-one can we convince people about why conservation is necessary," says one of the volunteers Doma Poudel, "It is hard work but we have seen positive results."

Many locals have suffered from wild animals, including rhinos that come out of the park to raid crops. But the rhinos are also a tourist attraction that brings revenue to the villagers living on the park's outskirts. On the other hand, poachers offer instant cash which could land a villager in jail for years. The group discusses all these things and tries to convince fellow villagers of the importance of conservation. Volunteers say locals have started reporting suspicious strangers and handed over traps and nets used by poachers found in nearby forests.

However, awareness alone is not enough. The group is also investigating carcasses of poisoned rhinos to find where the substances were bought. It has also hired guards who patrol nearby community forests daily and report their findings.

The group's intensive drive has now resulted in a well-



During the group's house-to-house campaign, volunteer Doma Poudel tries to convince a woman to keep an eye on strangers.

connected network of informants. When group members are notified of any illegal activities within community forests or of potential poachers in the area, they notify officials at the sector office who then take necessary action.

But hurdles remain. For example, the very conflict that has brought about the need for the anti-poaching movement has also greatly hindered the group's mobility. Also, the volunteers are still studying or have part-time jobs, so programs can only be scheduled in their free time. Because they aren't paid, some parents complain that groupmembers stay out all day and return home without a single paisa.

But they are not giving up. In fact, members have bigger ideas. They plan to organise a region-wide campaign to make vets and pharmacies more attentive to who is buying pesticides and why. Knowing that women also need to be active participants in their efforts, the group is planning a fun, conservation-related Tiji activity. And further afield, it wants to organise mobile street-plays along the highway from Bharatpur to Hetauda, which skirts the park.

For the moment, due to the greatly reduced number of rhinos in the park (see: 'The no-horned Asiatic rhinoceros', #258) the dedicated group is focusing on saving this highly endangered species.

We accompanied the regional head of the campaign, Rishi Gurung, on his door-to-door awareness drive. He sits down in the veranda of a mud house telling a woman about the benefits of the Milijuli Community Forest near the village and warning her about suspicious-looking strangers. The woman nods her head but says she wasn't even aware of the community forest even though she lives right across from it.

Gurung tells her: "We need to conserve nature not just for tourism but for ourselves and our livelihoods. All plants and animals are important." ●

Storm in the tea sector

The tea gardens and factories of Jhapa and Ilam have been forced to close because of Maoist threats since 16 July, the middle of the picking season. While estate owners are worried about recouping their investment and paying back loans, thousands of tea pickers are without jobs and are struggling to survive. “I can neither open the factory nor keep it closed, it is peak season for the leaves,” says Chandi Prajuli of Danfe Tea Processing in Bhadrapur.

There are 5,000 tea pickers and 35,000 labourers employed in the tea gardens of eastern Nepal. “What will we eat, how long will the strike go on?” asks Shyam Deb Urab at the Tokla garden. The head of the tea worker’s union here, Dipak Tamang, says no one has made any moves to resolve the dispute. “When other industries are affected, the government acts immediately but not when the tea industry, that is propping up the economy, is hit,” he says.

Banks and creditors have invested up to Rs 300 million in the tea industry and the country was exporting some Rs 70 million worth of tea into the international market and replacing imports by providing eight million tons of tea for the domestic market. (Tirtha Sigdel)

Le Méridien resort opens in Gokarna

Le Méridien Kathmandu, Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa opened this week despite slack arrivals in the country. The hotel is part of a chain run by Le Méridien Hotels and Resorts and is located inside the former royal hunting reserve, Gokarna Forest outside Kathmandu.

The hotel is an financed by an overseas Indian, Prem Sachdev who also developed the world class golf course inside the forest. Le Méridien Kathmandu consists of 38 deluxe rooms, one suite inspired by Malla and Rana period architecture and 16 cottages set amongst century old trees, with views across the second fairway of the golf course into the valley below. The spa offers a variety of rejuvenating treatments including Ayurvedic, massage and beauty treatments. There is an indoor temperature-controlled pool complex, sauna, steam room and Jacuzzi. The large, well-equipped gym overlooks the forest through large picture windows.

Sami Zoghbi, Le Méridien’s regional managing director for the Middle East and West Asia says: “The 18 hole golf course at Le Méridien Kathmandu is a golfer’s dream. It is one of the most spectacular golf resort courses in the world.” The par 72 course was designed by David Kidd of Gleneagles Golf Developments, Scotland and boasts the only Bent Grass greens in South and South East Asia.

Opening rates start from \$ 45 per room per night including airport transfers and breakfast. There are also special opening three-night golf packages starting from \$ 225 per person and a five-night spa package from \$ 375 per person, available until 30 September 2005.

NEW PRODUCT

NE PACKS: McFills is now in Nepal with the NE brand snacks. The products are available in attractive three-dimensional packs in many flavours.



Leapfrogging to nowhere

The state is punishing the people by denying them mobile phone connectivity

Why is the phone service such a scarce resource in Nepal? Fifty-five years after the first exchange system was set up, the state-owned telecom authority has been able to hand out only about 450,000 lines in this country of 25 million. Despite technological advancements that have made expenses fall worldwide, it still costs, on an average, about \$ 75 to get one fixed-line phone—that too, after waiting for two to 10 years.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



In fact, so pent-up was the demand that in just five years since the state first introduced mobile telephony in 2000, almost 250,000 new numbers have been distributed, at the ratio of 2.3 pre-paid lines for every post-paid connection. But the benefits of even that mediocre achievement were overshadowed when the state abruptly snatched away the right to use mobile phones six months ago. Though fixed-line connections have been restored since, the bureaucratic hurdles for reviving old mobile lines or getting new ones have gone up, more so outside of Kathmandu. As of today, almost 175,000 pre-paid mobile lines remain dead, ostensibly for security reasons.

Despite such measures, it is not clear to what extent the state has succeeded in destroying the rebels’ communication apparatus. Instead, what is increasingly clear is that by punishing ordinary subscribers, it has alienated many small businesses for whom the mobile—with an installation



charge that was one-fifth of a fixed-line—was a handy tool to earn money by staying in touch with customers and information networks. Far from fueling Maoist insurgency, the mobile phones in Nepal were seen as, to borrow the words of *The Economist* of London, ‘a classic example of technology that helps people help themselves’.

Indeed, in a paper published last March, Leonard Waverman and colleagues at the London Business School make a case that ‘investment in telecoms in developing countries generates a growth dividend because the spread of telecommunications reduces cost of interaction, and expands market boundaries and information flows’. Using data from 102 low and middle-income countries, including Nepal, they calculate that, all else being equal, 10 additional mobile phones per 100 people boost the GDP growth by 0.59 percent.

Their research concluded that

‘mobile telephony has a significant impact on economic growth and this impact may be twice as large in developing countries compared to developed countries’. That Africa has had the world’s fastest growing mobile market in the last five years despite its well-publicised poverty must tell us that the poor are more likely to value how important it is to stay connected to information flows.

In Nepal, geography remains hostile. The continuing war has partitioned people into isolated pockets in the hills. Road networks were sparse to begin with, but have become even more dangerous because of landmines and ambushes. Ropeway transports and postal facilities remain primitive. To add insult to injury, the state has handicapped the only two inexpensive and easy-to-spread voice-based technologies—FM radios and pre-paid mobile connections—that can leapfrog over the usual obstacles to deliver critical information to people who need it. Could the state have done anything more stupid than to allow information degenerate into rumors and heresies?

