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Weekly Internet Poll # 262

Q. Should the embargo on lethal arms exports to Nepal be lifted?

Yes 49.1%

No 46.6%

Don't know 4.3%

Total votes:2,893

Weekly Internet Poll # 263. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you evaluate the Nepali media's role post-February First in upholding press freedom?

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MANMOHAN SWAR
in KAILALI

King Gyanendra's whirlwind monsoon tour of far and mid-western Nepal brought thousands of people to the streets of towns across the region. Two years ago when the king visited these areas he was felicitated as a new king, this time he came as a political leader.

Besides just the curiosity to see the king, many who lined up here said they believed he was their best chance for peace. There was spontaneous applause as the king walked, greeting people, chatting and touching them lightly.

So far this week, the king has gone walkabout in Dhangadi, Kailali, Jumla and Dang and everywhere his message has been: "There is no need to fear the terrorists, we can defeat them if we unite." The message of peace is one that will resonate strongly in a desperately war-weary region but some here saw the royal tour more as a "barrack visit". The murder of the chief of the Banke monitoring committee Ajay Raj Singh in Nepalganj on Tuesday also showed that while the king and his entourage were well-

protected, officials associated with the royal government are vulnerable.

Indeed, one of the king's concerns seemed to be to boost the morale of the security forces after the worst-ever loss for the army at Kalikot two weeks ago in which 55 soldiers were killed and another 60 captured. He also summoned zonal and district administrators to heavily-guarded army bases to instruct them to efficiently deliver services to the people. His message to them was to coordinate development projects with the military.

Seventy-year-old Sukundebi Chaudhari, a freed kamaiya who is among those who occupied government land near here after waiting in vain for promised farms, managed to slip a petition to the king. But even though her family had cleaned up their temporary camp, the king had no time to visit them. People also waited at the Seti Zonal Hospital



MANMOHAN SWAR

HERE AND THERE: Police fought students shouting anti-monarchist slogans near the royal palace this week, even as King Gyanendra was telling media in western Nepal the country needed a "torrent of peace".

for a visit that never happened, and in Dadeldhura thousands waited all day for the king but that visit was scrubbed because of bad weather.

Meanwhile, back in Kathmandu student unions affiliated to political parties continued to battle police on the

streets defying a ban on protests near the palace. The king's tour came amidst speculation that he would announce rapprochement with the parties before his planned visit to New York in mid-September to attend a summit of world leaders at the UN.

NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala met UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal on Wednesday and insiders said they discussed a proposal for possible reinstatement of parliament and formation of an all-party government. Such an agreement would legitimise the king's proposed UN visit next month.

The Maoist online mouthpiece *Janadesh* warned the parties not to be hoodwinked by the king's effort to sow division by his ploy to reinstate parliament. ●

Editorial p2
Rollback now

NARENDRA SHRESTHA



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ROLLBACK NOW

Do the king and his praetorian guard realise they have gone too far in alienating the people and thumbing their noses at the international community? There are hints they do.

Many went along with 4 October 2002, others may have even felt February First was necessary, but few in their right minds had any doubts when the names were announced of the handpicked Panchayat apparatchiks who would carry out the king's plans. Even those who went along with the choice of two vintage vice-chairmen despaired when they saw the line-up of the expanded cabinet. Some of these royal decisions were deliberately taken immediately after meetings with foreign emissaries.

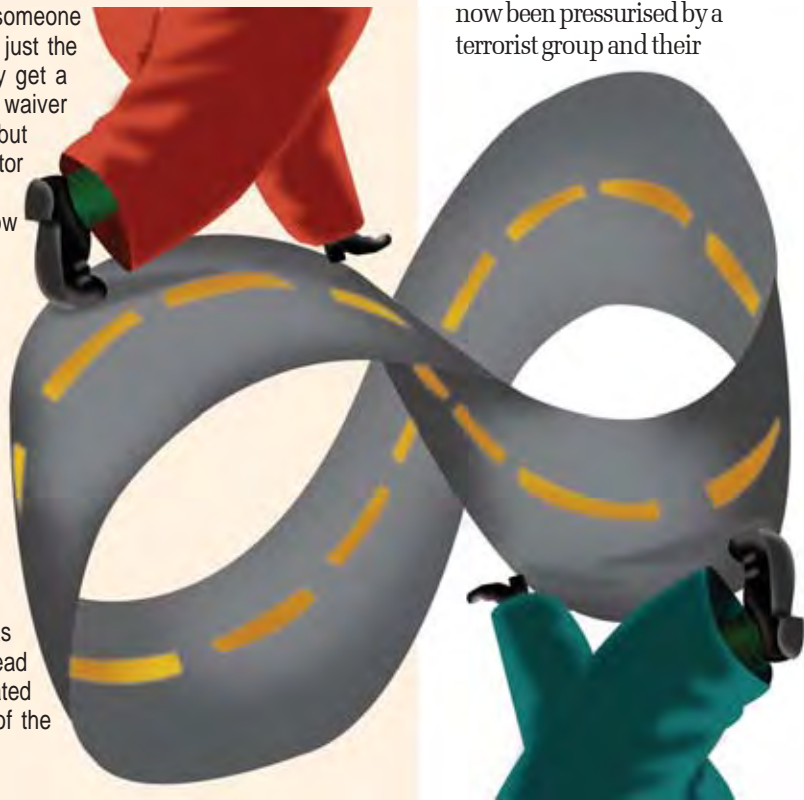
King Gyanendra is presently on walkabout in the district headquarters of the far and mid-west, and the throngs appear to suggest a spontaneous outpouring of goodwill. This is a useful photo-op to cancel out the monarchy's tarnished image. But although the palace's spin doctors may try to portray the crowds as a sign of support for February First, almost everyone knows it is just people desperate for peace clutching at straws.

The king has even been shown on candid camera calling for a "torrent of peace" in the country, and this will no doubt strike a chord in many people who have suffered the conflict. But in the back of everyone's mind is the question: if he is so serious about restoring peace why doesn't he get on with it instead of taking the country back 30 years?

No amount of spin is going to salvage the king's forthcoming Europe and America tour, however. World leaders are in no mood to be seen shaking hands with someone who says one thing and does just the opposite. Nepal's military may get a reprieve this week with a US waiver on non-lethal arms supplies, but the spotlight is now on the actor and not the act. High level emissaries have said they now want to see "action, not more words".

The bottom line is that King Gyanendra hasn't convinced even friendly world leaders that he needed to disassemble democracy to defeat Maoism. In fact, they appear more convinced than ever that it'll have the opposite effect.

Time is running out, and there will have to be some dramatic and drastic rollbacks before 16 September if our head of state is not going to be treated like a pariah in the corridors of the UN General Assembly hall.



Aceh and us

If we can't find a solution, let others help us do it

The Indonesian Government and the Free Aceh Movement prevailed over deep-rooted distrust to sign a peace MoU in Helsinki on 15 August. Brokered by the Crisis Management Initiative headed by former Finland President Martti Ahtisaari, the shaky truce could

GUEST COLUMN
Subindra Bogati



smooth the way for \$5 billion in aid for reconstruction of this war and tsunami ravaged region on the eastern tip of Sumatra.

The Helsinki accord is still fraught with pitfalls, but is a wake-up call for the warring sides in Nepal. However, the same week the pact was signed Nepali officials said they wouldn't allow outsiders to "meddle in our internal affairs". Speaking in Beijing, Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey said: "Nepal has now been pressurised by a terrorist group and their

supporters and sympathisers to accept outside intervention in its domestic problem."

All this sounds incongruous when even the top brass in the Royal Nepali Army have said this war doesn't have a military solution, all the military can do is force the Maoists to negotiate. If guns could do the job in Indian-administered Kashmir an estimated 500,000 Indian soldiers and paramilitaries would not have, in 15 years of warfare, failed to eliminate an insurgency now waged by perhaps 2,000 surviving militants.

From the safety of Kathmandu's bubble it is easy to keep arguing that the insurgency is home-grown and we are capable enough to solve the Maoist problem by ourselves. That may be true, but is the ever-deepening distrust among the king, political parties and the Maoists ever going to lessen so that substantial and meaningful negotiations can take place? Will the three forces ever muster the political will to negotiate?

