After crackdowns against politicians, journalists, human rights activists and other democratic institutions, the regime now has non-governmental organizations in the crosshairs.

In a move that for many harks back to the bad old Panchayat days, the Social Welfare Council has been revamped and given powers through royal ordinance to issue directives and supervise NGO activities. Earlier it was only directed to ‘extend support’ to NGOs. Next up is a code of conduct being prepared by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare.

Although the Social Welfare Council is an autonomous body, Minister Durga Shrestha has already hinted at what is to come by sacking member secretary Pushpa Basnet and all senior members on 29 July, replacing them with a handpicked team.

Basnet, a 33-year veteran civil servant, told us her sacking came as a complete surprise. "I was really shocked, and I don’t know why the ordinance is being introduced—ask the minister," she said.

One government source told us the minister had been miffed at SWC members who had constantly disagreed with her efforts at extending controls and with her working style.

The new staffing and rules have further harmed the government’s deteriorating relationship with national and international civil society which feel the government is trying to control their activities. Although the government has not yet officially informed INGO reps in Kathmandu about the changes, they have been informally told the amendments in the SWC act will not affect their work.

International donors and the UN have not commented officially, but have voiced private misgivings. Nepali NGOs fear they will suffer political harassment through the SWC and want the INGOs to be more vocal.

NARESH NEWAR

NGOs’ next

Changes to the Social Welfare Act will tighten controls on civil society

New SWC member secretary Shashidharam Sharma told RSS the changes would enable the government to monitor and regulate NGO activities, especially outside the Valley. But Arjun Karki of the NGO Federation of Nepal says the new rules will demoralise development workers.

"On one hand, we have to work under immense pressure from Maoists and now you have the government creating more problems," he adds. Recently, the Maoists announced a one-year moratorium on NGOs in Tehrathum district, and there are reports of similar restrictions elsewhere.

CWIN’s Gauri Pradhan says this is a witch-hunt, and an attempt by the government to sideline NGOs that are critical of the government.

The policy change has apparently infuriated even government officials, who argue it will only jeopardise the work of INGOs, who bring in Rs 7 billion annually to Nepal. The estimated 30,000 non-government groups countrywide are planning protests to pressure the government to leave them alone.

GROUND ZERO: The Royal Nepali Army Karnali Highway road construction camp that was attacked on Sunday is located on this exact spot where children applauded at the end of a nine-hour Maoist public meeting in October. At least 80 people were killed in the raid, and first pictures of dead soldiers at the site are too gory to print.

See p 7, 8-9.

NARESH NEWAR

GM
THE ROADS BETTER. SO WE USE MAKER CARS.

He’s tough, yet gentle.
Truly, he is my Special Editions Man!

Available at all leading department stores in Kathmandu & Pokhara
Imagined communities

Instead of pretending to work with our enemies, we should revive grassroots democracy

The Karnali Highway is being carved out of the rocky flanks of these awesome mountains near Pili (pictured below). At the moment the road goes nowhere to nowhere, high above an abyss. Which just sums up the state of the country.

If there is one lesson for the army, the rebels and their leaders and the leaders of the Maoist party is that there is no easy way to the political victory. The army is not the Maoists’ sugar in Kaitkai it is bloody truth of this senseless war.

The headlines read like basketball scores RNA: 44, CPNM: 26. But neither side won. Both lost. The dead were young Nepali men and women who ended up as cannon fodder. The saddest part of it is that they died in a needless conflict over an outdated ideology that can be carried out in a transparent way.

The security forces have often spread fear by their emotive and violent tactics.

These pressures have extended traditional migration movements, leaving behind a wreaked society. The Maoists have been empowered, but they have paid a heavy price for increased self-determination and they have been battered by additional work and responsibilities.

So, we don’t know what ‘communities’ mean anymore. In rural Nepal, this word is mainly taken to mean various user groups established by NGOs and project staff in order to manage resources or execute externally financed activities. All these organisations are ridden with serious problems of social exclusion, lack of accountability and political manipulation. High caste and traditional elites, although now closely watched by Maoist militants, continue to play the dominant role in all the existing organisations.

Indeed, to be able to speak of ‘communities’ in any meaningful political sense we should recall the democratically elected VDC which, despite their shortcomings, were a focal point of social and physical capital in rural areas. The conflict has blown them away and no political miracle can bring them back.

Yet only democratic institutions can ensure sustainable development results and the actual inclusion of women and socially discriminated groups. Meanwhile, neither the NGOs nor the projects should continue to be designed to take the desirable role of ensuring that ‘communities’ into account, instead of pretending that ‘communities’ can be a substitute for a vibrant society. Some women have been empowered, but they have paid a heavy price for increased self-determination and they have been battered by additional work and responsibilities.

Jorg Frieden is the director in Nepal of Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

GUEST COLUMN

Jorg Frieden

In his recent budget speech the Minister of Finance stated that the “effectiveness in the implementation of the program and improvement in quality of service can be maintained if the involvement of the local communities... increases.”

A development bank recently wrote that “community-owned projects show markedly low incidence of serious interventions on the part of the insurgents and willingness on the part of communities to come to their rescue when they do interfere.”

In remote parts of Nepal and areas beyond a day’s walk from a road, the lack of electricity is an obstacle to the mobilizing of the army troop strength and adding new armaments has not improved its capacity to conduct frequent direct and indirect discussions with the Maoists in order to understand, get permission to work or to enforce the Basic Operational Guidelines. The guidelines have helped in gaining access and acceptance of the impartiality of development work. But they have often been interpreted as a substitute for agrarian interruptions or suspensions of activities. The National Planning Commission’s statistics on the km of roads built in a year of schools transferred to parent committees reflect a large increase in the representation of bilateral agencies, NGOs, human rights activists and other intermediaries.

But to pretend that communities are empowered and able to protect themselves and the space for development, to believe that villagers can orient development activities, are acts of denial. Such statements reveal the real face of the Maoists ‘insurgents’. If there is one lesson for the army, the rebels and their leaders and the leaders of the Maoist party is that there has been a steady erosion of resources, hope and initiative and in some areas we are now close to a humanitarian crisis. Individuals and families feel that their rights and impurity are daily reality. Households, teachers and civil servants feel that their ‘communities’ are under threat. Governments and have been subjected to heavy taxation by the Maoists in cash or food or shelter and are increasingly exploited. Frequent changes in cadres and partyline have increased the sense of insecurity. On the other hand, the security forces have often spread fear by their emotive and violent tactics.

P M Lustig, Kathmandu
Parallel histories

Nepal and Pakistan have parallel pasts. And similar destinies?

This week, two of our neighbours will be celebrating their 65th independence day. Due to an easy access to Indian media, we know that 15 August is India’s independence day. But Pakistan became independent a day earlier on 14 August. Both countries suffered a harrowing partition that saw the biggest transfer of population in human history. Nearly a million died, millions more were rendered homeless. Unsolved issues of partition continue to haunt relations. Serious efforts at rapprochement between these two nuclear nations have now begun, but given the bad blood it’s still fragile.

Nepal has a lot to learn from Pakistan. For some inexplicable reason, the destinies of Islamic Pakistan and Hindu Nepal are mysteriously intertwined. Every time the axe of authoritarianism falls on democratic regimes in Islamabad, Kathmandu is sure to follow. Gen Ayub Khan declared himself president in 1960. As if on cue, King Mahendra dissolved Nepal’s first elected parliament. Gen Yahya Khan took over in 1969 and in Nepal the Panchayat fell into the hands of ultra-conservatives within the Gaun Pharka campaign. In 1977, Gen Zia ul Haq staged a military coup and executed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This led to riots in Kathmandu that had to be defused with a referendum.