These days, when millions of vegetable farmers in Bangladesh and *pan-wallahs* in India can afford to choose services from different and competitive phone companies, phones remain a needlessly scarce resource in Nepal. Why? Because the state controls who gets the lines and who doesn’t. And because the state doesn’t want citizens to stay connected, to share information and to help one another to be productive and aware Nepalis. ●

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“We are moving in the right direction”



KIRAN PANDAY
Home Minister Dan Bahadur Shahi in an interview with BBC Nepali Service, 3 August

BBC Nepali: What would you say are the three main achievements of the government under the king in the last six months?
Dan Bahadur Shahi: The law and order situation has been improving. We have been able to control terrorism. We have been providing efficient public services to the people without any prejudice and they are free of corruption. The biggest achievement is that we have been able to help people lose their fear of terrorism. These are the indications that the objectives for which this government was formed have been met and that we are moving in the right direction.

But the king himself and other members of the ministers’ council have admitted that they need time to get things done, which is also what the parties always said.
The difference is that the parties kept on saying things and we do things.

But do you have any supporters? Criticism is mounting.
Who is criticising? Is it the Nepali people or is it the foreigners? There is a big difference between what the Nepali people are saying and what outsiders believe.

But how can you claim to know what the people truly believe?
People have been representing themselves now. You will have to talk to the people and find out the truth from them.

When the king took over six months ago, he said he’d bring democracy back on track. All we have seen are crackdowns on democracy.
The parties have been carrying on with their demonstrations and free speech. The sizes of such demonstrations are exaggerated by newspapers. We have not prohibited any publications despite the fact that they have been bringing out incorrect news.

Professional organisations have also accused the government of curbs on civil liberties.
In the name of professional organisations, demonstrators are coming to the streets every day with political agendas. We have never tried to stop them. But in the name of democratic rights, if they resort to arson, vandalism and other destructive activities, we can’t allow them to do so.

No democracy in the world tolerates such activities.
The government has been criticised for making amendments to acts and laws through royal ordinances and not parliament.
You need to make such amendments and ordinances when you have to run the state. And remember, parliament was dissolved by an elected government of the same parties who are protesting today. The government cannot stay with its hands tied just because there is no parliament.

But many say the amendments add up to a plot against democracy.
How can you expect us to allow the civil servants, who are paid from the national coffers, to hold the flags of the political parties?

So, the government believes that the opposition from inside and outside the country to the royal takeover is not justifiable?
I did not say that. I believe that the government too has the right to express what it believes is right in the national interest.

Your government seems to be in no mood to work with the parties, forget about holding talks with the Maoists or announcing a ceasefire. How long do you plan to go on like this?
Who says the government is not interested to create cordial relations with the parties? If the Maoists come forth giving up arms and violence and with a sincere intention to hold talks, why would the government say no?

You can’t just take over, Your Majesty!

Surya Bahadur Sen Oli in the Note of Dissent column in *Jana Aastha*, 3 August

When a landmine in Chitwan killed 28 bus passengers, His Majesty, who was chairing the government, didn’t even send condolences or a message of sympathy, let alone inspect the site of the attack. Neither was there any message after families of security men were slaughtered in Dhangadi. It is natural for the people to feel this omission.
His Majesty can’t just take power or say I’ll run the country myself. For that one needs to know the real situation in the country, the security status, what the resources the country needs are, what is its future, do the people have peace and justice. If so, how can it be made sustainable? If not, how to do it? All these things must be taken into consideration and a comprehensive strategy put together before taking over power and administration.
Today, His Majesty has chosen the wrong people, without popular support and participation, and has not just plunged right into the conflict but has also antagonised the political parties. This is like Bhimsen Thapa’s government where he involved only his relatives. This bunch of arrogant

and greedy charlatans and convicts must be replaced.
Much time has been wasted since October 2002. How much more time are we going to waste? This is an era of new perspectives it’s for looking to the future, not to look back at old and ragged fossils. His Majesty is raising white elephants who have ceased to be relevant.
It is time for His Majesty to rethink and re-evaluate his move. Peace, justice and reformed democracy must be returned. The people can’t be disregarded: it will be a mistake to think that the people will automatically accept things just because His Majesty says so. This will widen the gap between the people who back the king’s measures and the people who disregard them.
His Majesty is being dragged into controversy, the people’s positive attitude and hope is being transformed into hopelessness and the international community is also pressuring the rulers to rethink their moves. There should be no more plans and programs that go against the people’s wishes.
Surya Bahadur Sen Oli was a former Zonal Commissioner during the Panchayat.

Give up violence

Editorial in *Samaya*, 4 August

Though the political parties seem positive about the offer for negotiations made by the Maoists, they cannot trust them. All Nepalis and the international community want peace and democracy restored. But if the king or the Maoists have central power, it will isolate the country further. It would be welcomed if the Maoists were to admit that no political victory can be won through military means. But the Maoists must also be clear that they cannot demand ‘agendas’ of the political parties at gunpoint. Until the Maoists stop killing cadres of the seven political parties and civilians, they will not have laid to rest their belief in violence. Any individual or group who does not respect another individual’s right to life, liberty and security cannot support democracy. Even if the conflict between Baburam Bhattarai and Prachanda seems to have ended, until they prove that they respect democratic values they will not be able to earn the respect of the people. The Maoists are stained by violence and can’t be entrusted with supervising the restoration of democracy. When they abide by a ceasefire and prove that they have ended all violent activities, it is the Maoists’ right to set up a common agenda with the political parties for a peaceful struggle. But for this to happen, they must accept politics as something that can be achieved through people’s support and through non-violence. We cannot forget that the Maoists once stated that they would talk only to the king. After February First, one faction in the Maoists were still willing to talk to the monarch. Therefore, democratic forces must be clear about how committed and dedicated the Maoists are towards democracy. Only if the



Maoists give up violence and work together with the political parties, will a revolution be successful.

Lhasa or bust

Nepal Samacharpatra, 29 July

The Kathmandu-Lhasa bus service launched with much fanfare in May has been cancelled because of hassles to Nepalis in Tibet. Chinese citizens can visit Nepal easily and roam freely and with dignity around the country but it is not the same for Nepalis when touring Lhasa. They are looked upon suspiciously and their tour restricted to specific places and hotels designated by government authorities. Nepalis are not even allowed to stay in standard class hotels but have to pay nearly \$ 200, besides the visa fee. Visitors are restricted to a 10-day visa but it takes six days for the bus to travel in and out of Lhasa.

Maoist injustice

Samaya, 4 August

Now that the Maoists have closed down boarding schools and disrupted classes with constant calls of bandas, they are targeting public schools that were handed over to village communities by the government. The rebels have warned they will call an



हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 31 July-16 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The talk of talks between the parties and Maoists is just talk. Each is trying to use the other... God has given everyone the right to be stupid but I don’t think the political forces in the country will be so stupid.”
Prakash Chandra Lohani of the Rastria Janashakti Party

indefinite strike if the government fails to take back the management of the schools. Leaders of the Maoist student wings in Mechikosi and Ilam, Jitesh Yonjon and Damber Lungeli, have warned that if their warning is not taken seriously, they won't be responsible for "any military, social, political or economic consequences". They had given a similar warning while ordering the shutdown of private schools. The rebels have also ordered all community schools to return the Rs 100,000 management grant from the government. Sources say the rebels want the grant for themselves. The Maoists' logic is that the government and not local communities should be responsible for mass education.