The Nepali state gets military help with strings attached: pressures, international geopolitics and strategic interests. If we are happy to play along with that, what is wrong with international pressure for mediation to find a peaceful way to end the war?

The international community can be a part of the solution, not part of the problem. If only we had our house in order and we could forge a political consensus to end the war as desired by a majority of the population. It is up to Nepali political forces to choose a credible mediator to lead us to a ceasefire and a peace process.

"Nations have no permanent friends or allies, they only have permanent interests," said Lord Palmerston, who was prime minister of Britain when that country's East India Company was waging war against the Kingdom of Gorkha. Today, we bend over backwards to lean on China while needlessly alienating others. China has other concerns, we should be pragmatic and seek a solution in our own geopolitical reality.

Seventy percent of Nepal's development budget depends on outside aid. An increasing chunk of it is being channelled into fuelling the war. As the conflict escalates, the Nepali people are insecure and despair for the future. The insurgency feeds on itself, and on poverty, neglect and repression. The Maoists capitalised on these by presenting themselves as liberators, and although they may no longer be seen as knights in shining armour there seems to be no effort by the other political forces and the government to address the alienation that drives the conflict.

After ten years and 13,000 lives, even if we find a solution we owe it to the victims to once and for all address our society's core injustices. Even if this war is worth prolonging, it shouldn't be Nepal's long-suffering poor who should be doing the dying.

It is about time the powerful people in Kathmandu figured that more helicopters and guns are not going to end this madness. If the Achenese with all the bad blood of 30 years of separatist conflict can do it, why can't we? ●

Subindra Bogati is a student of international relations at London Metropolitan University.

The radical centre

The Koiralas can't keep operating the party like a family business

When the Nepali Congress assembles next week for its 11th General Convention, its decision makers face a nation in crisis and a party snared in internal contradictions.

Unlike in the past, the party can't brush disagreements under the carpet anymore. To maintain its relevance the NC needs to challenge a coterie that has brought the country's most influential political force to its knees.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



The NC began as a move-

ment devoted to the transformation of Nepali society and polity. But it didn't take the Rana-Shah establishment long to slowly co-opt the leading lights of this once revolutionary party. Congress leaders Matrika Prasad Koirala, Tulsi Giri, Biswo Bandhu Thapa, Sribhadra Sharma and Parsu Narayan Chaudhary all fell one by one. The credit for keeping the rump on course must go to Ganesh Man Singh.

It was GM who kept BP's dream alive by refusing to settle for anything less than undiluted multiparty democracy. When the

pressure of the People's Movement mounted in 1990, King Birendra gave in and the sovereignty of the Nepali people was recognised for the first time in our history. But making that hard-won democracy work has been more difficult. The rot set in when the personalities of party leaders dominated the NC's ideology of nationalism, democracy and socialism.

After 1990 it gradually became more and more difficult to tell one party from another. The political mainstream shifted to the right and it was characterised by an ideology of defensive national identity based on acute ethnocentrism, mindless schizophrenia, and militant chauvinism. The parties lacked a commitment to fundamental political change, there was an unquestioned acceptance of the market economy and there was no patience for dissent.

The parties had fallen into enemy territory. The royal palace had never vacated the political space at the right-of-centre and newcomers had to accept a secondary role. The NC did just that. Under Sher Bahadur Deuba and his band of political opportunists, the NC became a status quo force. Girija Prasad Koirala

watched from the sidelines, unable to check his party's drift rightwards.

Deuba showed his conservative character when he prematurely dissolved parliament in the dead of the night on 22 May 2002. Had it functioned for some more weeks, lawmakers were on the verge of passing far-reaching changes in the constitution to bring the Maoists into the political mainstream.

Deuba turned his party into a palace front, and has allowed himself to be used and disposed of many times since. Deuba's departure was an opportunity for reform that Koirala failed to grab. The result has been catastrophic for the NC.

After February First, there was no way a political party could swear by a constitutional monarchy and still be relevant. Any party that feels the people's pulse can't have failed to realise that federalism, not merely decentralisation, is going to be the structure of the state in future. No monarch that wishes a constructive role can fit into such a scheme of things.

The NC must now begin to prepare itself for the day when elected regional leaders will be in command with a

committee of presidents at the centre formulating national policies through a system of collective leadership. The Koiralas can't keep operating the party like a family business just because King Gyanendra is running the country like a private limited company. A political organisation needs all its members to have a sense of ownership.

It's not that NC members don't know what needs to be done, they just lack the courage to break out of their inertia. The role of aspiring leaders becomes important here: they need to stir the ideological pot so that it comes to boil without overflowing.

In private conversations, NC leaders agree their party badly needs a transformation. But most of them are prisoners of the past. They hide behind the favourite excuse of all conservatives: history can't be hurried.

To say that Nepal isn't yet ready for republicanism is an insult to thousands of martyrs who laid down their lives for assertions of people's sovereign rights. The NC must now get over its complacency and rise up to seize its radical centre once again. That is its destiny, and only that will mean that it values democracy. ●

LETTERS

FIDEL'S CUBA

C K Lal's analysis is sharp, his attacks are as ruthless as the armour of a revolutionary and his suggestions are profoundly pragmatic. However, I disagree with his view in 'Revolution, regression and reformation' (#261) that Cuba is like North Korea. Cuba, unlike North Korea, is the only socialist country where education and health facilities are not only free but parallel to standards in the US and Canada. Cubans have one of the best education systems and their students are among the world's best in the fields of mathematics, physics and social sciences. Cubans enjoy free medical check-ups with free medicines and free surgical operations. They have better health and education facilities than the majority of Americans. No doubt Castro is a dictator but he is a benevolent one. He could not endure the injustice the neighbouring superpower was inflicting on Cubans. What the Americans did to Cuba was similar to what India is doing to Nepal. Like Castro we need a socialist revolutionary who will stand up against Indian imperialism and its brainchild, the Maoists. Fidel Castro isn't Mao, Stalin or Pol Pot, so don't insult him. He is a true socialist and a rational architect of modern socialism. He took Cuba to a new level from where democracy can grow. If a future democratic Cuba remembers Castro it will remember him not as a tyrant but as a man who made Cuban society fit to appreciate and protect. I agree with Mr Lal that communism all around the world has been used to construct the most rigid form of social inequality in the pretext of creating a classless society. But Cuba is different.

Annabel Rana, Sanepa

PEOPLE POWER

After reading 'People power' (#261) I wondered if any of the political forces in the country actually care what the Nepali people want? We've had 14 governments, 10 times the number of ministers, and countless bandas in the 12 glorious years of democracy. Dirty political games like trading of MPs, the prime minister dissolving the parliament if a no-confidence motion passed, followed by Supreme Court appeals were more entertaining than the best soap operas most of the time. The second force in this triangular battle, the Maoists, sounded very appealing initially. Here was a political party that was standing for a just society. It didn't take long for us to see the ugly side of their face. They have definitely become a force to reckon with but a despised one.

Then there is the monarchy. Despite all the negative comments of foreign diplomats, political parties and the Maoists after 1 February I was optimistic. The political parties had failed and the Maoists had proved their unworthiness. Most Nepalis just wanted peace and stability. Six months down the line, all my hopes have gone down the drain. So, what is this 'people power' supposed to deliver?

Santosh Khanal, Glasgow

VIGILANTES

The Guest Column by Hemlata Rai ('A peace vigil' #261) is ideological rhetoric strongly lacking pragmatism. I agree that anti-Maoist groups are causing violence but I don't see any alternative. The security forces are very thinly spread and can't be everywhere. How are the villagers to protect themselves? Three years ago a man was buried alive in Parbat, a member of the RPP was abducted and both his eyes were gouged out. A man was crucified and nailed to a tree. Faced with such brutality, what are the people to do? If the government can't protect the people, the people will protect themselves. It is really easy for urban intellectuals like Hemlata Rai to write about vigilantes but if she had seen the Maoist mutilation of a fellow-farmer, or Maoists force-marching villagers to be used as human shields she would also support vigilanteism. Nepal's villagers see the Maoists first-hand, they don't see them on tv or read about them. When Maoist assassins come to them they don't come with human rights people or *Nepali Times* reporters. Someone writing an article in Kathmandu is not going to protect them. Rai argues that vigilanteism will lead to anarchy, but most villages are already facing anarchy due to the rebel violence. I am not a rightwing nut, but I do believe desperate people need self-protection.