In August 1988, General Zia, the US ambassador and top Pakistani army officials were killed in a mysterious air crash, marking a return to democracy. In Nepal the discontent soon spilled over in the streets, leading to the 1990 People’s Movement and a new constitution, Gen Manohar staged an airborne coup in his country in October 1999 we had a parallel royal takeover in October 2002 in Nepal.

If what has happened in Pakistan since is anything to go by, the palace also badly needs an electoral exercise to legitimise authoritarian rule. On Tuesday, US Ambassador James Moriarty strongly urged political parties to accept any proposal for elections emanating from the palace. And that is another similarity between Kathmandu and Islamabad. US ambassadors in both places have often been the arbiters of the fate of democracy.

But Pakistani generals are much better at handling America. Pakistan gets more per-capita US aid than any other country in the world except Israel. Islamabad’s rulers ignore unsolicited US advice with panache. Hem. Sachit Sharmah and Kuber Sharmas publicly grovel in front of foreign envoys, as they did on Tuesday. All militarised societies are at the brink of state failure. Pakistan and Nepal stand together at 34th and 35th places from the bottom respectively. But Pakistan’s military has a demonstrated capacity of handling emergencies while the Royal Nepali Army has yet to prove it is capable of containing the Maoists. The rout in Kalikot is a grim reminder of uncertainty looming ahead.

If the war with Maoists continues, Nepal’s survival will be doubtful, cautions the report titled The Second Freedom: South Asian Challenge 2005-2025 published by the thinktank Strategic Foresight Group. But it doesn’t seem to sway dictators. The Pakistani military has been a virtual ruling party in Pakistan nearly throughout that country’s history. Nanayamati seems to want to be something similar, but without shouldering the same responsibilities.

The international community, America in particular, needs to get over its obsession with evil communists from the Cold War. Each of the countries in South Asia faces different challenges. Post-colonial states like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are struggling for their second freedom—from identity politics, class wars, communal strife and other uprisings of political nature.

Challenges in Bhutan and Nepal are rather primal, we are yet to evolve into political beings. We are still struggling for formal freedom, the fundamental right to be free citizens of not just an independent but a free country. Faiz Ahmad Faiz writes in ‘We Shall Win’: ‘Aur raaj kamy kay kahdah-e-khuda ki main bhi bhoon aur tum bhi ho’ (So will rule God’s people Which is also you and also I). There is something in the resilience of the people of Pakistan that all of us must salute.
Homecoming

It is the astounding lack of order in Kathmandu that brings me home

There is something magical about returning to Kathmandu after spending half a decade in America’s trimmed, tame suburbia. Everything greets your senses like a blast of fresh air and you are seized with rapture as you walk down its potholed streets.

The first things that strike you are the billboards and street signs. #EAT! Restaurant, #Prolific English Boarding School, #Ineffect Dilapidated Computer Institute. The direness and simplicity of these words are so much in character with the city that you wonder how you never recalled them while away. #Sincere Market, #Human Tailors, #Unique Eat Restaurant, #Prolific English Boarding School, #Intellect College: they flash past as the taxi swerves on the laneless street, echoing with loud music, honking, hawking and splitting.

The surprising thing is that the cacophony refuses to get on your nerves. On the contrary, it gives you a rush, a peculiar sense of freedom and you roll down the windows to soak up your mad, maverick city of dust and fumes and all.

It is the astounding lack of order in Kathmandu that brings you home. Home as you cross the crazy interactions at your own risk and witness the wreak of reckless drivers at rush hour. Home as you watch paper boats sail on a roadside puddle and street kids riding bicycles. Home as you smell sewage on the holy river by ancient sculptures. Home as you see Sewa Sambhau and the temple roofs scream her name without half the neighbourhood calling the police.

Here you can order a half-plate of momo without breaking a restaurant ticket, drinking ticket, fine for not paying the fine in time. A place where excess is defined by its power and superabundance. A place where the norm and the poorest are also the fattest. Where a bewildering centripetal force sucks you into yourself and life revolves around your space, your car, your bills and your meals cooking in your microwave.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Billboard at Narayan Gopal Chok warns Kathmandu that brings me home

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A place where you must organise and systematise the very air you breathe or you end up violating the rights of those around you. You end up paying incredible fines: parking ticket, speeding ticket, smoking ticket, drinking ticket, fine for not paying the fine in time. A place where law and order hounds you even in your dreams, especially the dreams of the millions discarding the System, those who do not hold power in the pigment of their skin, those who quietly slog day and night, and hide as though slogging were a crime.

How exhilarating to be in Kathmandu and leave all that behind. How exhilarating to be in Kathmandu and leave all that behind. A place that leaves you to be yourself.

C

Hamimkola Kumvari was 12 when she started showing symptoms of leprosy infection. Neighbours in her village in Myagdi soon found out and fearing an epidemic, dragged her to the banks of the Kali Gandaki and quarantined her in a shack built with twigs and leaves, warming her never to set foot in the village again.

I still hate them,” says Chandikarka, now 20, about the villagers and relatives who ostracised her from buying at local shops, using the public tap or going to school. Finally, her father carried the girl for nearly three hours from her village to the district hospital. Eventually, she was transported to Anandaban Leprosy Hospital (ALH) in Lele outside Kathmandu. Eight years later, she has lost most of her toes but is cured. The mental scars, however, still remain. In Lele, patients recall heart-rending tales of vilification.

No matter where I go, whenever people see my feet, they will remind me that I am a leper,” says Chandikarka. Says another patient, Maya Lama: No matter what we do we are still treated differently.

Nepal has been successful in reducing the leprosy affected population from a prevalence rate of 21 per 10,000 in the 1960s to just 2.41 per 10,000 by 2004. In fact, the country is on the verge of declaring leprosy eradicated and in reach of the World Health Organisation (WHO) target of reducing the number of cases to one per 10,000 people.

We are already reaching that stage where we no longer see leprosy as a major public health crisis. It is just a matter of a few years,” says Bimla Ojha, director general of the government’s Leprosy Control Division. But for many health personnel working closely with leprosy affected families, numbers are not so important.

The problem of leprosy does not end with medical care because real challenges of stigma start once patients complete their treatments, explains Pradeep Faillus, superintendent of Anandaban, the country’s pioneering and best leprosy hospital. It offers free treatment and medicines supplied by the Ministry of Health. Doctors here say curing leprosy is not the problem: it is addressing the low self-esteem and psychological trauma of exclusion once patients return to their homelands.

The worst problem is social exclusion, perhaps even more than leprosy because it will take a longer time to heal,” says Suman Ghimire, whose studies have shown that even the educated have strong prejudices against people who are curbed but are deflected by leprosy. The situation is much worse for girls and women, who are often abandoned by male relatives and husbands.

A wife would rather get infected by her husband than desert him,” says Rewati Malato, a 20-year-old mother of four children whose face shows signs of infection. She was abandoned by her husband who remarried and fled to India. Life becomes a nightmare,” she added. Malato was forced by relatives and neighbours to live in isolation in a forest. She left her children with her parents and travelled over 150 km from Mahottari district to Kathmandu for treatment.