Monacracy

Political scientist Krishna Khanal in *Deshantar*, 31 July

देशान्तर-साप्ताहिक

In a developing country like ours, one can't expect a people's movement overnight.

One thing needs to be made clear about the movement—it can't be wishy-washy. What is the objective? We can't be vague about that. The objective of the 1990 people's movement was to uproot the partyless system; what is our movement this time? Is it aimed at activating the constitution or is it for the reinstatement of parliament?

We also need to be clear about who or what is creating hurdles to activating the constitution or



MIN BAJRACHARYA

reinstating parliament. What is stopping talks with the Maoists? What is stopping us from going for the constituent assembly? What is obstructing the flow of the country's politics? The answer to all of the above is: the king's active regime and his political aspirations. In short, this movement needs to be clear about the monarchy's role.

Calling for a republican system is no crime. There are many countries in the world that have a democratic system but no monarchy. A king is not a mandatory condition for democracy. We need to understand that the earlier compromise we made on the monarchy was a temporary understanding. If the king is not willing to work within that understanding, the deal is off.

The political parties have been saying that the king's future lies in his own hands. Actually the monarchy's future is not in the king's hands but in the hands of the people. So the democracy

movement needs to focus on that one target. For this, we need a leadership we can trust. Can the NC or UML lead it?

Teenaged killers

Kantipur, 29 July

कान्तिपुर

TANAHU—They were 15-16 years old, the Maoist youth who tortured and killed Raju Sharma. He had fled after being detained by Maoists and the rebels followed him back to his village in Sisneri. First they shot him in the knees, he fell down and while he was writhing in pain they smashed his head repeatedly with a boulder until he died. Sisneri's villagers are now terror-stricken and too scared to even venture out of their homes. Human rights activists who visited the site have condemned the brutal killing. INSEC representative Prakash Chandra Bhattacharya said the murder proves that the Maoists have no respect for an individual's right to life.

Giving the king a bad name

Himal Khabarpatrika, 31 July-16 August

हिमाल

Among the ministers who give the king a bad name is Minister for Physical Planning and Works Jagat Gauchan, an ex-convict accused in 1985 of a conspiracy to kill journalist Padam Thakurati (seen with wound in his head, inset). Gauchan (circled in red) was found guilty and is seen being taken away to prison to serve a two-year jail sentence. Gauchan's appointment has created an uproar, with visiting US ex-senator Tom Daschle saying last week: "There should be no place in this government for ex-convicts." Two other ministers in the present council, Home Minister Dan Bahadur Shahi and Assistant Minister for Education Senate Shrestha, were both embroiled in a fertiliser scandal.



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विजय लामा
नायक/पाइलट

व्यक्ति अनेक, विचार अनेक, क्षेत्र अनेक तर पत्रिका मात्र एक... अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्टमा प्रकाशित सामग्री सम्बन्धी विविध प्रश्न निम्न हामी तपाईंको घर आँगनमा आउँदै छौं । तपाईंको सही जबाफले आकर्षक उपहार पाउने छ ।

सम्पूर्ण पत्रिका

Medicine worse than the disease

Poor patients and poorly performing doctors are turning us into a nation of pill poppers

MALLIKA ARYAL

At a World Health Organisation (WHO) conference in Thailand last year researchers said half the antibiotics in Nepal are prescribed unnecessarily and 40 percent of money spent on medicines is wasted on inappropriate prescriptions.

The International Network for Rational Drug Use (INRUD) Nepal found that more than three-quarters of patients were being prescribed antibiotics to treat common colds.

INRUD Nepal Coordinator Kumud Kumar Kafle says such irrational drug use is common and is also seen in prescriptions for children under five. For example, only 40 percent of diarrhoea cases in the tarai and 36 percent in hill areas were being prescribed oral rehydration solution, the standard treatment. “Doctors are prescribing antibiotics for common colds and diarrhoea,” says Kafle.

Over-prescription of drugs, inadequate treatment of severe illness, self-medication using prescription drugs, misuse of anti-infective drugs and premature interruption of treatment are all common.

Global studies have found that poverty and lack of patient-doctor interaction are main reasons for such abuse. Not all patients can afford to perform the tests doctors recommend. Thus, sick people or patients in places with no doctors consult the nearest pharmacist.

Irrational use of medicine in Nepal is common but no one is documenting it. Sharad Onta at the department of community

medicine at Teaching Hospital says patients can’t be blamed for the mess because the health system doesn’t give them a choice.

“Drug companies look for profits and so do retailers,” says Onta. “Consumers can’t be blamed for going after the best price in the market. Doctors need to work towards discouraging such malpractices.”

Rishi Kumar Kafle, president of the non-profit Health Care Foundation, is not surprised pharmaceutical abuse is so common in Nepal. “Doctor-patient relations are so impersonal,” he says, “patients feel uncomfortable asking questions during consultations.”

All drugs sold in Nepal have to be registered with the Department of Drug Administration, which has classified the drugs available at pharmacies into three categories. The first includes highly addictive drugs—opiates and narcotics—whose sale is prohibited without prescription and for which pharmacies are required to keep a copy of prescriptions.

Drugs in the second category, therapeutic medicines like antibiotics, are also prescription drugs but the pharmacy does not need to keep a record. The third group are over-the-counter drugs, mostly antacids and mild pain killers.

Drugs in the second category, especially antibiotics, are the most misused in Nepal. Not only do health workers prescribe heavy doses but pharmacies also sell them without prescription.

Antibiotics have saved and improved many lives since they were discovered in the 1930s, but their inappropriate use has caused global concern. Prolonged and irrational uses of antibiotics have created ‘super bugs’ resistant to some life-saving antibiotics.

A 1993 study in India showed that in 83 percent of the 500 typhoid cases sampled in Maharastra, the bacteria causing the disease were resistant to chloramphenicol, an antibiotic that has been the mainstay of typhoid treatment. It was later discovered that drug companies had been promoting chloramphenicol in combination with an anti-diarrhoeal drugs resulting in the typhus bacteria developing a resistance to it.

In Nepal, irrational drug use includes unnecessary and expensive prescriptions of vitamins, tonics and other spurious syrups to patients. Public health expert Aruna Upreti explains, “Malnutrition is not solved by taking vitamin supplements, but by eating an adequate, balanced diet.” She adds, “Misuse of vitamins also reinforces the misconception that there is a magic pill for all

ills and that supplements can replace food.”

INRUD Nepal’s Kafle says many doctors don’t give patients correct information about the drugs they prescribe and why. Many poorer patients self-medicate or go to a pharmacy

because of the difficulty in getting cheap checkups. He says the solution is to regulate doctors’ fees and launch a health insurance system. “This would make health services affordable and will also check misuse,” he adds.

Onta thinks some medicines for common illnesses have to be provided to Nepalis free of cost by the state. He cites the successful anti-TB program which gives out antibiotics free. “It is due to the national tuberculosis program that the rate of misuse of TB drugs has come down dramatically,” he says, adding that hospitals need guidelines so that if an illness is suspected, patient s will go through tests to pinpoint the cause before a drug is prescribed. ●



Model pharmacy

Prakash Pharmacia in Teku is a model drug store. Owner Prakash Man Pradhan runs the pharmacy his father started 35 years ago and has a simple rule: follow the rules.