A Thapa, email

KARNALI

'Don't kill the Karnali with your aid' by Jivan Bahadur Shahi (#260) is perhaps the most encouraging piece I have read in *Nepali Times* recently. Finally somebody has voiced my exact opinion. Nepal needs infrastructure not charity. I hope Mr Shahi's words will be heard by the powers that be in Kathmandu, most of them busy doing studies and collecting statistics and seldom

considering how they can empower the people. The people of Karnali and many other remote parts of Nepal deserve a chance to sustain their own lifestyle.

Shalini Tater, email

● Jivan Bahadur Shahi has brought out the bitter and true feelings of rural Nepal in 'Don't kill the Karnali with your aid'. I agree with his analysis that Kathmandu's disinterest is responsible for the Karnali's backwardness. Flying in food, piecemeal projects and ad-hoc responses are not going to meet the real basic needs of the Karnalibasi. But as Mr Shahi argues, besides the government, the INGOs are also responsible for this dependence. Let the civil servants in the Karnali be from the Karnali, allow them to prepare their own programs, let the people of the Karnali take care of themselves. However, I do have my reservations about Mr Shahi's misgivings about importing iodised salt, which is protecting thousands of people from micronutrient deficiency. An iodisation plant in Gamgadi or Simikot is not a feasible solution for now. The benefits of community forestry far outweigh the effect it is having on traditional trade patterns.

Thebehang Thakur Subba, Taplejung

RETORT TO RETORT

Re: Bihari K Shrestha's reply (Letters, #260) to my letter (#259) on his write-up ('Support by default', #258). Politicians are corrupt even in mature democracies, ours was only 12 years old before the king decided to play the messiah by blatantly breaching the constitution. Democracy has a self-cleansing, in-built system to flush out undesirables. In an autocracy, we see the corrupt and ex-convicts foisted upon us. True, elections are the real barometer of knowing public opinion but the king is bent on interpreting the public opinion in a manner that suits him. Elections under this royal government can never be free and fair. Crooks and ex-military officers (there is an ex-general in the Election Commission) overseeing polls is a nightmare. The king wants three years to put the panchayati set-up in place, and the six months since his coup leaves no doubt about his real intentions. As for president's rule (there is such a system in federal India), it can be done only on the recommendation of the elected head, to be duly ratified by parliament. Here the king resorts to Article 127 of the Constitution whenever it suits him. While 'groveling' at India is undesirable so is accepting the king's ambition to rule above the law.

Sambhav Sharma, New Baneswor

● Re: 'NGOs next' (#260). After 1990, economic and political liberalisation led to the mushrooming of NGOs in Nepal. On the positive side some of the best hospitals and elite schools were set up but the NGOs also had a negative impact. For one, they made society ever more dependent on the mercy of foreigners. Another result was increased corruption and conspicuous consumption by a few in the name of poverty-alleviation. Some of them were Christians proselytising on the side. Unfortunately, the Nepali media and intellectuals have failed to realise that no society has achieved prosperity with the help of NGOs. In fact what you need is effective state intervention. Now that the government finally comes up with rules to regulate this sector, NGOs cry foul. If NGOs are really working for the enhancement of poor Nepalis why do they have to worry about a new regulation? It only proves they had a hidden agenda all along, namely that their lavish lifestyles are threatened.

B Raj Giri, email

GTZ AND TEA

Thank you very much for Mallika Aryal's report on Nepali tea ('A new leaf', # 261). However, kindly note that GTZ's leading role in promoting Nepali tea at the forthcoming Tea and Coffee World Cup 2005 to be held in Hamburg 11-13 September is missing. The German aid group has been actively involved in tea sector development in Nepal since 1998. In partnership with our alliance, GTZ has also been involved in the development and promotion of the Nepal logo, codes of conduct, PR materials and trade shows.

*Chandra Bhushan Subba,
Tea and Coffee Global Development Alliance*

CORRECTIONS

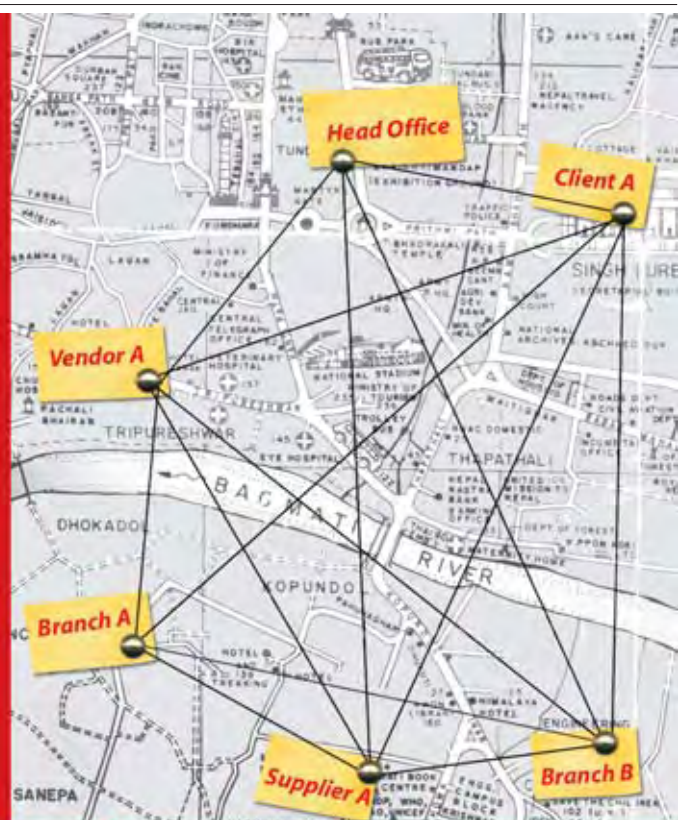
'A new leaf' (#261) gave the erroneous impression that Jang Bahadur Rana visited China. He didn't, and the tea was sent to him as a souvenir by the Chinese emperor. Due to a proof-reading error, the actual altitude of the Guranse Tea Estate was wrong. It should have been 'up to 2,000m'.

- Editor



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The art of diplomacy

It's simpler than some make it look

I hope the kind editors called Ambassador Keith Bloomfield and yelled "IINNCOMMINNNGGG Your Excellency" prior to the barrage of letters (#259) responding to his attempts at defining terrorism. The fact that Tony Blair was announcing that very moment that human rights laws might be changed in the United Kingdom must not have helped. This wasn't just your run-of-the-mill bent-out-of-shape reader or two sending in letters to *Nepali Times*. This was a multiethnic, multinational, coalition-style assault that must have had him reaching for the Guinness.

His Excellency evidently forgot—IJBTSTHUST. No, it's not Russian for 'Come hither my burly babushka' but the first rule of diplomacy and stands for It's Just Better To Shut The Hell Up

NEPALI PAN
Pravin Rana



Sometimes. He also seemed to have forgotten the second rule—JBYAYAKIMK. This rule is derived from the wise Hawaiian Kings (evidently before they did away with all those pesky consonants) and stands for Just Because You're Ambassador You Ain't King In My Kingdom. Failure to follow above rules has caused many a diplomat unnecessary grief.

So the INSAS rifle controversy is now out in public and it took the loss of so many brave and under appreciated soldiers of the RNA for this to become an issue. What do these fine soldiers have to do to get credit? When you're building a road in the most remote part of the country you're not doing it for the 'Royal Government' or the 'Imperial White Army' or violating human rights, you're doing this for the country. When you ambush and kill these fine people you're not liberating anyone or getting rid of feudalism, you're wiping out skilled workers and soldiers and stoking your own creepy pathologies.

Actually, the INSAS assault rifle is really a cool-looking assault rifle. The weapon is what is known in stodgy military parlance as, well, sexy. Its transparent plastic ammo clip is particularly attractive: a quick look lets you see if you have enough bullets left without actually having to keep count. A very handy feature in battle, I am told.