Even after decades of mass awareness that leprosy is curable and not very contagious we still have this problem,” explains Shovakar Kandel, an activist with the self-help group Integration Dignity and Economic Advancement (IDEA). Kandel feels the media is not doing enough to educate the public: “If we had not done it the government would have done it anyway.”

The government is optimistic such stigma will be eradicated as the disease itself disappears. “It is definitely not easy to reintegrate especially individuals with deformity,” says Ojha. “We have to work on raising mass awareness to generate sensitivity towards their situation.”

Rewati (above) was abandoned by her family when she developed a leprosy infection. She is now at Anandaban hospital in Lele.
Mero mobile

Nepalís first mobile telephone company eself-launched its service this week three years after obtaining its license. Spice Nepal Private Limited (SNPL) changed ownership half-way through the set up process after the Kathen group sold its shares to a consortium lead by Russian Nepali businessmen. We are pleased to inform you that most elements of our GSM network have been installed. SNPL said in a statement on Tuesday. The company is carrying out tests with select customers before launching the main service which will go under the brandname, Mero Mobile, and have numbers beginning with 9881.

On Tuesday, secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication Lok Man Singh Karki and chairman of Nepal Telecommunication Authority Suresh Kumar Pudasaini ceremonially launched the service by taking to each other through the new system.

MA-60: buy two get one free

The Bank of Kathmandu has launched a new Rainy day savings accounts of 2004/2005, the bank announced. Credit grew by 29.6 percent, while total deposits increased by 25.2 percent, to Rs 10,097.7 million over the preceding year in its network of 16 branches.

Everest profits climb

Everest Bankís operating profit registered a growth of 9.1 percent over the last year, or Rs 376.9 million, based on the unaudited accounts of 2004/2005, the bank announced. Credit grew by 29.6 percent, while total deposits increased by 25.2 percent, to Rs 10,097.7 million over the preceding year in its network of 16 branches.

Rainy days savings

The Bank of Kathmandu has launched a new savings scheme. The Kopila Bachat Yojana will pay, quarterly, a higher rate of interest than a savings account. Customers need to have an account with Bank of Kathmandu in order to sign up and a monthly transfer of Rs 1,000 or any multiple of a thousand will be debited automatically on the 25th day of each month.

Taxing books

You canít balance the budget by taxing knowledge

For a country that boasts that it ranks only 10th from the bottom in GEP per capita in the world, what do you expect? Nepal has one of the lowest literacy rates in Asia, especially among girls. Education is politicised, higher education is over-commercialised. So why not tax books, right?

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Of the many absurd things that have transpired in the past year or so, the new tax on books in the new budget is probably the most absurd. Surely the intention in the beginning of the 21st century is to make education policies less cumbersome, education fees more affordable and books affordable.

Nepali publishing has just been coming of age with free private companies really taking the risk to invest in producing world-class material such as the press that prints this paper. However, there is little apart from regular periodicals and reports for the report-hungry development communities—there is little serious publishing that goes on. The bulk of the printing that takes place on a recurring basis is educational books that are consumed by the growing number of students and these are mostly imported.

Most of the books used in the ever expanding colleges and universities are not published in Nepal. Therefore, the new tax impacts students directly. In a country where good libraries are as alien as the concept of good governance, it is the young who will directly suffer. We do not have separate student editions, as in many countries, nor do we have a well operating market for used books or proper libraries. Students have no option but to buy the books they need.

It is nothing new for competition-sly Nepali businesses to seek protection. They have done it in the past and they will do it in the future. And surely it is a global tendency for homogenous enterprises to ask for protection. Therefore, this provision can make some local businesses happy as they can surely have a competitive edge. Of course, we have an inefficient government monopolist in this sector that wants to continuously produce sub-standard products and ensure that some individuals and their patrons benefit. But why sacrifice a sensitive issue like book pricing at the altar of individual interests?

We need to also understand that we ourselves have embraced WTO membership, which we like to flaunt. One of the key WTO issues is Intellectual Property Rights. Therefore, Nepali companies will really need to work around the copyright of books before they even think of publishing them here. With a fraction of a non-student population that reads and a fraction amongst them that actually buy and read, there is little market for licensing of publications. The only option is to import, to tax it more means directly affecting the prices that consumers pay. Pirating audio CDs, video CDs and DVDs is easier as the cost of piracy is low, but to pirate books you need volumes and surely the intention of the new tax is not to encourage illegal printing.

Many have argued that this insignificant tax hike should not affect pricing too much and since book imports are not significant, why make this a big issue? The Beed feels the same but differently; if the Finance Ministry canít really quantify what additional duties will be substituted is possible, why do it? Why send the wrong signal?

We are telling the world that we want to reform, we want to promote education, we need more assistance in this sector. And then we go and increase the tax on books.
Road rage

Royal Nepali Army Spokesman Brig Gen Deepak Gurung in an interview with BBC Nepali Service, 9 August

BBC Nepal Service: What information do you have on the recovery of the bodies of 40 security personnel in Pili?

Brig Gen Deepak Gurung: The bodies show signs that the soldiers were tortured and killed by the Maoists after capture. They were shot in their heads and some of their body parts were mutilated.

You have mentioned there were non-combatants among the security personnel in the Pili camp. Who were they?

They are soldiers with the Royal Nepal Army but they were hired for road construction.

But the army's press release issued on 8 August stated that there were around 100 local people who were hired for construction work. What happened to them?

They were not local people. They were non-military people who had been hired from elsewhere.

Your press statement stated clearly that these non-military personnel had been kept in the military camp at Pili. So what are the chances that there were civilians also killed in the clash?

Things are not clear as yet. There are camps for road construction in Rupa, Rukum, Salyan and Jajarkot also. Even in those places we have hired people like that. These people are non-combatants who are not full soldiers. We hire them because if we were to look for locals for such work, they would be scared away by the Maoists.

Were any civilians involved in the construction work?

These workers do wear army uniforms but they are not trained soldiers. They are something like a civilian who are not full soldiers. We hire them because if we were to look for locals for such work, they would be scared away by the Maoists.

Apart from them, did the army use any civilians for construction work? Civilians are never used.

Maoist promises

Editorial in Nepal
Sancharcharita, 5 August

Recently, Maoist supremo Prachanda stated his party would abstain from targeting civilians and political party workers and stressed that those captured by the rebels would be treated with respect, according to international law. But with Maoist atrocities growing there is nervousness as to whether rebel leaders and cadres will keep the promise. The violence in Mankot of Bajura is evidence of the Maoist terror. They have killed the man's three-year-old son Lekomina. In another incident a young girl was burnt alive in a public vehicle. Only a few months back nearly 40 civilians were killed in the bus targeted by a rebel landmine in Chitwan.

Frequent apologies after each incident start to appear farcical when such atrocities keep happening. These incidents are acts of terrorism and in no way can help the Maoists achieve political power or reconcile with the democratic parties. All this occurs at a time when the parties are showing interest in such a dialogue. If the rebels want to come into the political mainstream, they should stop these violent ways. Peace and terrorism don't go together.

Let them return

Editorial in Kathmandu, 7 August

Bhutanese refugees have no other choice than to use India as a transit route to return home to Bhutan. The recent incident of police firing on a group of refugees to return to Nepal is nothing new: such groups have been blocked by Indian cops many times. For nearly 15 years, India has been ignoring the refugees' plight despite Nepal's request to help solve the refugee crisis. To make matters worse, India has been violating the borders treaty whereby road to a group of rebels, killing the man's three-year-old son Lekomina. In another incident a young girl was burnt alive in a public vehicle. Only a few months back nearly 40 civilians were killed in the bus targeted by a rebel landmine in Chitwan.