That begins with requiring all his staff to wear blue coats, a government rule that has never been followed nationally. The staff are trained and professional, and this is probably the only pharmacy in the country that doesn’t look like a corner grocery.

While most pharmacies in Nepal ignore the government’s regulations on prescriptions, Pradhan follows them by the book. Today, Prakash Pharmacy is a community-based pharmacy which he says places utmost importance on providing quality service to all members of the community. “I did not have to be trained abroad to start thinking about community-based pharmacies, I am only following the government’s requirements for drug stores,” he says. While a hospital pharmacy provides medicine only to the patients in the hospital, a community pharmacy does not discriminate.

Pradhan even adheres to the government’s new rule that prescription and non-prescription drugs can’t be sold together, one that few pharmacies follow. “We have a small shop next door that sells over-the-counter drugs and cosmetics,” says Pradhan, “and this bigger section only handles prescription drugs.” And it goes without saying that no prescription drugs are sold here without a valid prescription.

Prakash Pharmacia has branches in Putalisadak (Prakash Medico), Bhedasingh (Sajan Pharmacy) and Sanepa (Arnico Pharmacy).

Substance abuse at the drug store

“Dai, I need two strips of T. or Cl.”
“Which would you like?”
“Is there much of a difference?”
“T’s milder, it’s only 10 mg. C’s a minimum dose of 25mg, it’s more effective.”
“Okay, I have a feeling my grandmother will be needing the one with the higher dose. Could you get 20 ready for me, I’ll come back later?”
“Of course, no problem.”

●

“Didi, two packs of I. and one tab of A. 10 please.”
“Anxit 10? You don’t get those, bahini, you get them in .25 and .5—which do you want?”
“Oh, okay, the .25 ones.”
“There you go, nani. Twenty Rupees, 18, with the discount.”

These aren’t comic extracts from a junkie’s biography. This is me in medicine shops in the Valley. The medicines in question are sleeping tablets, treatment for tachycardia and palpitations and anti-anxiety pills. And I got them, no inconvenience, without a confirmation call to my doctor (or my grandmother’s, for that matter) without even having to show a prescription.

Since the turn of the last century, the use of drugs for medicinal purposes has become a topic under constant,

heated debate. Many popular opiates and stimulants have been declared addictive, some illegal. Heroin in cough syrup, morphine in infant pacifiers, cocaine as a cure for depression have all been replaced.

But legal nicotine isn’t less addictive than the illegal heroin, it is just available outside the black market. Addictions aren’t just physical, they are psychological and prescribed medication requires verification because the medicines being supplied are still drugs. They can cause major withdrawal symptoms and many of them are highly addictive.

It may be entirely up to individuals if they want to become addicted. But 90 percent of Nepal’s population is still under the poverty threshold, half are illiterate. Health facilities, when available, are rarely accessible and there is a lack of awareness in the general population that puts a lot of citizens entirely at the mercy of their doctors and pharmacists. People don’t check expiry dates. They can’t take their own temperature. They don’t get check-ups regularly, they see doctors only after their health has deteriorated significantly, and they stop treatment as soon as superficial symptoms seem to go.

When people don’t know that painkillers

are not substitutes for paracetamols, how can figures of authority allow them to decide, on their own, what their dose of sleeping tablets should be? How can they give an adolescent (who evidently doesn’t know the constituents of the medicine she is buying) two strips of anti-anxiety pills, no questions asked?

What makes this availability more frightening is that many ‘educated’ people are abusing medicine for recreational purposes. Teenagers down bottles of cough syrup, boys take oestrogen pills for a high, exhausted workaholics are hooked on anti-depressants. There are hypochondriacs who swear they haven’t been able to sleep for the past 20 years without sleeping pills.

We have come a long way since Hippocrates and his theories on mania, melancholia, and phrenitis. Disorders, both somatoform and psychological, are being studied, so they can be treated and not just controlled. To abuse scientific findings that have cost plenty in terms of time, effort and lives, is to jeopardise a future. A jeopardy that may not have a remedy. ●

Tracy McGray



Simikot: Diarrhoea claims 10, 400 infected.

Every year, about this time we see small headlines like this in the Kathmandu press. We are told of a litany of problems, from a lack of the simplest medicines and broken governmental promises and absent staff at public health posts.

Diarrhoea is so easily treated with rehydration solutions and if very severe, a short course of antibiotics, even if this does nothing to change the conditions of poverty under which such a common and simple disease becomes so much more dangerous.

But in these remote areas, even this basic right is denied, particularly to the more marginal. This combination of bureaucratic lethargy and extreme poverty

COMMENT Ian Harper



is a deadly mix, leading

to suffering and misery that we can barely comprehend. These issues are not new—anyone who visits or works in the more remote areas will have witnessed them and we've been reading about them for many years. What is new is how the current conflict might be feeding these problems.

The state in many of these more remote areas functions inadequately in fulfilling its responsibility to provide public services. It had great difficulties in the past, prior to the conflict. But as funds are diverted from much needed health provision into the military machine (one aspect of the state machinery that is not 'failing') frequently veiled as quasi-developmental ventures, there are even less resources to deal with these issues.

Government health posts in these areas are frequently under or un-staffed. In some areas of the mid hills we witness the concomitant growth of small private pharmacies and clinics, frequently unregistered and staffed by either those working in the government system or increasingly by those amongst the literally thousands of health workers trained in the mushrooming private technical training colleges. Maoists may insist that government health workers remain in their posts and that staff do not close early to go to their private clinics. They certainly want to encourage the influx of resources,



NARESH NEWAR

LINING UP: Children in Simikot wait patiently for Vitamin A drops in a campaign organised by UNICEF in April.

including health care related ones, into the areas they control.

Last year I spoke to a young man who was training to be a health assistant. From the far west, his family was investing money in his education, and like many others, he was attending one of the newly opened technical training colleges in Kathmandu. On returning to his village in the western hills for a holiday, he was incarcerated by the Maoists for several days. Eventually he was released and told that he would be allowed back to work in the area when he qualified. And was that his intention? He stated that he would rather wait until things "returned to normal".

One impact of the conflict is how it has inadvertently fed the proliferation of private institutions catering to this

increased need as more and more health workers wait out the conflict and stay in urban areas.

Yet some health workers will make it back to these areas to open a small pharmacy or run a clinic. I was told last year by a representative of a drug company how a drug distributor in the west had been arrested by security forces. He was supplying drugs to unregistered pharmacists and the logic of the security forces was that he was therefore supplying drugs to the Maoists.

This illustrates the increased surveillance that the army now has over health related institutions and workers. But this blanket desire to want to cut off the supply chains to the Maoists, not just in health resources but with food, clothing

War is bad for health

Health care delivery has worsened because of the conflict

and other goods that most would consider as basic human needs, will affect the poor and marginal the most.

It is not the Maoists (who, ethically, have as much right to treatment as anyone else) who are dying of diarrhoea in these remote areas of Nepal but those who for years have been living an increasingly insecure existence further destabilised by the conflict. Does the conflation of state and military now feel that all the people in these areas are to be punished for the unfolding political situation around them?

Certain areas of Nepal are in a precarious balance with chronic and acute food shortages exacerbating infectious diseases. The army's current security agenda, made worse by Maoist handling of workers, will almost certainly make these health related problems worse.