On the other hand, even for casual students of firearms like myself, transparent plastic clips have, ahem, a clear disadvantage to hardened steel ones seen in other assault rifles. Besides holding just ammo, the steel clips are tougher and are excellent substitutes as garlic and ginger mashers—so you can always have that evening curry just right while in the field.

But nothing apparently goes right in battle. Weapons jam, weather doesn't cooperate, air support's late, you forgot to bring enough ammo, someone forgot the base plate for the mortar, some goofball brought too much wai wai noodles—tom yum flavour—when the troops like the new mutton flavour and so on.

So maybe the whole thing is only the age-old tussle of style over substance: see-through cuteness versus multi-functional ruggedness, tomato versus tomaatoo, Catmandu versus Kathmandu, lungies versus shalwar kamij.

But if it does turn out that the INSAS isn't really that lethal, maybe the rifles can be packaged together with all the other approved non-lethal aid that Nepal is currently receiving. That should keep our activists happy. It's a win-win situation.

Nepalis have one of the least precise cultures. We have alleys in place of roads, the concept of forming a queue is still a Neanderthalish exercise and chairs for wedding receptions are arranged as if for concert seating. But when it comes to getting a drink at a bar, no one—not even rocket scientists or atom splitters—can beat the precision of our Nepali bartenders in pouring the 30 ml or the 60 ml shot of liquor.

In my own little survey (not sanctioned by *Nepali Times*) of a statistically representative sample of Kathmandu bars, results indicate that most bartenders in Kathmandu are unemployed chemists with a cruel bent. Even when enticed with a massive tip and/or grovelling they will refuse to serve a molecule more than what the shot-measuring glass holds.

Whatever the bar owners are doing to keep these guys in line, we need to immediately bottle and extrapolate across our entire culture for really important things—like correcting the goofy seating arrangements at wedding receptions.

Before I go, let me raise a toast to IJBTSTHUST and JBYAYAKIMK.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

A phoney business

Nepal Telecom is being sacrificed

SHIVA GAUNLE

Nepal Telecom's decision this week to finally resume pre-paid mobile service is seen here as the government's response to increasing public pressure and the threat of agitation by Telecom employees.

It could also have been an effort to deflect widespread coverage of the alleged link between restriction on mobiles imposed after the royal move on February First on security grounds and favouritism towards Nepal's first private mobile operator in which King Gyanendra's son-in-law has a share.

Of the 173,000 mobile phone lines that were cut off on 1 February, only 40,000 post paid lines in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Biratnagar have been reconnected. Some 111,000 pre-paid mobiles were out of action for more than six months and Nepal Telecom has started activating about 12,000 of them per day in Kathmandu this week. Other 20,000 post-paid lines in Kathmandu and other metros are still out. Nepal Telecom has been allowed to issue only a limited number of new mobiles, and it has been forced to delay its plans to launch a CDMA wireless phone network in the Valley.

To be sure, as a government monopoly Nepal Telecom always treated its customers shabbily. Its technology was behind demand leading to poor service, high cost and lack of innovation. But employees of the company are convinced that post-February First the government was delaying full resumption of Nepal Telecom's services in order to favour Spice Nepal Pvt Ltd (SNPL) in which King Gyanendra's son-in-law Raj Bahadur Singh owns a stake. Spice Cell which is a joint venture with Kazakh and Cyprus-based companies with links to Russia-based Nepali billionaire, Upendra Mahato.

Spice was supposed to begin operations from July, but that deadline has been extended by three months. Its director, Ajeya Raj Sumargi, in an interview denied it is being favoured and in turn accused Nepal Telecom of being not responding to customer demand (see p5).

The Ministry of Information and Communications says Nepal Telecom's services have been cut for security reasons. But the army's public relations office says: "Any decision to reopen old services or new ones is up to the ministry and Nepal Telecom, we have nothing to do with it."

"On the one hand they have given Spice Cell another three months, but they have told us not to re-start our CDMA project till November," says Tanka Lal Shrestha of the Nepal Telecom Employees' Union, "this is a strategy to keep us out of the competition till Spice Cell comes into the market."



Nepal Telecom had to stop all mobiles from February to May, customers had to go through cumbersome re-registration, only 80 percent of Kathmandu's post-paid mobile were activated, pre-paid phones are being gradually put back, phones in other cities have still not been resumed.

Minister of Information and Communications Tanka Dhakal and the secretary, Lok Man Singh Karki, mysteriously failed to attend the launching of Nepal

Telecom's CDMA wireless network timed for King Gyanendra's Birthday on 7 July. The very next day, Nepal Telecom's managing director, Sugratna Kansakar said the launch of 75,000 new CDMA wireless phones had been postponed till November. There are 100,000 units of CDMA sets lying in storage at Birganj customs.

However, Karki (who is also chairman of Nepal Telecom) did attend the 'soft launch' of Spice Cell on 9 August and made a ceremonial call to NTA's Suresh Pudasaini on the Spice system. Indeed, the conditions under which the ownership of Spice Cell was transferred from the Khetan Group that originally won the bid in 2000 to the new joint venture partners has not been fully revealed, especially the Rs 2.2 billion royalty it was supposed to pay the government. Officials at the Nepal Telecommunications Authority declined to be interviewed for this article.

One official at the Ministry of Information and Communication told us: "Spice was obviously worried that Nepal Telecom would have captured 90 percent of the market with its new mobiles and CDMA even before it launched its service, and it used all its political clout to delay Nepal Telecom's plans." He admitted Nepal Telecom's monopoly had resulted in poor service to customers, but added competition must be clean and fair.

Nepal Telecom has always been one of the highest revenue earners for the state. It earned Rs 4.8 billion last year and pays Rs 80 million a year to the government to provide security to its microwave repeater towers. But Nepal Telecom has lost Rs 1.3 billion in expected revenue since 1 February.

One Telecom employee sums it all up: "The Maoists are blowing up our exchanges and repeater towers, and in the capital the royal regime is busy gobbling up our revenue and not allowing us to earn. As far as we are concerned, they are both the same." ●



Biz blitz slammed

Foreign embassies and chambers of commerce have condemned Maoist attacks and threats of violence against Nepali businesses for hurting the livelihoods of thousands of workers and crippling the nation's economy. In a press release issued Wednesday by the auspices of the Industrial Security Group (which includes joint chambers from the US, Britain, France, Germany and India) they said, 'The Maoist claim to represent worker interests is a pretext for extortion and an illegitimate means to achieve political ends. No legitimate political force or, nor workers' movement would resort to such tactics.'

Lhasa bound



Sajha Yatayat is set to resume Kathmandu-Lhasa direct passenger bus service from 23 August. Shambhu KC, Sajha's traffic chief says the the company will also manage travel permits for passengers travelling to Tibet from Nepal. The direct bus service that kicked off on 1

May has been parked since 23 May owing to a number of problems, including the issuing of visas to Nepali travellers. Sunshine Travels has been appointed as the visa-processing agency, and the cost of the trip will now include \$70 per passenger one-way bus fare, a \$10 service charge for visa processing and issuing of a permit. Foreign travellers will have to pay an additional \$50, which will include the cost of lodging for three nights enroute.

Chinese investors may be interested

Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey has said during his recent visit to China he convinced Chinese businessmen to take a look at Nepal as an investment destination. A Chinese team is expected here on a reconnaissance trip, he said on return from Beijing on Tuesday. Pandey also secured a grant assistance of Rs 870 million budgetary support for Nepal, and signed five other bilateral agreements.

NEW PRODUCTS



KIDS' PLAY CENTRE: Children's entertainment centre Punkie Universe recently opened in Hotel BlueStar Complex, Tripureswore. Designed to exercise children's minds and bodies it features a 20-foot tower, huge ball pool and the five-tier Magical Maze. Children

can be safely left to play while parents do their own thing. The cost is Rs 175 per hour.

Morang Auto Works has announced the launch of the Yamaha G5. The new motorcycle comes with improved styling and upgraded technology that suits both rough and city roads of Nepal. The G5 is available in four colour combinations and also promises unmatched mileage—85 kms per litre. The price is Rs 106, 750.