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Editorial in Kathmandu, 7 August

Bhutanese refugees have no other choice than to use India as a transit route to return home to Bhutan. The recent incident of police firing on a group of refugees to return to Nepal is nothing new: such groups have been blocked by Indian cops many times. For nearly 15 years, India has been ignoring the refugees' plight despite Nepal's request to help solve the refugee crisis. To make matters worse, India has been violating the borders treaty whereby road to a group of rebels, killing the man's three-year-old son Lekomina. In another incident a young girl was burnt alive in a public vehicle. Only a few months back nearly 40 civilians were killed in the bus targeted by a rebel landmine in Chitwan.

Frequent apologies after each incident start to appear farcical when such atrocities keep happening. These incidents are acts of terrorism and in no way can help the Maoists achieve political power or reconcile with the democratic parties. All this occurs at a time when the parties are showing interest in such a dialogue. If the rebels want to come into the political mainstream, they should stop these violent ways. Peace and terrorism don't go together.
Slaughter on the banks of the Tila

Jana Aastha, 10 August

The 227-strong temporary base camp of the RNA at Pili was set up only 12 days ago. Fifteen minutes after the helicopter that brought in camp commander Lt Col Raju Debkota had flown back to Nepalganj on Sunday evening, Maoists in the thousands started their attack on the post. The soldiers hadn’t even had time to dig trenches and sentry posts and a helicopter had made two trips ferrying supplies from Kathmandu on Sunday itself.

Most of the personnel in the camp were non-military staff from the Pioneer Brigade, Bhadrapali who are normally used for road construction, flood and landslide rescue. They had arrived in Kalikot three months ago and soldiers from the Sri Jang Brigade at Singha Darbar and Debi Dal brigade in Lalitpur had just arrived to provide protection for the road worker recruits.

The battle raged from six in the evening on Sunday, 7 August till four the next morning. Army helicopters with night vision were dispatched but couldn’t do much because of the terrain. They were finally able to land at a nearby school on Monday afternoon where they found 40 bodies of dead soldiers, 111 others who were missing have been located and the fate of 76 others is not yet known. Lt Col Debkota and seven others managed to escape.

Army sources say the Pili base camp was set up in a hurry without proper defences. But the army has vowed to resume the highway construction within a few days despite the setback.

Lt Bhandari had his private parts cut off and then was located and the fate of 76 others is not yet known. Lt Col Debkota and seven others managed to escape.

Pioneer Brigade but were cut down with khukuris. A dozen soldiers, 111 others who were missing have been located and the fate of 76 others is not yet known. Lt Col Debkota and seven others managed to escape.

Eleven of the soldiers appear to have been lined up and executed with a bullet in the forehead. After capture some of them tried to raise their hands and say that they were sons of poor families from the Pioneer Brigade but were cut down with khukuris. A Lt Bhanandari had his private parts cut off and then was killed.

The soldiers fought back for over nine hours. The attacks came from two sides. Many soldiers were mauled in Khara, Rukum, Rolpa, Bardiya, Pandaun, etc.

The Maoist guerrillas attacking Pili were from the same units that fought in the previous battles in the west.

If the Maoist claim of having captured a lot of ammunition is true then it looks like the soldiers couldn’t get to the ammunition to reload. The only way out for the soldiers after they ran out of bullets was to escape into the night. All in all the Maoists lost at least 26 of their fighters, including battalion commissar Lokesht (Sharad Awastii).

Ironically, because of a heart condition Raju Debkota was posted to road construction garrisons in the west. The RNA has been in a hurry to finish the Karnali Highway because of King Gyanendra’s expressed wish during a visit to Kalikot last year. But Naresh Basnet, an officer known as the army’s millionaire who is in charge of the army’s construction projects, sent an untrained officer into an undefendable garrison. Basnet is the brother-in-law of the king’s military attaché, Rishi Kumar Pandey.

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The attack was not a surprise. There were reports from a Maoist captured on 25 July that a big attack was planned. Travellers on the road had also spoken of three Maoist brigades massing along the Archar-Kalikot border area. The Maoists appear to have planned their attack well on a vulnerable base where air support and even surface reinforcements would be difficult. So why did the army choose such a weak spot? According to Min Bahadur Shahi of the non-profit group, KIRDARC, the reason could be that there is a village nearby and where there is a water source. This has is the first-ever attack on an army road unit.

The RNA seems to have believed that the Maoists wouldn’t attack a road unit, but the rebels made no secret of the fact that they treat the Karnali Highway as a strategic threat to their base area.

To be sure the Maoists have suffered a series of defeats since February last, leading ex-generals like Bharat Keshari Singh to proclaim that they had been weakened. The Maoists were mauled in Khara, Rukum, Rolpa, Bardia, Paudaun, etc. The Maoist guerrillas attacking Pili were from the same units that fought in the previous battles in the west.

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The Maoist guerrillas attacking Pili were from the same units that fought in the previous battles in the west.
There are six directions in the Karnali: north, south, east, west, up and down. The rugged topography and remoteness of this roadless region has held Karnali Zone back for centuries. But the real reason the Karnali has not been able to develop is not lack of resources. It is the lack of imagination. Over the decades, the Karnali has been deliberately made dependent on the outside world by keeping it reliant on rice flown in from Nepalgunj. If the money spent on food and air freight over the past 30 years was added up and invested in irrigation, highways or energy the Karnali would, by now, be feeding the rest of Nepal.

We, the people of the Karnali, are pastoral people, we have relied on our livestock and traditional trade between Tibet and the midhill valleys. But one of the unintended side-effects of the success of the community forestry program has been the ban on free-grazing of livestock herds. And the centuries-old trade for salt, grain, wool and essentials between the Tibetan plateau and the tarai that sustained the people of the Karnali has been crippled by the insurgency.

Planners in far-away Kathmandu have little understanding (or the will to understand) our plight. Donor agencies may show interest but quickly turn elsewhere when they realise just how difficult life in remote Humla, Mugu, Dolpa, Jumla or Kalikot is: our harsh winters, erratic flights, the shortages of just about everything. Karnali is poor because it is neglected, not because it lacks resources. Our assets include timber, fuelwood, hydropower, eco-tourism, biodiversity and herbal products. Our remoteness means we lack a market for these products. We need a road to the border to India or China whichever is closer.

The marginalisation of the indigenous people of the Karnali and their migration in search of work has lead to the loss of cultural autonomy and environmental degradation. There are entrenched problems of traditional gender inequality, female illiteracy and the low status of women and disadvantaged groups.

Abandoned by Kathmandu’s political elite and ignored by development partners, our people have become distrustful of outsiders. The forced dependence on outside food has caused an erosion of our traditional self-sufficient pride and dignity. The people of the Karnali are deeply cynical because of years of political and administrative alienation that span the Rana regime, Panchayat, democracy and the present direct rule by the king.

Development should be area-
specific, appropriate for local conditions but the government in Kathmandu has a one-size fits all policy. It is trying to keep our people occupied by airlifting rice and salt to the Karnali. This may keep people quiet for the time being but it has created a debilitating dependency. This is not the right approach to development.

We have been using Tibetan rock salt for more than 200 years in the Karnali. Now, in the name of modern control, they are airlifting iodised salt from Nepalgunj paying Rs 65 per kg air cargo rate and distributing insufficient salt at a subsidised rate of Rs 7 per kg. This is an example of the medicine being worse than the disease.