In future we are likely to read many more devastating articles chronicling death from what to us seem like such minor ailments. ●

Ian Harper currently lectures in medical anthropology at the University of Edinburgh.

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We're all Bise Nagarchis

Nepalis are raving about Shrawan Mukarung's symbolic poem about Prithbi Narayan Shah's tailor



Bise Nagarchi's Account

by Shrawan Mukarung

Master!
The lofty peaks of the Gorkha Kingdom
why have they suddenly shrivelled?
These decent and dignified people
why are they bleeding and bent?
Why has the Daraundi turned around to flow uphill?
Why do I see the Palace in fragments?
I've gone mad, I've gone mad.

Master!
Does your sword now chop heads, or petals?
I've been mistaken.
Does your rifle shoot down dreams, or people?
I've been mistaken.
Did your subjects make this kingdom, or you?
I've been mistaken.
Master, I've been with you now 250 years,
how can I be a terrorist?
I've gone mad, Master. Mad.

Excerpt from Bise Nagarchi's Account translated by Kunda Dixit

Bise Nagarchi is an historical figure, a tailor from Gorkha who sewed clothes for Prithbi Narayan Shah and was also a close adviser as the warrior king embarked on his conquest of Nepal 250 years ago.

Prithbi Narayan went on to capture Kathmandu Valley and unify the country, establishing the dynasty that rules Nepal to this day. Bise's descendants still live in Gorkha near the old hilltop palace. Recently, the district administration evicted the historical Nagarchi neighbourhood to make way for the expansion of the palace perimeter.

Poet Shrawan Mukarung happened to be in Gorkha and watched the Nagarchis forced out of their homes. Something snapped in the poet's psyche: centuries of exclusion of Nepal's dalits and janajatis suddenly became focussed in one point of light. Mukarung could express his outrage the only way he knew how: by sitting down to write a poem about the incident.

What he didn't expect was *'Bise Nagarchi ko Bayan'* (translated excerpt in box) to be so popular so quickly. At a recital at Gurukul theatre this month, Mukarung read this and other poems to a packed hall. Something unheard of had happened—people paid to listen to poetry and Mukarung made nearly Rs 40,000. Not only is it rare for Nepalis to buy tickets for a poetry recital but the audience clamoured for Mukarung to recite *'Bise Nagarchi ko Bayan'* over and over again.

We asked Mukarung why he thinks the poem is so popular. "I think it struck a chord in people," he replies. "It is an outpouring of the suppressed feelings of Nepal's cast-aside communities and of course it coincides with the country's present political predicament." Indeed, if *'Pijara ko Suga'* was the allegorical protest against Rana oligarchy during times of censorship, *'Bise Nagarchi'* could be a similar symbol of poetic resistance to Shah autocracy.

The poem is an imaginary conversation between Prithbi Narayan and Bise but both are in a timewarp—it is as if they are talking 250 years later, in present-day Nepal. The free verse is devoid of jargon, it is not a flag-waving call to arms to overthrow the oppressors. No, it is even more powerful than that

because with its understated words and the low-key voice of a dalit it exposes the centuries of injustice that still exist.

"I wanted to use Bise's voice, tell it through his words, through the experience of his community and society," explains Mukarung, "and I put myself in his shoes after I saw the Nagarchi community being uprooted in Gorkha. It made me want to weep, I was erupting from deep inside."

We asked Mukarung how it feels to be a celebrity poet. "I am proud that I could communicate my feeling through the medium of poetry—people recognise me in the streets now and it is not an uncomfortable feeling." Rest of the interview:

***Nepali Times*: What is the role of poetry in a time of censorship?**
Shrawan Mukarung: We have a big role to play. We are like Bise, we stitch words like fabric. Our pen and ink are his needle and thread. Our leaders are trying to say things but words fail them. It helps when we say it for them. Poets and poetry carry each other at times like these.

What new poetry are you weaving with pen and ink?
I am trying to relate the roots of the conflict in a poetry format bringing in the faces of janajatis, dalits and women. I am writing for full and sustained democracy so that my work will represent Nepal in its entirety. My feeling is that contemporary literature must embrace society. It doesn't make sense anymore to write poems about gurans, danfe and himals.

What inspires you to jot down poetry?
When I am seized with an internal outpouring of emotion, it automatically make me want to express it through verse. But first the reader in me must also approve that what I am about to write is worth expressing. And the satisfaction that I derive from that is something else.

Have you ever been as satisfied as you are now?
Once, when I heard the song *'Mathi mathi Sailungema'*. But *Bise Nagarchi* has traversed boundaries—people who never read poetry were curious and read it. The lines entered the sociological imagination and my reward was the recognition it got.

Bob Berky: the universal comedian



Bob Berky, comedian and mime artiste, did not return from his trek in Khumbu with funny lines but plenty of great experiences. He's been in Nepal since 16 July and ventured into the mountains with his friend Broughton Coburn, author of *Nepali Aama*, and family. "I did pick up a few words like dai and bhai," says Berky who plans to write a routine on his Nepal experience once he returns to the US. "We didn't plan anything but I did perform impromptu at schools in Khumbu and Namche," he adds, "I don't know if they understood anything but they were laughing and it is always a good sign when people laugh."

But the Sherpa children probably did because Berky's humour is universal. Language has been no barrier when he has appeared on MTV, Disney Channel and Nickelodeon. Trained initially as a classical musician, he also performs musically and comically with symphony orchestras in the US and Canada. His talent and reputation are now so recognised that Hollywood stars Jeff Goldblum

and Michelle Pfeiffer hire him as a movement coach. Berky's work off-Broadway earned an OBIE Award, and he's performed at such top venues as the Kennedy Centre, Lincoln Centre and the Edinburgh Festival.

Berky is known for his talent that taps into those humorous predicaments all of us find ourselves in at one time or another. "If we can touch that simplicity at the root of us and really make it vibrate," says Berky, "we'll go out of a theatre not saying 'wasn't he a good performer?' but rather 'aren't we all great!'"

Besides shows that he has lined up for factory workers, monasteries and schools while he is in Kathmandu, Bob Berky will also be performing *Out of the Blue Trunk* at the Indigo Gallery.

Out of the Blue Trunk at the Indigo Gallery on 5 August at 7PM
Rs 500 (partly to be donated to victims of the insurgency)
01-4413580

Where's the mission?

It has been three months since the UN human rights monitoring mission arrived in the country and activists are running out of patience waiting for it to act at a time when they say abuses by both the state and Maoists are growing.

"The mission has a huge challenge but I think it's time for it to move a little faster," says Subodh Pyakhurel from the human rights group, Insec.

Other activists believe the mission shouldn't wait for its entire team to arrive to start field visits since the killings of civilians is reportedly growing.

"The monitors will never be stopped by the rebels or security personnel from travelling in any part of the country under any circumstances," explains Pyakhurel, adding this has become important since Nepali activists can no longer travel independently.

The mission argues it is already active although it intends to start its fieldwork extensively only from October, when it will also

submit its first report to the UN General Assembly. (see *interview with mission chief, Ian Martin, below*)

The human rights environment, especially abuses at the hands of the rebels, has deteriorated since February First. The bombing of the bus in Chitwan was the worst Maoist atrocity since the rebellion began in 1996. Abductions have also scaled up, to over 3,800 in the last six months of which 2,400 were students. Over 1,000 people have been killed since 1 February, three-fourths of them by the state. And most of those who died at the hands of the Maoists, about 114, were ordinary people, according to Insec.