Fuel for fear
As global oil prices rise where does Nepal stand?

Here in the United States, where the Beed is busy mixing business with pleasure this week, the average price of retail gasoline is poised to cross \$3 a gallon, nearly double the bill just one year ago. The government is cautiously

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



watching for inflation to set in while economists argue that when that is factored in, nominal prices will still be lower than in the early 1980s in real terms. The message is: price hikes happen and little can be done about it.

Soaring oil prices have become a global issue far beyond its tyre-burning-stone-pelting manifestation we see in Nepal. Neither elected nor un-elected governments like to be seen to be responsible for hiking prices as this has a cascading and direct effect on an array of consumer prices. In Indonesia, the government has lost \$14 billion in the first eight months of this year subsidizing prices. In India, a left-right coalition struggling to find a middle path has made oil companies suffer. China's appetite for oil is growing faster than anywhere else on earth and no statistics are available to explain how subsidies on consumer prices are financed. But price increases loom and hoarding has begun in many parts of the country. Until the early 1990s China was self-sufficient in oil but its current production is just half of consumption.

After water, oil has become perhaps the most sought after natural resource and one for which countries have gone to war.



With a growing global population that increasingly requires more energy to build the infrastructure to power the automobiles, air conditioners and other amenities of modern consumer societies, there is tremendous pressure on a resource that will begin to run out in our lifetimes. Meanwhile the global oil supply is concentrated in regions whose countries are in most cases controlled by governments that closely manage their economies.

Governments have always loved to control oil as a strategic resource. Cloaking it as a resource of national importance, oil has been misused and abused by successive governments in most petroleum-rich countries for motives that defy economics. For instance, cornered by auto industry lobbyists, the US government does not encourage mass transit systems nor discourage the sale of more gas-guzzling vehicles.

Similarly in Nepal, the government still wants to be the regulator and operator of the oil business while providing lip service about opening the door to

the private sector. This has led to large-scale open corruption in the distribution of adulterated fuel that has defied consumer activism to fix it. In India a plethora of government-owned oil firms continuously compete against one another and in China, the government still balks at liberalising retail prices.

So, back to this week's Beedism: Nepal can't do much with oil prices as long as we have a fixed currency regime with India. If oil prices rise in India, they will rise in Nepal. (A fall never happens in either country, as government oil companies like to pocket profits and spread employee bonuses.) The Nepal government needs to get out of this business and leave the prices to the markets, while ensuring that oil companies and dealers do not hoard and profiteer.

The global oil price hike has also again sparked discussions on alternatives, similar to talk heard in the early 1980s. Should not Nepal also embark upon such a dialogue? Let's take our focus away from hydropower for a change. ●

“We don’t have to answer every rumour...”

Spice Nepal (SNPL) has been embroiled in controversy even before it launches its service. The director of this joint venture foreign direct investment company, Ajeya Raj Sumargi, spoke to us about his company's plans and addressed allegations the firm is being favoured.

Nepali Times: The restrictions on Nepal Telecom resuming its services since February First and starting new ones gives reason to believe allegations that you are being favoured by a certain power center.

Ajeya Raj Sumargi: We are on track to start our services, and those who make these allegations are on their own path. Nepal Telecom and us, we are both Nepali companies, we are willing to extend any cooperation necessary. We have come to Nepal at a time when most foreign investors have been scared off. I am confident the Nepali people and consumers will understand this.

But the controversy doesn't die down. You have to remember we acquired SNPL only two years ago. This tender was awarded in 2000 and it went to the Supreme Court. We actually resurrected a dormant company, paid royalty to the state and brought it to this



MIN BAJRACHARYA

stage. Many couldn't believe it. True, there may be some people who mistakenly think their interests will be affected by our presence. But we are bringing telephone service to a country where consumers have to wait hours to make a call. There are many rumours on the streets, we don't have to answer each and every one of them just because they are controversial.

But Nepal Telecom says it has suffered a lot because of you.

SNPL came into existence after laws were changed and free competition was allowed. Nepal Telecom was not in the dark about this and they should have apprised their clients and their employees about it and told them, 'look we no longer have a monopoly we have to upgrade our services'. Instead, they went for the blame game. And I don't understand why they have to suffer a loss just because we come in ...There are 170,000 subscribers,

they have only provided service to 50,000—why are they in a hurry to expand? You can't blame others if you are being irresponsible yourself.

When do you plan to start?

Before Dasain. We are busy setting up base stations, streamlining our billing system and testing our electronic equipment with a soft launch from 7 August. We have permission to provide the service nationwide in a phase-wise manner. We have an initial investment of Rs 2 billion and will start with Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, then Pokhara. After that we will expand nationwide.

Who are the main investors?

This is a joint venture with 25 percent of the shares held by Nepalis and the rest by non-resident Nepalis, foreign direct investment, and financing from with foreign bank loans. The foreign investors are Reynold Holding of Kazakhstan and Delta Trade of Cyprus. The local partner is Raj Group, which I represent, and I am also in the board.

What is the involvement of overseas Nepalis in this venture?

We have to thank Dr Upendra Mahato—he is someone Spice Nepal salutes for having convinced foreign investors to come in. He used his influence to coordinate the investors although he is not directly involved in SNPL. Internationally, the telecom sector is seen to have potential and if the state responds by creating the conditions, foreign investors will come in.

Reporter’s diary from Pili

Tularam Pandey in Kalikot, Kantipur, 22 August

PILI—The terraces of paddy, millet and corn had been dug up with empty graves. We counted 51 of them. We asked Janam Malla who destroyed his crops by digging up the fields. ‘They dug these while the army base was being attacked on 7 August,’ Malla replied. ‘Maybe not as many were killed as they expected or maybe they took bodies elsewhere.’ Here in Naibada, the villagers counted 21 Maoists buried and another six that were abandoned unburied.

The two of us could travel along the Karanli Highway to Pili from Manma only six days after the attack. Previously the army had stopped us thrice saying we couldn’t go because there were mines and it was a war zone. But after hearing that colleagues from Jumla had reached the site human rights activist Kali Bahadur Malla and I decided to go. Manma was awash with rumours and none of them could be confirmed.

We set off at 6.30 AM passing workers who were digging sections of the highway. We reached Bihani Khola by 9AM and there were people crowded around the teashop. Jir Bahadur Shahi saw us and complained about reporters in Nepalganj, Manma and Surkhet saying villagers had assisted the Maoists. ‘The soldiers who escaped were hungry and naked, we gave them food, clothes, shoes,’ he said, ‘and they accuse us of helping Maoists. Why don’t those reporters come here and see for themselves?’

One elderly man told us about road labourers 20-year-old Nandalal Chaulagain and 22-year-old Sarpe Kami who were going to Manma to fetch rice but were beaten up by soldiers on the way. We pressed on ahead and by 11AM reached Simlagaun Khola where the army had accused the Maoists of executing 12 soldiers. There was a bad smell—it was a corpse that had been rotting there for six days and shopkeeper 62-year-old Gaga Bahadur Shahi said a boy who had come to the water mill that morning couldn’t stand the smell and vomited. ‘The army came and said it wasn’t one of theirs, no one has claimed the body, and we will not bury it because we don’t want to be accused of anything,’ he told us. He had heard the sound of the fighting but didn’t know anything about the executed soldiers. ‘There is just that abandoned one that is rotting,’ he said.

We took a picture of the corpse on a paddy terrace 30 m away and kept walking along the mountain flank towards Pili. Half-an-hour later we ran into 150 soldiers descending to the trail. Another group of soldiers was approaching from Pili. A soldier with a walkie-talkie signaled us to stop. Both of us had our IDs around our necks and he asked us which one of us was Kali Bahadur Malla. I pointed behind me. He told us we could go. Obviously they already had word we were coming. The soldiers were moving the way we had come from, perhaps they were finally going to dispose of the body.

Along the trail there were torn pieces of uniforms, abandoned boots, caps and cartridges of bullets. The base camp itself was still strewn with pots and pans, uniforms and sand bags. Armed police were busy digging trenches and bunkers. We showed our IDs and entered the camp. Below us was the gorge, above us a cliff. Except for the western side, there were cliffs all around. The Maoists had attacked the post even before it had been properly set up.