On the one hand, the government is unable to ferry enough salt and on the other, subsidies have discouraged traditional salt traders from bringing rock salt from Tibet. A better idea would be to set up an iodisation plant in Simikot or Gamgadi to iodise local salt.

Development in Nepal has rarely been demand-driven, it is proposal-driven. We have to start planning according to the people’s needs and not according to the government’s or donor’s needs. The people of Karnali now have a slogan: “Instead of salt give us iodine, instead of rice give us irrigation, instead of sympathy give us hydropower.” It’s the old adage about giving a fisherman a net.

Food aid to the Karnali should be phased out and gradually replaced with a strategy to boost local production of millet, barley, buckwheat and high-altitude potato which are suited to local conditions. Our high-altitude potato which are nutrition-rich millet and buckwheat and don’t depend on the outside world?

It’s not that Karnali people haven’t seen rice in their life. In fact, paddy is grown in the southern regions of the zone. Once and for all, Kathmandu needs to realise that the Karnali is not a food-deficit area but only a rice-deficit one. And we don’t mind, as we can do perfectly well without the rice, thank you. We won’t starve just because you don’t send us your rice.

The population of Nepal’s remotest district, Humla, is just 40,000. Let’s say 10,000 of them are babies. If the 30,000 adults needed one kg of rice a day, the whole district would need 30 tons of rice a day and nearly 11,000 tons a year. But the government is only supplying 6,000 tons of rice a year to Humla. So how come people aren’t starving to death?

This is proof, if proof is still needed: if we could encourage the people of Humla to grow more of their own food, provide irrigation and an additional cash crop, they could take care of themselves. And it would save Kathmandu billions of rupees a year that it could earmark for some needier area of the country.

Oh yes, the transportation mafia will lose its lucrative contracts. The civil servants won’t be ‘civilised’ any more because they have to eat dhindo but it will rescue the Karnali from the clutches of our crippling dependence on the outside world.

It is now the 21st century, across Hilsa in Tibet, there is now a highway there is electricity and living standards are soaring. On our side of the border we are still in the medieval ages. This can’t go on much longer, we have to start changing now. And we will do it ourselves if Kathmandu is not interested.

(Jivan Bahadur Shahi is the former elected DDC chairman of Humla)
Japanese Story is about geologist Sandy Edwards (Tony Collette) and Japanese businessman Tachibana Hiromitsu (Gotaro Tsunashima). Their polarised characters are thrown together purely for business reasons when Sandy reluctantly accepts the assignment to guide Hiromitsu with the hope of promoting her software designs. Hiromitsu, who is infatuated with Australia’s limitless landscape demands that Sandy drive deeper into the unknown. At first Sandy openly displays her disdain and frustration towards Hiromitsu, yet a series of unpredictable developments allow attraction, desire and romance to ensue.

The Australian Embassy Film Roadshow is coming to Kathmandu for the fourth year in a row this weekend. Featuring six recent Australian films that will appeal to a broad range of tastes, the event will showcase developments in the Australian film industry and highlight the nation’s history, culture and contemporary values. Past Roadshows featured award-winning films like Rabbit Proof Fence, Children of the Revolution and Sam Neill starrer The Dish.

Ned Kelly is Australia’s legendary bush ranger and folk hero. The film is an adaptation of Our SUNshine, a novel by Robert Drew about the Kelly legend. Ned Kelly (Heath Ledger) is wrongly imprisoned for stealing a horse and when he returns to the bosom of his large Irish family, finds that the police want him to go straight. After being accused of a crime he didn’t commit, Kelly is left with no option but to go on the run. Accompanied by his gang (among them Orlando Bloom) he robs banks to survive and to gather money to free his family from prison.

Thunderstruck is about five friends, all fans of well-known Australian rock group AC/DC. In 1991 they make a pact that if any of them should die, they will bury him next to their favourite band’s lead singer, Bon Scott. Twelve years later their lives have taken very different directions when the unthinkable happens. Now the estranged friends reunite for a cross-country road trip from Sydney to Perth in an old van to spread their friend’s ashes next to his idol.

Swimming Upstream tells the true story of Anthony Fingleton, a young Australian who somehow manages to become a champion despite the obstacles of a disruptive family life and an abusive alcoholic father. Set in the 1950s Brisbane, life is tough for Harold (Geoffrey Rush) and Dora Fingleton (Judy Davis) and their five kids, especially since Harold has a hard time keeping a job. With little money for recreation, the kids take advantage of the local swimming pool and soon Tony and his brother John are swimming faster than anyone.

Aussie Film Roadshow

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<td>Japanese Story</td>
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All screenings at the Russian Cultural Centre in Kamalpokhari, 13-15 August. Free passes can be obtained from the Radisson Hotel and the Australian Embassy in Bansbari. For more information: Australian Embassy 4371678.
Energy House

A prototype house with infinite energy-saving potential

AARTI BASNYAT

The Zero Energy House—a building that generates as much energy as it consumes throughout the year and does it without using any fossil fuel. Inside the Institute of Engineering in Pulchok, the house’s main source of energy is a 6.5 kW solar photovoltaic system on the roof. All it needs is 4.15 hours of direct sunlight a day to generate 27 kW of electricity—which is stored in battery banks in the basement. The excess power is supplied to the campus’ power grid so that during cloudy days when there isn’t enough sunlight, power can be ‘borrowed’ from the grid.

“The energy given and taken from the campus grid is equal, hence the term Zero Energy House,” explains the brain behind the house and director of the campus’ Centre for Energy Studies, Jagan Nath Shrestha (pictured, below).

The building has been fitted with thermocool insulation between the walls to help maintain its temperature and includes a solar water system and solar kitchen equipped with a solar-powered cooker. OK, you can’t fry chicken in it but it is enough to boil water and cook simple meals. A wireless system in the campus computer lab reduces power consumption, a weather station and other appliances such as a gasifier—an efficient smokeless burner used for drying large cardamom—are also being developed and used.

The Centre for Energy Studies is also working on a unique Earth Air Tunnel system which works on the principle that four metres below ground level the air temperature remains constant, which at the university grounds is at about 19 degrees. The system sucks outside air into a tunnel where it mixes with the underground air and cools down or heats up depending on the season. This regulated air is then blown into conference halls and classrooms by convection, where it acts as an air conditioner or heater depending on the outside temperature.

“The Zero Energy House wouldn’t be immediately applicable for the lay person but there are features which are attractive. The EAT for heating and cooking homes and offices is one such feature,” says energy expert Bikash Pandey of the international energy group, Winocek, “the thing now is to make architects more aware.”

The Zero Energy House was designed entirely by the Pulchok campus faculty. It took five years to build and cost around Rs 60,000,000.

“We started from scratch and began designing, thinking that if we come across problems we would consult experts,” recalls Shrestha.

Because it is a model house, it has used every conceivable source of alternate energy available in Nepal: there is even a working model of a microhydro powerplant on-site that students can observe and study without leaving the campus. The canteen kitchen runs on biogas energy powered by kitchen rubbish and garden waste and the Zero Energy House’s security guard uses biogas for all cooking.

Research continues on other potential bio-fuels from trees and crops that contain oils or can be turned into biodiesel by fermentation as alternatives to expensive imported fossil fuels.

Says Shrestha: “We want to show that alternative energy is an option and by demonstrating and making an example of ourselves we plan to prove this fact. The motto for our students is ‘Don’t look for jobs, Create jobs.’”