An Amnesty International report issued on Wednesday said civilians are increasingly vulnerable at the hands of vigilante groups supported by the state. Amnesty surveyed six districts in the far west and western regions and found evidence of new vigilante groups.

Says activist Krishna Gautam: "We need stronger statements and immediate action by the mission." *Naresh Newar*



KIRAN PANDA*

“A lot is happening
that people don’t see”

The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission arrived here three months ago. In this interview with *Nepali Times*, head of the mission, Ian Martin (*pictured*), rejects criticism that it has been slow to get off the mark.

Nepali Times: Activists here are saying your mission is not moving fast enough

Ian Martin: A lot has been happening that people don't see. We have received complaints (from victims). We have been taking up a lot of issues directly with the state authorities and the Maoists regarding abduction and other issues. We are actively investigating many things now. Certainly we are not very present in the field yet. That won't happen unfortunately until we get more staff and are able to open our offices out of Kathmandu. We are already making a number of field visits and have planned more and will begin visits to many places of detentions. All this may not be very visible but that certainly is a lot of human rights work.

The ICRC has suspended visits to detainees inside army camps, has this affected your visits too?

We've had no disagreements so far with the RNA about the MOU. We have regular communication on a number of issues. We have a very clear agreement giving us the right of access unannounced to any places of detention, right to speak in private to any detainee. We'll only know when we test that whether we are satisfied and I expect that it (agreement) will be respected.

You've had several meetings at the NHRC. Are you satisfied about its independence given the criticism here about the selection criteria of its new members?

We've had routine meetings on their request. They wanted to inform me about their recent visits and activities. We don't want to replace activities by Nepali organisations whether NGOs or NHRC. The more they are able to do effectively, the better. But we have our own independent mandate to investigate and report.

Will you be looking into the disappearances cases as well?

In fact we are already actively doing so. We are trying to make sure that we coordinate our own work with that of others who report disappearances both to the UN working group and direct to the RNA. The RNA at the moment have teams out in the regions, one of whose aims is try to clarify outstanding cases of disappearances. We are now for the first time receiving lists of detainees in the army barracks.

Do you expect anything from the contacts with the Maoists?

We have a clear mandate to engage with non-state actors. That's purely for the purpose of promoting observance of international humanitarian law and making clear that Maoists are accountable for the violations of international humanitarian law. So we are putting to them cases of concerns that are reported to us. Again it is early days to see how serious and effective the response would be.

How about vigilante groups?

This is definitely a case where we need to get some first hand information as to what is happening on the ground and it is certainly amongst our priorities. We will be making visits to areas where alleged vigilantes are operating and to look at what the relationship is between them and security forces.

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Bollywood's good girls learn

Heroines aren't just discovering sex, they are positively revelling in bad behaviour



ANUPAMA CHOPRA

Halfway through *Aitraaz*, a Bollywood take on Barry Levinson's *Disclosure*, Sonia grabs hold of Raj. She starts to undress him, whispering, "Show me you are

an animal". When he walks away, she screams: "I'm not asking you to leave your wife. I just want a physical relationship. If I don't have an objection, why should you?"

A former Miss World, actress Priyanka Chopra had a difficult time playing this scene. She had prepared for her role by studying the calculated seductiveness of Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*. But on the day that scene was shot, Chopra broke down and cried. The directors, brothers who go by the hyphenate Abbas-Mustan, had to spend a few hours convincing her that she was only playing a character. Filming didn't start until late afternoon.

Chopra is a Bollywood actress, and as such, trained to play the role of a virginal glam-doll. By tradition, a Bollywood heroine is a one-dimensional creation who may wear eye-popping bustiers or writhe passionately during a song in the rain. But she is unfailingly virtuous. Whether girlfriend, wife or mother, she is the repository of Indian moral values.

But a decade-long cultural churning has overturned stereotypes in India. In 1991, the threat of fiscal collapse forced the government to introduce wide-ranging economic reforms and allow multinational corporations to operate in India. The same year, satellite television arrived. Today, consumerism, globalisation, the proliferation of semiclad bodies in print and television and the emergence of a more worldly audience have redefined the boundaries of what is permissible. Sex has been pulled out of the closet and actors have become more willing to experiment with their images.

Mallika Sherawat, 24, a statuesque actress, needed little convincing to step out of the stereotype. She made her leading-lady debut in 2003 with *Khwahish*, which grabbed headlines for its 17 kisses. Her follow-up was even steamier. *Murder*, released last year, a rehash of Adrian Lyne's *Unfaithful*, had her playing a lonely housewife in Bangkok who has a passionate affair with an ex-boyfriend. Sherawat pushed the edge of the sexual envelope as far as the Indian Censor Board would allow. The lovemaking scenes featured bare backs, cleavage and passionate kissing.

Bolder still was the idea that a respectable upper-middle-class woman could have sexual desires and cheat on her husband—and get away with it. *Murder* made back its investment, approximately \$750,000, several times over. Ashish Rajadhyalcscha, a senior fellow at the Bangalore-based Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, said the film established Sherawat as an Indian "postfeminist icon". Sherawat plays an Indian princess in an upcoming Hong Kong movie, *The Myth*, starring Jackie Chan. After making a splash on Chan's arm at the Cannes Film Festival, she is, she says, negotiating with Creative Artists Agency for representation.

Sherawat's journey from a traditional small-town nobody to an international sex symbol is a modern-day fairytale that has

already had an impact. (For Sherawat, it also has a downside: She says her father refuses to speak to her.) Film studios in Mumbai are overrun with starlets fiercely trading on their sexuality and even established actresses are now taking chances. In *Fida*, Kareena Kapoor, a fourth generation star of the Bollywood Kapoor aristocracy, played a scheming hedonist who beguiles her besotted lover into robbing a bank for her. There were audible gasps from audiences when her true character was revealed in *Fida*: she steps out of the shower with a man who is not her lover.

Heroines aren't just discovering sex, they are positively revelling in bad behaviour. In a forthcoming, still-untitled film, Sushmita Sen, a former Miss Universe, plays a protagonist who she says, "Cheats, lies, sleeps with men, even kills them and gets away with it all."

Aishwarya Rai, former Miss World, whose ethereal good looks have been immortalised in wax at Madame Tussauds in London and is listed in the July issue of *Harpers & Queen* as the ninth most beautiful woman in the world, is ready to play vamp in *Dhoom 2*. Rai won't comment on how badly her character will behave but says, "You can't define heroes and villains in this film but it's a character I've never played before."

One of this year's biggest film is *Bunty aur Babli*, a sanitised *Bonnie and Clyde* about two small-town con artists who go on



to be bad

a looting spree across India. The woman, Babli, unapologetically uses her sexuality to cheat people but she is not evil or predatory. Her disdain for the housewife role she is forced to play is comic: “If I have to make mango pickle one more time, I’ll die,” she tells the police officer who arrests the couple.

Interpreting the Hindi cinema heroine’s latest avatar as a feminist, however, may be stretching the truth a bit. Earlier films like *Hunterwali* (1935) and *Amar Jyoti* (1936) featured more powerful female

images—a whip-wielding, crime-fighting action heroine, and a female pirate who keeps men in captivity. Scriptwriter Bhavani Iyer dismisses present-day heroines as “naive attempts to portray reality” but admits that they are preferable to the deified women in earlier films.