We went to see Nanda Malla, a shopkeeper, who was looking miserable. The army had tied him and beat him up for two days. On the day of the attack he had gone with his father-in-law to Pantadi and was returning with seven or eight other villagers and having tea at Simlagad. Suddenly there was a big uproar and a lot of gunshots, everyone went into the shop and bolted the door. Nanda’s wife, Gauri Malla recalls: ‘The fighting lasted all night, we were hungry and thirsty and afraid. The gunfire stopped at five but we came out only at nine, and when we opened the door we saw the camp on fire.’ The Maoists were all over the surrounding mountains shouting slogans and waving flags. The army reached the camp only on 9 August at 11AM and suspected Nanda and Gauri of having told the Maoists about the soldiers.

The army beat him up but the couple had also been on the receiving end of the Maoists. They had been abducted for three days by the Maoists in December because they were suspected of being army spies. They were finally released by depositing Rs 20,000 and their jewelry.

The helipad is 300 m away from the camp, and there were two ammunition boxes in the bushes. At 5.15 PM on 7 August, camp commander Raju Debkota had landed by helicopter which had also brought ammunition, food and other materials. The army had plans for a foundation stone laying ceremony and official opening of the camp. But within two minutes of the helicopter taking off, the attack started. Some 20-30 soldiers who were carrying the unloaded material were captured. Others (including Debkota) successfully escaped. The Maoists killed a local firewood and vegetable supplier, Shakti Malla, accusing him of being a spy. Some 13-14 children who had gathered at the helipad to watch the helicopter ran away as soon as the firing started and reached their homes safely. The villagers suspect the Maoists had wanted to capture the helicopter too but it had taken off by the time they got there. At the Kalika Primary School near the helipad there were still bloodstains and the doors of the school had been blown out. The Maoists had buried two of their dead in the school playground. Principle Hansa Bahadur Shahi still goes to school every day but there are no students.

As we walked to the village, the children ran and hid in the cowsheds. The women still had shock and fear on their faces. Villagers we knew drew us aside and wanted to tell us what happened on that fearful night. At about 8PM on 7 August, helicopters with nightvision hovered overhead and fired, damaging Jana Malla’s house and setting it on fire. A cowshed was also damaged after being hit by the helicopter. Villagers were complaining all their crops were damaged by Maoists trampling all over them.

Most said the army had treated them well after arriving in Pili, promising to help build latrines, set up a health post. Many villagers had benefited also because they could sell milk, vegetables and firewood. But after the battle, many feel they can’t live here anymore because they fear being caught in the crossfire.

We were hungry, and grabbed some biscuits as we headed back to Manma at 3PM. On the way we passed the soldiers again walking along the side of a cliff. One of them said, ‘It’s ok, they’re journalists.’ He asked us, ‘How far is Manma?’

‘It’ll take us two hours,’ I told him, ‘but you look tired, it’ll take you three.’

‘The age of kings is over’

Interview with former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana in Nepal, 28 August



Nepal: Are peace talks possible?
Daman Nath Dhungana: Not as long as the king rules and not until power is handed over to people’s representatives.

But the king says that he will hand over his authority after elections?
Who’s going to hold the elections: the king’s loyalists, relatives, ex-Panchayat leaders? If the king really is keen on elections, why would he push the democratic parties so far away from him?

Maybe he’s trying to solve the insurgency first?
The question is, who is the army fighting for if not the citizens? People are dying like mice. The king has been moving ahead with the attitude of ‘I am the state and it belongs to me’. The

problem would not have reached such a scale if only the constituent assembly was agreed upon in Hapure (during the second round of peace talks).

Why the need for a constituent assembly?
This means that the people can frame their own constitution and decide where to place the king. The alternative would be a republic. Democracy does not need a monarchy.

The king could gain legitimacy once he solves the Maoist problem.
Times have changed. Are we the only ones who protest the king? What about Nepal’s own friendly nations? Nepal’s monarchy is no longer a symbol of nationalism and national unity.

It is said that the Maoists are using the political parties to start one-party rule?
Not possible. We will not agree to cooperate unless they opt for multiparty democracy. The talks and giving up arms will go hand in hand. They have to win our trust by adhering to their promise that they will respect multiparty democracy. Unless that happens, we will not agree to have talks with them.

How about third party mediation?
It is India who has to be involved. Without India’s mediation the problem will not be solved.

Won’t India place its own vested interest first?
We also have to look after our own interests. India’s interest will not be different from ours. It can’t move ahead by pushing Nepal aside.

It is said that the leaders are not capable of handling a republic.
That is what the king says. Is there any country where people failed after emperors, kings and maharajas left? The Indians managed quite well after the British quit. The people will be capable.

One clear choice

Ganga Bahadur Thapa in Dishanirdesh, 21 August

Today the political parties stand bewildered by three choices. The first is to struggle on their own. The second is to forge an alliance with the Maoists. The third is to form a power equation with the king. Till now there has been more talk than action on any two of these three forces coming together. Hence, there is no immediate possibility of a new alignment. The king has a clear-cut objective: to eliminate the Maoists and then carry on with active monarchy. Irrespective of what he says, his goals are pretty clear. That raises the question: what are the goals of the parties? What do they mean when they say that they are against autocracy? Does that mean uprooting monarchy or only activating democracy? Students, intellectuals and Maoists have pushed for a republican system while some party leaders have been saying that if the country could only return to its pre-1 February 2005 or pre-4 October 2002 state, the autocracy would disappear. The fact remains that the king does not care much for the parties. Now they must reach a conclusion—whether or not to recognise the king. They should also be clear on whether their movement should aim to return the king to his earlier status or move toward a sweeping change.

The parties also need to understand who the real enemy of democracy is, the king or the Maoists? The Maoists have played an equal role in disrupting the democratic process. It was their ‘people’s movement’ launched in 1996 that derailed the democratic process and provided the king with a platform to end democracy in the country. That is why the parties need to decide who they would like to sideline first: the king or the Maoists. There has been talk of an alliance between the parties and the Maoists. But the parties lack confidence on that front. They are apprehensive that the government will label them terrorists and are equally concerned that in days ahead they will have to confront an armed group. Today, the parties are compelled to shake hands with the Maoists. If they are debating whether to voice Maoist slogans that should not be a problem at all. If the slogans are appropriate it does not matter who chants them. It is absurd to say that the constituent assembly is the slogan of the Maoists only. This is one issue on which the Maoists and the parties can forge an alliance. Once there is an agreement we will have a political outlet. I do not subscribe to the idea of surrendering arms. Who knows how many arms the Maoist have? If the Maoists offer up 10 pieces of arms to surrender, we would have to believe them. We must remember that the Nepali Congress has not yet submitted the arms of its own militia from its underground days.



नेपाल Nepal, 28 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



We will sweet-talk the terrorists or break them up but we will nonetheless bring peace

King Gyanendra in Kantipur, 25 August

Power leakage

Kantipur, 21 August

कान्तिपुर

The Nepal Electricity Authority, already under severe budgetary pressure due to bills yet to be paid for power purchases from private producers, has seen an eight percent increase in ‘leakage’. The leakage has now reached 24.8 percent, which equals the power generated by the country’s biggest producer, the 144-MW Kali Gandaki project. Half the leakage is stolen power while the rest is due to loss from the system during transmission. This costs the NEA 650 million units (653 Gwh) annually, with a price-tag per unit of Rs 6.81. The Electricity Price Commission last year instructed NEA to reduce its leakage by three percent. Instead it has increased. NEA’s distribution and customer service office says that’s because electricity meters can’t be monitored and billed in many rural and suburban areas because of security reasons.