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NATION

With petrol prices rising and natural resources diminishing all over the world, alternative energy is starting to look not just like the best option but for Nepal, it may be the only option.

In Nepal, renewable energy sources like solar, hydro and biogas are examples of what works. Tribhuvan University’s Centre for Energy Studies has taken things a step further by building a Zero Energy House—a building that generates as much energy as it consumes throughout the year and does it without using any fossil fuel.

The Centre for Energy Studies, Jagan Nath Shrestha (center) stands in the Zero Energy House, which is the brainchild of the building and director of the campus’ Centre for Energy Studies, Jagan Nath Shrestha (pictured, below).

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Mediawatch

On air again

A handful of FM radio stations started airing news and current affairs from 11 August following the Supreme Court’s ruling that the government abstain from taking any legal or administrative moves against Nepal FM 91.8 until a final verdict is made. (See also: 68Day tuned, 4295.) Nepali foremost private FM station, Radio Sagarmatha also started its evening news broadcast, Haal Chaal from 11 August. The ruling was the result of a petition filed by Nepal FM on 8 August against the government’s decision to close it in seven days if it continued broadcasting news. The Nepal FM team is now asking other stations to take this decision as an opportunity to resume broadcasts. Radio Bheri in Surkhet, Radio Swagadwari in Dang and Synergy FM in Chitwan have resumed news on air. After February First FM stations were ordered to air only entertainment related programs. The government continues to repeat the truth that nowhere in the world do FM stations broadcast current affairs programs. Some 1,000 radio journalists lost their jobs because of the decision.

Maoist censorship

The popular daily in eastern Nepal, Dharanis Blat Times, has been told by Maoists to immediately cease publication. The Maoists’ llam leader Umesh warned in a statement that the newspaper has been banned for false reporting. Journalists are asking the rebel leaders to lift the ban and have urged the rebels, who have offered an olive branch to the political parties, to show that they respect press freedom and allow dissenting voices to be heard.

Letter to the king

The International Federation of Journalists has written to the king highlighting international concern for the safety of journalists and condemning the government’s violations of civil liberties and human rights. “The IFJ has now participated in two missions to Nepal, and on each occasion we have received, and welcomed, assurances from the Nepali government that all the articles of its constitution guaranteeing basic rights are in force,” said IFJ President Christopher Warren in his letter. However, the daily reports of new media bans and attacks against journalists demonstrate that these assurances have meant nothing,” said the IFJ president. He added that there is need for more international pressure on the government, until it realises that it is utterly unacceptable that human rights and the right to free speech have been abandoned in Nepal. The letter to King Gyanendra is part of the ongoing campaign for press freedom and journalists safety in Nepal. A Global Day of Action for Press Freedom in Nepal on 30 August involving IFJ affiliates has been planned to express international disapproval to the king.

Nepal Pashmina Industry

“Pashmina from NPI, Soft as Cloud”

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"Freedom in Nepal on 30 August involving IFJ affiliates has been planned to express international disapproval to the king."
Japan boosts aid

Tokyo is in a bid to meet international expectations and boost its image as a generous donor. Japan is taking steps to shore up its failing Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget in fiscal 2005, raising mixed expectations.

Eve's welcome a hike in the failing ODA budget. The issue is now making sure the government takes the opportunity to continue to increase development assistance and becomes a leader in the international efforts to eradicate poverty in recipient countries, it said Masaji Inaba, representative of the Japan Africa Network.

Taking the lead in the debate to increase ODA, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has pledged to increase Japan's ODA budget by $1 billion over the next five years and also to double aid to Africa to meet the target to increase assistance to the continent set at the Group of Eight (G8) summit in Scotland in July. Japan's ODA budget in 2004 was $8.9 billion and has been falling for the past four years as a result of the long economic recession that has cut away at national revenue drastically at home. (IPS)

Microcredit queried

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 10 - Muhammed Yunus, a founder of the microcredit movement, once described it as a program for putting homelessness and destitution in a museum, so that one day our children will visit it and ask how we could have allowed such a terrible thing to go on for so long.

But after 30 years, it is still unclear if microcredit fulfills some of its proponents' lofty claims of poverty reduction. The point of contention hinges on the effectiveness of the neo-liberal microcredit model, with some researchers questioning whether increases in income through self-employment can solve the structural problems of poverty.

Microcredit program extend small loans, often of just 75 or 100 dollars, to very poor people, especially women, for starting or augmenting businesses in the hopes of increasing profit. The loan is usually paid back over a period of six months to a year.

Grameen Bank began giving small loans to those too poor to be considered for conventional bank loans in the 1970s in Bangladesh when the Gramene Bank began giving small loans to those too poor to be eligible for credit from other banks. Grameen has a particularly high repayment rate, due, in large part to its weekly meetings and peer-monitoring group.

While an effective microcredit programs follow this model and are complemented by health and education classes that assist loan recipients in their small businesses, ideally slowly raising themselves out of poverty by providing capital and training.

It is clear that microcredit works for some. However, it is unclear to what extent it works and for whom. Some researchers argue that microcredit is only applicable to the “well-off poor” and those with to what extent it works and for whom. Some researchers argue that microcredit is only applicable to the “well-off poor” and those with

COMMENT

George P Fletcher

Waiting for tomorrow

Iron rods sticking out of the tops of buildings may not look too good, but they represent hopes for the future

Terrorism

There is more than one way to consider the concrete pillars that reach up to the sky from the tops of iconic buildings all over the Subcontinent. One is built of reinforced iron rods, the other is living buildings. Perhaps that too should carry more rods atop, indicating unfinished business, hope and perhaps avance.

It seems that in large parts of our urbanising region a building is never complete. There is the expectation that the economy will improve, demand will pick in and a storey will be added. In the transition, aesthetics are clearly not a priority.

Artistry and design is indeed a by-word of the generation of middle-to-lower-middle class homeowers presented with the potentials of the Modernist “system” in 1950s. The attractions were the wide indoor spaces that were never possible earlier in the era of mud, brick, tile and timber. As specific architectural elements like roofing, flooring, dividers and staircases are discarded in the age of cement, an entire storey of what may be called dwelling vocabulary is being abandoned.

In the hills of parts of Nepal modern construction materials have led to the demise of the pINDI (veranda), that familiar space for chores and conversation. The main door, the Pali (eave), contained by the that (pilliar holding up the pali). Indoors, the zanda (main wooden beam) and the dahin (cross beam) are disappearing as are tects such as chotha (the first floor) and Biude (the second floor and attic). As homeowners opt for flat roofs, the dahin is also history, that sloped roof of tile, and the chotha (the first floor) is a flat roof now. The Southasian classes who can afford concrete are yet to adapt to entirely concrete homes.

The transition from mud floor, wooden supports and load-bearing brick walls has been too quick and drastic and the indoor quality of life has taken a terrible beating. Walking down Kathamandu’s city core, one can see with disgust which the design at one go—the mud-brick edifices with lattice-work windows from the mountain forests. The interiors of these spaces were redewed over centuries and can truly be said to reflect the genius and sensitivity of the highlander Gurning of the midhills, the urban Newar of the Kathmandu Valley, the tribal-dwelling Tharus of the tinu valley.

But it would be more remnant living if one were to see nothing of significance in the modern-day constructions despite their aesthetic deficit. The homeowner will willingly get rid of the dahin and xioned if he/she can have a cement lawn that needs no maintenance and no peeling, or a room that can be a place for various household activities. The heat and cool that the cement roof insulation provide for the various seasons, creating comfort indoors, is a reasonable trade-off.