The box office occasionally applauds the sexual daring of a

Mallika Sherawat but as the director Karan Johar, who has made several wholesome, family-centred blockbusters, put it, “In Bollywood, the number one position will always be reserved for the girl you can take home to Mom.”

That’s why most actresses are hedging their bets. Chopra got rave reviews and awards in *Aitraaz* but she has followed up with good-girl acts as she says, “I’m not sure I can play such a sexually aggressive character again.” ● NYT

BOLLYWOOD BOMBSHELLS:
Bipasha Basu (overleaf)
and Mallika Sherawat.

A tennis journey

Sujay Lama starts his fortnightly tennis column

Seventeen years ago, I left Nepal to pursue a dream of playing college tennis in America. It has been one heck of a ride.

I have been blessed to have this opportunity and would like to share my story and try to help promote the sport of tennis in Nepal.

My earliest memories of tennis are following my brothers to the HIT Centre which was a five-court tennis club my father built in the mid-seventies. Saturday was the big day at the tennis centre which was located near the airport. It was my favourite day because there were a lot of interesting people from all over the world playing tennis and having fun. My father (Hem Lama) and my two brothers (Vijay and Raj) were my role models and it was very easy for me to pick up the game watching them play.

What I liked most about tennis was the feel of the ball on the strings of my racket and the fact that there were so many elements to master, such as the technical, tactical, physical and mental

GAME POINT

Sujay Lama



aspects of the game. Very early on I realised that I had some talent and that I loved to compete. I remember quite vividly my dreams of becoming

national champion, winning a gold medal at the Asian Games and playing at Wimbledon.

I trained intensely in Germany with my brother Raj. The biggest lesson he taught me was the importance of mental and physical discipline. I soon became the number one player in Nepal and qualified for Junior Wimbledon and played the Asian Games in Beijing. Although my game had improved, my confidence took a hit at the international competitions.

The big breakthrough came one day when I was training with some elite German players. We were running up and down a steep hill a few times and half way through the run I started to overlap the competition. From that point on I realised that the most important thing was self-belief. My tennis soared when I came to the States. I won many tournaments was named two time All American and was inducted to the Luther College Athletic Hall of Fame. I never would have accomplished this if not for the love, encouragement and sacrifices my family made for me. They inspired me all along and I did not want to let them and my country down.

I have been able to take that confidence into the next phase of my life. In the last 13 years, I have been coaching players of various skill levels at the junior, professional and college ranks. I have enjoyed coaching because it is extremely rewarding to see young people realise their potential. I am a teacher and that means I have the privilege of being a role model and showing the great lessons the game of tennis has to offer. Whether it is coaching a professional at the grand slams such as Wimbledon or working on stroke mechanics with one of the girls on my team at the University of Illinois, I have been able to do it with a lot of passion. I believe in PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) and that is why I have been very successful. Every thing I do as a coach and as a person, PMA is the foundation of it all.

I look forward to this opportunity to write a tennis column every fortnight from here in Champaign, Illinois for *Nepali Times*. I would love your feedback and suggestions. ● lama@uiuc.edu

Sujay Lama’s tennis column, Game Point, will alternate with Deepak Acharya’s golf column, Tee Time, in this space every week.



FATHER AND SON: Me with my father Hem Lama at the Royal Hotel tennis court in 1970.

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



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Perceptions of Time** Paintings by Sunila Bajracharya at Lajimpat Gallery Café, until 16 August. 4428549
- ❖ **Slide Show and Art Exhibition** by Alphonso Doss at Siddhartha Art Galley, until 19 August. 4218048
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

EVENTS

- ❖ **Out of the Blue Trunk** Live performance by Bob Berky at Indigo Gallery on 5 August, 7PM, proceeds go to internally displaced Nepalis. 4413580
- ❖ **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Play by Rato Bangla School on 6-7 August, 11AM, 2.30 PM, 5.30 PM at St Xavier's School. 5522614
- ❖ **Plantation Program** at Bagmati River Nature Park, 8 August.
- ❖ **International Day of Indigenous People** 9 August.
- ❖ **Nag Panchami** 10 August.
- ❖ **International Youth Day** 12 August.
- ❖ **Anti Plastic Campaign** 12 August.
- ❖ **Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism** Talk by Ivy van Eer, 6, 7, 13 August from 10AM to 4PM at HBMC, Thamel. 4414843
- ❖ **Teej Festival** at Radisson Hotel, on 12-13 August, 9AM-7PM.
- ❖ **Intercultural Exchange Program** Every Wednesday at Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali, 4.15 PM. 4250871
- ❖ **Film South Asia '05** 27 September-2 October, entry forms and details. www.himalassociation.org/fsa
- ❖ **Tai Chi** Demonstration at Swayambhu. 4256618
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Garage sale, pet practices and more. 4215068
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999
- ❖ **Art Workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Saturdays. 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibar Mela** Saturdays at Bakery Café, Dharara, 2PM and Chuchepati, Boudha, 3PM.



MUSIC

- ❖ **Funk and Fusion** 1974 AD and friends at Moksh, Pulchok at 7.30 PM on 5 August, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Hindustani Classical Music Concert** Tuesdays at Hotel Vajra, 7PM. 4271545
- ❖ **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 Doodle, 7PM. 4701208
- ❖ **Ladies Nights** Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music, one free drink. 4256622
- ❖ **Fusion** Mondays at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 8PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Pear Festival** at Hotel Himalaya on 6 August, 11AM-5PM. 5523900
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Special** at K-too!, 30 percent discount on Mexican specialities. 4700043
- ❖ **Kilroy's 3rd Annual Wine Festival** at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440/41
- ❖ **Saturday BBQ** for Rs 888 at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Culinary Fare** of game food at Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti.
- ❖ **International Buffet** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Daily Delite** Lunch at Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Crosskitchen** Indian cuisine at Lajimpat. 9851083806
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** BBQ at Dwarika's, Fridays at 7PM. 4479448
- ❖ **Boire and Manger** at Vineyard, Baber Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Bawarchi** The Restro Bar for Nawabi cuisine at Lajimpat. 4436673
- ❖ **Barbecue lunch** Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn. 6680048
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Fridays at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Delicacies** Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café. 5521755
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

GETAWAYS


- ❖ **Spa** Seasonal rates valid till 21 October at Le Meridien. 4451212
- ❖ **Go Karting** at Tiger Karts, special monsoon offer. 4361500
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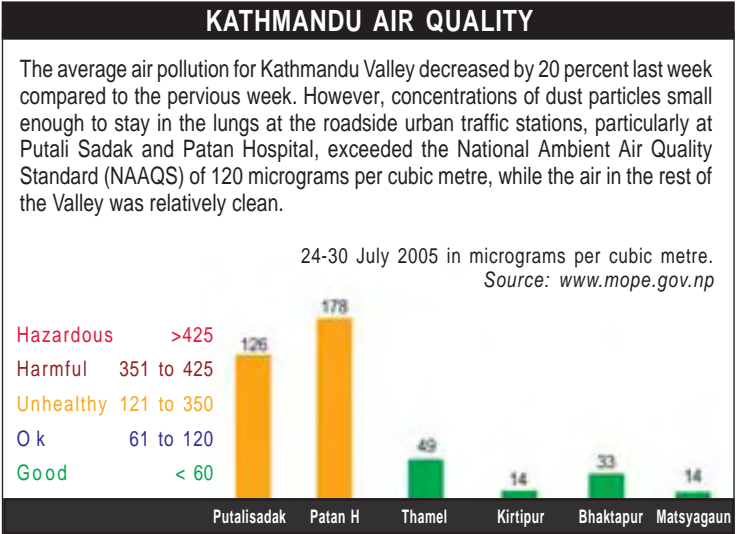
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Sarkar revolves around a city politician who has risen, with time and circumstances, to wield unchecked and autocratic authority over people living under a so-called democratic form of governance. Amitabh Bachchan plays the patriarch Subhash Nagare while Abhishek Bachchan and KK Menon play his sons, Shankar and Vishnu. A man who has rewritten the law, Nagare by nature possesses the ability, charisma, intelligence and Machiavellian cunning to control the workings of the city. Sarkar is a volatile film dealing with crime, greed, love, family relationships and retribution.