Foreign mobiles

Nepal Samacharpatra, 20 August and Kantipur, 21 August

कान्तिपुर

The installation of base stations in Khasa has allowed Nepalis to use Chinese mobile phones in the border area near the Friendship Bridge. Living in a place that is out of reach of mobile network signals, many Nepalis are using Chinese sim cards. Similarly, Nepalis in the western tarai regions of Bhairawa, Taulihawa,

Krishna Nagar and Butwal are using Indian mobile systems. Many hundreds of thousands of rupees are flooding to India as Nepali customers switch to Indian telephony because of the delay in Nepal Telecom’s resumption of services. There are an estimated 5,000 Nepali subscribers of the Indian private operator Hutch. In the Universal College and Teaching Hospital in Bhairawa alone, there are said to be more than 200 Hutch phones in use. Instead of cracking down on this illegal use, Nepali security forces reportedly make up the majority of Indian mobile users.

Despondent Koirala

Samaya, 25 August

समय

Girija Prasad Koirala created quite a national controversy by blurting out in his hometown Biratnagar that Narhari Acharya and Gagan Thapa were royalists. Now that the Nepali Congress chief is back in the capital, he denies saying anything so stupid and is blaming the media for spreading false rumours, suggesting a conspiracy. But his party workers say otherwise. According to them GP said the same sorts of things about late UML leader Madan Bhandari as well. In this view the palace was the brains behind the fast rise in popularity of Bhandari, Acharya and Thapa. The leader also reportedly criticised civil society for ridiculing party politicians in public gatherings. Koirala is all set to turn back national politics by assaulting the

aspirations of youth leaders and the republican movement. It seems apparent that he is quite exhausted with the popularity gained by his younger cadre, especially the respect and attention given by party workers. His displeasure was very visible during the mass welcome given to Thapa at Pokhara airport, which Koirala witnessed.

NC workers now believe the leader is worried about the majority of party support going towards Thapa, who is actively advocating a republican system.

Tortured women

Kantipur, 23 August

कान्तिपुर

DAILEKH—After the women of Salleri and Nyauli in Dailekh rose up against the Maoists last November many from those villages fled to the district headquarters fearing rebel reprisals. Six Maoists had been killed in the resistance. Tulsi Singh and Jamuna Basnet of Nyauli had returned to their villages. The Maoists abducted Tulsi and Jamuna last month and despite Tulsi being pregnant, they beat her up and forced her to carry heavy loads of weapons. Jamuna was accused of leading the anti-Maoist resistance and was also beaten up and tortured after her abduction. Jamuna’s five-year-old son and three-year-old daughter want to know when their mother is coming back. Relatives say eye witnesses told them the two were being tortured in detention.

No regrets

Former COAS Sachit Shumsher Rana in *Jana Aastha*, 24 August

आस्था

‘I have heard there are people who claim that I offered wrong advice to the king. I would like to know what that were. If it was my suggestion that the parties should be labelled anti-national, then I can justify my argument. The leaders of these parties went to New Delhi to meet Baburam Bhattarai and it was afterwards that we heard they would be joining hands.

I had said that the parties are dancing to a foreign tune. I said so because the parties were meeting the same persons they had once termed terrorists. If they can stoop so low just for state power then we shouldn’t hesitate to call them anti-national. I spoke the truth, and I stick to my position.

When the present Constitution was being prepared we lobbied for certain provisions: the state should be secular and the king should be given the authority of a head of the state. I think the power that the king used by invoking Article 127 was a result of that suggestion.

The other suggestion was that the RNA should be kept under the supreme command of the king. If our suggestion was unheeded the army would have been politicised and the Maoists would have occupied the country by now. The army would have suffered the fate of the police. You must thank us for that.

I don’t agree that my expressions have driven a wedge between the king and the parties. The distance was already there, ever since the parties started talking about moving towards republic. For four years the parties have been raising hackles about Article 127. They have repeatedly asked the people to join their movement but the people have never listened to them. So they started going abroad to talk to the Maoists. If they really need to they should talk to them in Nepal.’





के तपाईंले आज

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

पढ्नु भयो ?



सपना थापा

पूर्व-प्राथमिक शिक्षिका

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

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



अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

सम्पूर्ण पत्रिका

Matthieu Ricard

New York's new Himalayan art museum features



DANIEL HABER in NEW YORK

Most New Yorkers know the address 17th St and Seventh Avenue as the venue of the former Barney's, once the city's most famous men's store. But its present occupant is the Rubin Museum of Art. Barely a year old New York's newest museum housing Asian art, primarily from the Himalaya, spent over \$ 60 million reincarnating this space.

Arriving visitors are invited to impress their hand or footprints in a sandbox set up at the museum's entrance to promote one of its current exhibitions, 'Handprints and Footprints in Buddhist Art'. The impressions are then recorded on a digital camera with one's name and entered in the museum's website, by date. An album in the same gallery displays thangkas with handprints and footprints of Karmapas, and one can find an eclectic display of handprints from

other cultural references, including Hollywood.

Last week the Rubin was screening 'Shortcut to Nirvana', a documentary on the Kumbh Mela, and also featured a dance performance of the Drepung monks from a Tibetan opera. The museum has the mandatory gift shop, which even sells Himalayan red salt. Available in Asan for about Rs 10 a package, it sells here for \$ 7.50. For \$ 14 we bought a non-toxic, vinyl Lotus Bud

made in China by Bodhi Toys for dharmic dogs to chew on.

Exhibitions also include 'Female Buddhas: Women of Enlightenment in Himalayan Art', displaying depictions of goddesses such as Tara in her different manifestations. Another showcases photos by Kathmandu's own Matthieu Ricard, the French-born author-monk residing at Boudhanath's Shechen monastery and who, it turns out, is an accomplished lensman.

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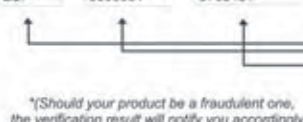
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on the plateau

es the works of a Boudha-based lensman monk

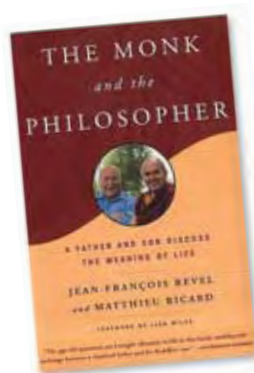


'Matthieu Ricard: The Compassionate Eye' is a welcome change from all the museum's serious iconography. Here was an eclectic mix of landscapes (mostly Tibetan but with some Nepali images as well) and human figures—from monks leaping in the air at beholding the sea to an elaborately coiffed and bejewelled young girl from Kham, where Ricard spends much of his time, and the Shechen Clinic in Boudhnath, which he oversees. There is also a remarkable portrait of the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and another of the current reincarnation, a small boy nuzzled by

the Dalai Lama.

Ricard is the well-known author and photographer of *Journey to Enlightenment* and *Monk Dancers of Tibet*, as well as *The Quantum and the Lotus*, about science and Buddhism. He collaborated with Olivier and Danielle Follmi on *Buddhist Himalayas*, and was cinematographer and writer of the video, *Spirit of Tibet*. After the Rubin, he hopes to bring the exhibition of his pictures to Kathmandu. ●

The Rubin Museum of Art,
150 West 17th Street, New York
+1 212 620 5000
www.rmanyc.org



The Monk and the Philosopher:
A Father and Son Discuss the Meaning of Life
by Jean Francois Revel and Matthieu Ricard
Schocken Book, February 1999 336 pages.

A MONASTERY COURTYARD (left)

At the end of an afternoon, the monks of Dzongsar Monastery in eastern Tibet meet to discuss questions they have studied during the day. This monastery was levelled during the Cultural Revolution and has now been partially rebuilt by the local community.

MONK JUMPING IN DEBATE (above)

At Dzongsar Monastery the monks of the philosophical college (shedra) engage in lively and animated debates. Here, a monk putting forth his arguments punctuates each one with a leap in the air and a powerful clap of his hands, as he tries to lead the seated monk to contradict himself through faulty logic.





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Tourism turnaround?

Travel traders are cautiously hopeful about the autumn season



MIN BAJRACHARYA

TERENCE LEE

Indian tourists are returning in droves, bookings for September and October are looking good, and flights in and out of Kathmandu are full.

But Nepal's travel traders have been let down so badly so often that they aren't jumping with joy yet. In fact, they've all got their fingers crossed that the post-monsoon will mark an end to the years of downturn in arrivals.