Downstairs, concrete beams and pillars allow for vast spaces never dreamed of and windows now let in unprecedented amounts of light.

Most significantly, the ground floor need no longer be dank and damp space suitable only for keeping livestock and storing materials. It can be a comfortable space available for commercial space, air, inviting and open to the street. Of course, being partial to this evolution of the ground floor does not mean that one has to like the clanking, rutting, rolling metal shutters that are by now a ubiquitous Southasian-wide feature.

Over time, as we all begin to understand that these modern building materials better, an indigenous architectural form is bound to evolve. This evolution will not take place by way of both down from those who build for the well to do, but will be pushed by idioms that emerge from the gallis, toles and bawars. We will come to terms with the unexpected indoor space we have been offered a gift that we should be grateful to learn with and learn to fill it with the warmth and charm of our traditional spaces.

The unyielding rods poking off the top of concrete rooftops therefore may indicate no greed, but hope for a better tomorrow.

We hope to find a good day tomorrow. For the moment aesthetics be damned. ●
Be a winner

Create a routine and stick to it

I t is all about being competitive! I believe in most instances it is.

This is part of human nature. For anyone who believes in getting better or achieving success to its fullest, being competitive is a must. Those having enormous talent and an ability to endure undoubtedly have a head start, yet it is great desire coupled with true discipline that leads to a successful life and ultimately to being a champ.

In the case of golf, in some way or another there is competition everywhere, be it among beginners or top professionals on the PGA tours. Why my ball flew 100 yards, one beginner says to the other, if got four birdies and I drove 290 on one of the par 5s, 1 club golfer says to his partner. What is all this?

This is simply the player’s ego existing itself on a fellow golfer, making him aware that he has just done something better. Sometimes I think that if there was no drive to compare and compete, life would be very dull.

In today’s world, competition isn’t only in sports in every field. Look at education for example, where every student wants to go to the best school or college, or how every businessman wants to be richer day by day. In college, or how every businessman wants to be richer day by day. In

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case of golf, in some way or another there is competition everywhere, be it among beginners or top professionals on the PGA tours.

So exams arrive and the pressure is on. Similarly, its competition day and what happens? Tension, negative thoughts and all the normal day performance characteristics disappear. The end result: from mediocre to a disaster.

So what advice can I give to help you turn all these days and months of practice and playing into a successful tournament result? In the 24 hours preceding a competition it helps to have a routine that you can rely on to get you into the right physical and mental state for competing effectively and at your full potential.

Uncertainty is always a source of stress. As you know, the sudden realisation that you have forgotten something can cause outright panic. If you want to make sure you are really prepared, a simple pre-competition routine will be really beneficial. It is an important part of staying in control of yourself and your performance.

Start by setting out three columns on a page with headings 8:00 to Race!, 9:00 to Race!, and 10:00 to Race! Use the notes section to add more detail if required, perhaps to build in some contingency. Set out all the activities that you need to carry out to perform at your best. Write them in time sequence so that they are easy to follow.

Try to view a competition as something greater than the duration of the match or race or round. Give yourself time to get things right, and recognise that your actions several days before, even weeks before your event, can have a bearing on performance. You want, for example, suddenly manage to produce your best on the day of a race if you have neglected your training all week.

Finally, your routine is yours. What works for you might not work for others. What works for others therefore might not work for you. There’s only one winner. Make it you.

Deepak Acharya

Beijing booms for Games

Organisers of the 2008 Olympics in China are going into orbit to ensure the capital city is ready on time

The huge digital clock on Beijing’s Tiananmen Square shows there are still only until the start of the 2008 Olympics. The Chinese capital however is already well on its way towards being ready.

Eight of the 11 new venues planned for the Beijing Games are under construction, the rest will be before the end of this year and ground has been broken on key support buildings, from the sprawling National Indoor Stadium to a high-tech communications center.

Preparations for the Beijing Olympics are going according to schedule and progressing relatively smoothly, Liu Qi, president of the Beijing Olympic organising committee, said in July. ‘All the venues will be finished in 2007 and surrounding roads and bridges will also be completed on time.’

Following July’s subway and bus bombings that killed more than 50 people in London, Chinese officials have been talking about stepping up security for the 2008 Games but have revealed little about specific plans. ‘Especially after the London bombings, we have again raised the safety and security requirements for the Beijing Olympics,’ Liu said, without elaborating.

Soon after, Beijing police were ordered to carry out their duties ‘based on the standards set for the coming Olympic Games’ and to begin implementing new security checks for large public events, Liu said. ‘We also should be on our toes before the 24 August 2008 Games.

There are only around 1,000 days to go before the Olympic Games in 2008, the Chinese Daily quoted Beijing police chief Ma Zhenchuan as saying. ‘We have to use every opportunity to raise our risk management abilities toward terrorist attacks and familiarise ourselves with Olympic security inspections for the Olympic Games.

Beijing has hiked its original $1.6 billion operating budget for the Games to closer to $2 billion, due in part to security concerns after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States. But the city has also been trying to tighten its belt, further reducing already-allocated back plans for the “bird’s nest” National Stadium, the site of the opening and closing ceremonies and the athletics competitions.

The shift of the equestrian events to Hong Kong should help that revenue stream, allowing planners to avoid the costs and headaches of building a venue and guaranteeing facilities.

While the steel bones of the National Stadium are already visible above ground, work on the National Indoor Stadium, the gymnastics and handball venue designed to evoke a fending Chinese fan, the Olympic wrestling facility and the Yuhanabol for cycling have started only in the past few months.

As of early June, China’s total investment in five main Olympic venues had hit 30.7 billion yuan ($3.79 billion), with more than 12 billion yuan slated to go to the sites this year alone, the official English version of the People’s Daily said.

Organisers’ estimates of the total bill for the 2008 Olympics have risen to $40 billion from $37 billion, with most of the money targeted for new roads and subway lines and efforts to improve the city’s power grid and environment.

Almost 90 billion yuan would be poured into 60 key construction projects this year, the People’s Daily said. The latest Games-related project is the planned August launch of a small satellite that will take up orbit over Beijing and snap a picture a week of the city to keep track of construction on and around the Olympic Green.

‘Once it is in orbit, even the smallest illegal building in the area will not be able to hide,’ Beijing science official Li Shizhu was quoted as saying by the Beijing Morning Post.

In a sign of the prestige Beijing is giving the Games, the Olympic Green and the Olympic Village have been located on the ancient north-south axis that bisects the Forbidden City and other imperial landmarks and used to represent the Chinese emperor’s central position in the nation.

The city is looking so far ahead it is already screening big names to direct its opening and closing ceremonies.

The list of bidders for the directing chair reads like a who’s who of the Chinese film world, including global commercial successes Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. The native heroes could face stiff competition from a formidable Hollywood contender—none other than Steven Spielberg.

The director of the ceremonies and the tentative plans for the events themselves should be announced in September.

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.

This column alternates with the new Game Point column on tennis by Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.

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The Duo

FOOD

- Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti.
- Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- Ladies Nights Wednesday at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- Live Music at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg, 4221711
- Jazz at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7PM. 4479448
- Tai Chi Demonstration and group meditation at Swayambhu.
- Demonstration and group meditation at Swayambhu.
- Live at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila, Lajimpat.