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NEPALI WEATHER



by MAUSAM BEED


Too little too late is how we can sum up the isolated showers at the end of July. Tens of thousands of farmers across central Nepal haven't planted paddy. This is the worst monsoon drought in two decades. Usually by this time of year the Bay of Bengal arm of the monsoon moves along westward of the Himalaya bringing heavy rains. But in July a persistent high pressure zone over the Tibetan plateau blocked its advance while sucking in the Arabian Sea moisture. So far Nepal has seen only two monsoon pulses, whereas during an average monsoon we see up to eight pulses. This satellite picture Thursday morning shows a low pressure system that could draw in rain. Expect another warm weekend with some localised rains along the Valley rim.

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SERIOUS MONEY: From right to left, Finance Secretary Bhanu Acharya, Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, Kheya Bhattacharya and Sanjay Verma of the Indian Embassy at the signing of a Rs 5 billion in aid to upgrade border checkpoints between the two countries on Wednesday morning.



RADIO ACTIVITY: A news reader at Nepal FM's studio defies the ban on news broadcasts on FM on Wednesday evening just before the station got a warning from the government. The restriction, imposed after February First, expires on 5 August.



TEEN POWER: Some of the aspirants for the Miss Teen Nepal crown posing at Dwarika's Hotel on Tuesday. The contest is organised by Kathmandu Jaycees and will take place at BICC on 6 August.



BEING PREPARED: Scout participants of the Rover Ranger Model Pioneering Tournament organised by Machhendra Rover Scout Group show their models to examiners from Nepal Scouts on Saturday.



ESPECIAL: Himalmedia Marketing Manager, Sunaina Shah, introduces the new Nepali Times web presence eSpecial at a function to mark the fifth anniversary of the paper at Dwarika's Hotel on 30 July.

For Rajan Khatiwada, 27, acting as the protagonist in *Bagh Bhairab* is a constant struggle between being a teenager 500 years ago and the person he is now. Every evening before he goes on stage, he reminds himself to walk into Gyan Bir's skin but even then, he says, "I have to remind myself to remind myself who I am."

For his audience at the Gurukul theatre's rendition of *Bagh Bhairab*, however, Rajan Khatiwada is Gyan Bir, the potter. A week's rehearsal and nearly a month of performances has polished the rough edges and Gyan Bir grows more convincing with every performance. But learning to be the young shepherd from centuries ago did not come easy for Rajan.

"It took a lot of research and soul searching. We went to the Bagh Bhairab temple in Kirtipur many times and things there are still like they were 500 years ago," he says, "I talked to some older people about my character."

Written by playwright Satya Mohan Joshi, *Bagh Bhairab* is directed by Sunil Pokhrel and staged at Gurukul nearly every evening. Rajan himself worked on the set design based on the black box technique. But there are other details that he took care of to give the play its essence.

"I had a certain section of the backdrop painted with red mud like in village houses so the subtle hint of smell would add to the authenticity of the atmosphere and I wanted to portray the Kirtipur landscape in the set design," Rajan tells us, wiping away his make-up after a performance. Presenting himself as Gyan

Finding Gyan



the potter on stage has been an epiphany for Rajan, the actor. The play itself is a time machine that takes him and his audience to a Kathmandu Valley 500 years ago. He says, "Gyan helped me understand the creative

potentiality of my character, a potter whom everybody loves." ● *Abha Eli Phoboo*

Bagh Bhairab, daily at Gurukul until 12 August, 5.30 PM 01-4466596



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Bowling is an ideal group and corporate activity to bring owners, managers, and/or staff together in a social setting. This shared moment creates excitement, encourages team work and increases positive communication that carries over to the workplace.

National security no laughing matter: govt.

The news this week of an Austrian spy plane intruding into Nepali air space should send a chill down every ultra-nationalistic spine and give all patriots goose pimples.

Luckily, alert air traffic controllers noticed a blip on the radar that shouldn't have been there and quickly swatted it, thinking it was a common house fly (Latin name: *Musca domestica Linnaeus*) sitting on the scope. Only then did they realise it was not a fly but an unidentified flying object encroaching in an unauthorised manner into

our sovereign air space and terrorising our territorial integrity.

The Royal Nepali Air Farce was immediately scrambled from its base in Tumlingtar and the jet

intercepted in midair somewhere over the eastern sector, warning shots were fired according to accepted international procedures, and then the plane was forced to land at Kathmandu airport. When commandos stormed the plane they found eight spies on board all bristling with antennae. The crew gave the laughable explanation that they wanted to "see Mt Everest up close" to hide their true mission and were immediately packed off for interrogation at the Rum Doodle Bar.

Our fearless air traffic controllers deserve the highest medals in the land, but the lesson from this close-shave is that we can't be too vigilant in safeguarding our national security during these perilous times when tensions are running high with the international community. It is time to remember the high school Boy Scout motto ("Be Prepared") and be vigilant about future threats.

I have offered my services as a security consultant (free of cost in the national interest) and after a thorough appraisal of our current security scenario have come up with the following list of top-secret recommendations which are totally off the record and are published below on condition that readers don't pass them on to any suspicious looking foreigners, especially Austrians still lurking around Tumlingtar.

For your eyes only:

- Our northern border is protected by high mountains, but our open border to the south is easy to infiltrate which is why we need to make an East-West Moat. All we need to do is ask the Indians to construct more embankments to submerge our tarai.
- RONAST should immediately begin plutonium enrichment at a secret reactor at Khumaltar. Experience in North Korea and Iran have shown that the only thing that will force the international community to take us more seriously is to have our own secret nuclear weapons program.
- The Nepali landmass is under constant surveillance from spy satellites, all VIPs should therefore be careful about walking about in broad-daylight where their movements can be monitored. They should wear wraparound sunglasses to disguise themselves.
- The Cabinet Room could have miniature microphones hidden under the table so the Council of Ministers should refrain from discussing anything of national importance at cabinet meetings. They should also not discuss any state secrets at home since there may be bed bugs.
- The international moratorium on arms supplies is of serious concern. So all incoming passengers are henceforth allowed to bring lethal weapons. Non-lethal weapons will not be permitted.
- We are doing a great job keeping our highways blocked by landslides, trees, blown-up bridges to thwart enemy invasion. But more needs to be done, there are still some cargo trucks plying the East-West Highway.
- By now we have amply demonstrated that this country is ungovernable. And that is the greatest deterrent of all, why would anyone in his right mind even want to attack us?


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