MUSIC

- Hindustani Classical Music Concert Tuesdays at Hotel Vaja, PM. 4271545
- The Duo Live at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila, Lajimpat.
- The Good Time Blues Band at Rum Doodle, Thamel, PM. 4701206
- Ladies Nights Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music. 4256622
- Fusion at Jalal Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- Live Music at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg, 4221711
- Jazz at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 8PM.

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- Best time to be in Shivapuri.
- Thewa and Swaraja Poonam Das Festival at Pashupatinath.
- Folk Songs and Dance at Patan Dhoka, 14 August, Rs 50. 5542544
- Coffee with Narayan Wagle Talk with the author of Palpasa Café at Jatra, Thamel, 14 August, 7PM.
- Kilroyís 3rd Annual Wine Festival at Kilroyís of Kathmandu, 7PM.
- Taj Chini Demonstration and group meditation at Swyambhunath.
- Paintings by Sunila Bajracharya at Gallery Nine, Lazimpat, 12-18 August. 4428699
- Folk jams with Narsay Wagle Talk with the author of Palpasa Café at Jatra, Thamel, 14 August, 7PM.
- Anti Plastic CampaignTM
- Bazaar Festival and ExhibitionsTM
- International Youth Day
- Music Festival and Exhibitions TM
- Perceptions of Time Paintings by Sunila Bajracharya at Lajimpat.
- Slipper and Art Exhibition by Alphonse Doss at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 19 August. 4218046
- Art Walk Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4221599
- International Buffet Lunch at Shambala Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat. 4221599
- Daily Delle Lunch at Shambala Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat. 4221599
- Ciney and Par-e-jat BBQ for Rs 625 person at Dwarikais Hotel, Fridays. 4701458
- Boire and Manger at Vineyard, Baba Mahal Revisited.
- Special Combo Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- Asian Special Lunch at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- Krishnarpan
- Intercultural Exchange Program
- Tai Chi

CITY

FARMERS MARKET

- Asian specialty restaurants: Nepali speciality restaurant at Dwarikaís Hotel.
- Mexican specialities. 4700043
- Live Music at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- Ladies Nights Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music. 4256622
- Fusion at Jalal Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
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- Tai Chi Demonstration and group meditation at Swayambhunath.
- Demonstration and group meditation at Swayambhu.
- Live at the Jazz Bar, Hotel Shangrila, Lajimpat.
- Tai Chi

KATHMANDU VALLEY

KATHMANDU

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Surprisingly the air quality in Putali Sada, normally one of the most polluted spot in Kathmandu, was quite good in the past week. The level of PM10 particles (less than 10 microns and small enough to lodge in the lungs) dropped as low as 40 micrograms per cubic metre Saturday. The average PM10 concentration in Putali Sada was 109 micrograms, which is 13 percent less than the previous week and well below the national standard of 120. The air quality in most other places in the Valley was also fairly good because the rains washed the dust, except around Patan Hospital.

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31 July 6 August 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre. Source: www.mope.gov.np

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by MAUSAM BEED

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NEPALI WEATHER
Dina, the daughter Bangdel

Dina Bangdel has many faces including writer, lecturer and artist. But this time she was in Kathmandu as an editor, rushing home from the US to ensure that the last works of her late father, artist and historian Lain Singh Bangdel, were properly edited and distributed.

Lain Singh Bangdel wrote Jay Verma ko Murti and Nepal ko Verma Banksh during the last few years of his life and in them he claims that the Verma dynasty ruled Nepal in the fifth century before the Lichhavis. Bangdel based this claim on a statue of Jay Verma found in Maligaun in Kathmandu and the argument has triggered a new debate among historians about this period in Nepali history.

Before working on these volumes, Dina had edited her father’s earlier work, Inventory Of Stone Sculptures Of The Kathmandu Valley. She says, “I just want to honour my father’s deep and overwhelming love for his country.”

Dina worked with John Huntington on the book The Circle Of Bliss, Buddhist Meditational Art, which took five years to complete and established her as an expert on Buddhist iconography in her own right. The book documents 160 Buddhist statues from Nepal, India, Mongolia, Tibet and China which were on display at the Los Angeles County Museum for five months in 2003-04.

Dina is currently teaching Buddhist art at Ohio State University and is unhappy that although people in the west are really curious about Buddhist artistry and culture, Indian and Tibetan works have overshadowed Nepali Buddhist religious art. She says her mission in life is to promote Nepali devotional art and makes it a habit to tell people that the roots of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist art are here in Nepal. Like father, like daughter.
As surely as night follows day (or is it the other way around?) it is now that time of year again when we celebrate the annual beauty contest season. From now till Dasain, every week is already booked with much-awaited knockout tournaments in various categories to select young men and women or body parts thereof who are most qualified to be Miss Nepal, Miss Taken or Miss Fit.

This week we have already seen the successful selection of a Miss Teen Kune with winners in the Most Photogenic, Best Hair and Thickest Dandruff categories. Competition was keen and it was a pleasure to see so many members of the unfair sex (mainly mediapersons like me) thronging the venue to get a peek at the contestants as they let their hair down.

And even before we had time to get over our hangovers, the very next day at the BICC was the eagerly-anticipated Little Prince and Princess 2005 Contest which, befitting the times, had 42 below eight-year-old contestants doing junior catwalks and taking part in the Q&A rounds in which judges asked simple off-the-cuff questions to test their intelligence, like: “What would you do if, god forbid, you were a Prince?”

Now that we have the calendar of events for the rest of the year from various organisers, it does look like it will be a busy season of pageant-hopping for us reporters who have beauty as our beat. Highlights:

Master and Miss Infant Nepal 2005
Motto: “Catch ‘em young!”
Date: August 23-27
Venue: Prasuti Griha Main Auditorium, Thapathali
Criteria: Only babies who have their umbilical cords already cut are eligible. Will be required to take part in the elimination procedures, which includes the Koochi-koochi-koo Round, Crawling-Around Round, Disposable Diaper Round, Breast-feeding Round, Burping Round and the Wee-pee and Poo-poo Rounds. Judges will evaluate participants on the basis of noise, poise, odor, motor functions and response to questions in the Interview Round about which way our country is headed in the foreseeable future, if any.

Decisive Anti-Regression Street Pageant, 2062 BS
Slogan: “The Bold and the Beautiful”
Date and Time: Top Secret
Venue: Somewhere Inside the Prohibited Zone
Categories: Miss Brickbats, Most Photogenic Stone-thrower, Mr Arsonist in the Tyre-Burning Round, Mr Roving Ambassador and Peacepotiary In-charge of Meddlesome Affairs. Political participants above 82 years of age must take part in the make-or-break Continence Round and the Party Conventions Going Round and Round in Circles Round while their optimistic political heirs can enroll for the quarterfinals of the Mr. Young Turk contest.

Politically-Incorrect Miss and Mr Nepal Nomination
Credo: “We Love Our Mud and Our Motherland”
Venue: Behind-the-Scenes
Procedure: Winners will be selected on a merit-basis but nominated by a clique of shadowy advisers
Categories: Miss Thighland, Miss Censorship, Miss Congeniality, Miss Latent Talent, Mr & Mrs Autocracy, The Right Honourable Mr Ex-Convict, Messrs Wilful Defaulters.
Activities: All participants required to take part in a game of Musical Chairs and the Skeletons in the Closet Round after which winners will be allowed to sit for a brief period on unceremoniously unseated. The proceedings will conclude with the staging of a Crowning Ceremony for the Most Asinine Newspaper Columnist in the Last Fiscal Year.