Hoteliers, travel agencies and airlines have all learnt that in Nepal, Murphy's Law applies: anything that can go wrong will. Last year, just as the travel industry was gearing up for a turnaround, 12 Nepali hostages were killed in Iraq and riots hit Kathmandu on 1 September. There were mass cancellations. Although no tourists have been deliberately hurt by Maoist

violence, news of the conflict and embassy advisories have kept western arrivals low.

"The bookings look good but the problem is that they are just bookings," says Ashok Pokhrel at the Nepal Association of Tour Operators. "The political developments in February wiped out all bookings overnight, remember?"

But the fact that international tour operators have started selling Nepal again seems to reflect a renewed confidence in the destination. Nandini Thapa at the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says, "The last few months have seen an improvement, international tour operators have come to terms with the situation in Nepal. We are hopeful but realistic."

A number of factors seem to be working in Nepal's favour. Natural disasters, epidemics and a spate of terrorist attacks worldwide have, ironically, sent the

message that nowhere is safe and at least in Nepal the violence is not random.

But more importantly, the new budget airlines flying from Nepal have brought airline prices down and this in turn has expanded the market. Prices to Indian destinations have dropped by more than half, pushing up Indian arrivals.

"Air accessibility is the major factor and competition has made Nepal a viable choice as it's cheaper now for Indians to visit Nepal compared to southeast Asian destinations," says the NTB's Thapa.

Subodh Rana at Marco Polo Travels agrees: "Tourism from the region is certainly looking better, flights by Air Nepal have added connections to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur and with their partner airline they are also looking at connecting Beijing. These are very positive developments."

Air Nepal could not have come at a

better time because Qatar Airways had pulled out its four-weekly Kuala Lumpur flights in June. "We can now revive tours and the Malaysian market looks good," says Rana. "Air Nepal has also broken the monopoly long held by Thai Airways and competitive fares will further benefit the destination."

However, long-haul markets, especially Europe and the US, don't look too promising. Since Holland's Martinair stopped seasonal flights to Amsterdam west-bound flights via the Gulf are going to be packed this autumn, travel agencies predict.

For its part the NTB is urging Kathmandu-based embassies to tone down their travel advisories and has launched a campaign to enlist Nepali missions abroad to get the word out that tourists have nothing to fear in Nepal. "Ambassadors and consulates are being briefed on how to refute misleading information and provide exact information on Nepal," says Thapa.

Despite this message, the insurgency and threat of violence still loom large. For now, just to prove a point, tourism entrepreneurs are telling the world that Nepal is as safe, or as vulnerable, as London or any other place in the world.

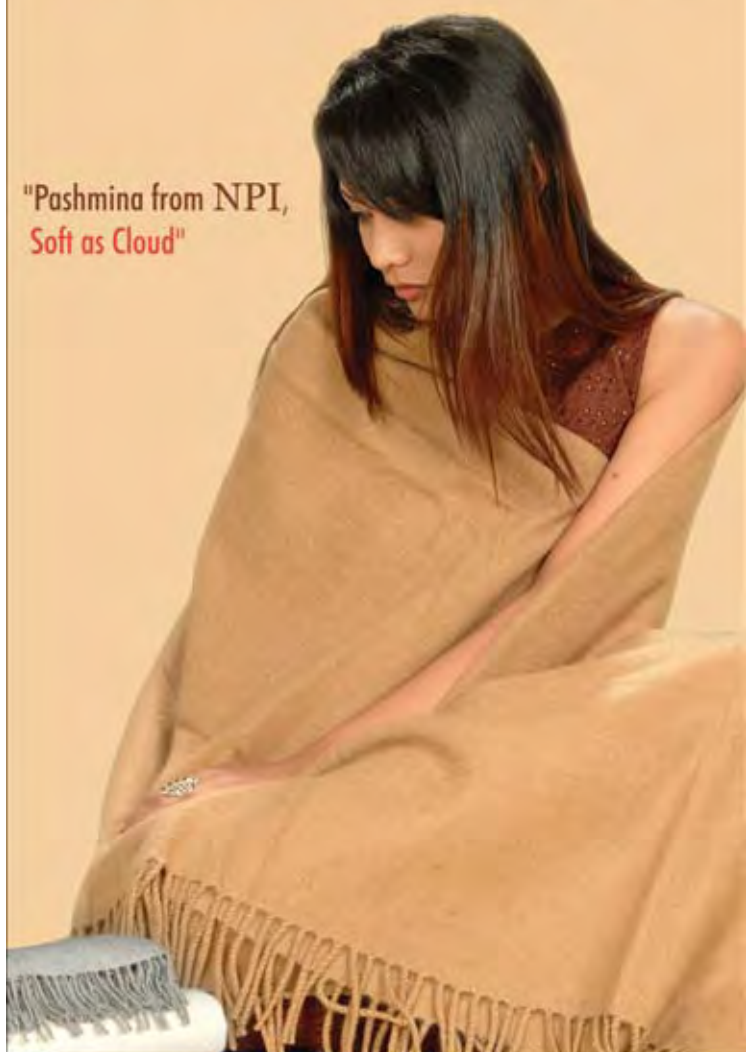
Tying up with Tibet

If the coming tourist season is looking good, it is in part because Nepal serves as a transit hub for travellers going to Tibet, Bhutan and other neighbouring destinations. "The total number of annual visitors to Tibet is officially around 800,000 of which around 500,000 are foreigners and it would be safe to say that at least 30,000 go via Nepal," says Ashok Pokharel of the Nepal Association of Travel Agents. "In fact, almost every tour or trek in Tibet involves a Nepali operator because we have the edge over the Tibetans in experience and professionalism."

In fact it is the Tibet traffic that kept Nepal afloat this monsoon season. But after September, Tibet traffic falls off and Nepal has to pull on its own. ●

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Palpa’s radio classrooms

Madanpokhara’s FM station mixes education with information and entertainment



GUNAKAR ARYAL in PALPA

Among the districts in the midhills of central Nepal, Palpa has a special place. It has high literacy, better living standards because of remittances and an outward-looking politically alert population which is open to new ideas. That is perhaps why Palpa really blossomed after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Freedom opened doors to better roads, drinking water, electricity and infrastructure as politically-aware locals demanded services from their representatives. Elected village and district leaders launched affirmative action programs, Palpa’s health and sanitation initiatives showed immediate results and with roads Palpa’s farmers had access to markets and prospered. But it was in grassroots communications that Palpa emerged in the mid-1990s as a model, first using a public address system, then fledgling cable tv and then community radio stations to encourage public participation. This grassroots communication was vital in turning democracy into a catalyst for development. The crackdowns on radio after 1

February hit Palpa badly. Telephone lines here were cut even as King Gyanendra was announcing his takeover in Kathmandu. The army marched into radio stations, two publications and cable networks and shut them down. The radio stations couldn’t broadcast anything other than music which hurt advertising revenue. All this coincided with the Maoists shutting down private schools in Palpa, and a ban on using government funds for development work. It was a double whammy for a district that placed a premium on education. As the blockade closed highways and farmers suffered, students appearing for SLC had to walk all the way to the district headquarters every day for their exams. Palpa’s SLC results this year were the worst in history, falling even below the national average. But every crisis throws up opportunities. Some of us at Radio Madanpokhara, frequency 106.9, came up with a cunning plan: why not use radio for distance education? That way you didn’t violate the government’s ban on news, while using the medium to compensate for the closure of schools. We launched programs on health, agriculture, gender issues and education. Among the most



EDUTAINMENT: The FM station at Madanpokhara (left) with Dinesh Basyal teaching math by radio and a student following the instructions on the radio at home.

successful was the Hamro Pathshala program for radio classrooms which was built on radio tuition classes during the SLC exams. *Hamro Pathshala* is run by teacher volunteers from three local high schools and airs three days a week for 30 minutes and is targeted at secondary school students and teachers in math, science and English. The aim is to restore Palpa’s good performance in next year’s SLC exams by making sure that even if schools are closed the student’s studies don’t suffer. The interactive classroom targets the rural poor and disadvantaged students, offering on-air tutoring on subjects in which the students suffer the highest failure rates. The station constantly updates programs so they combine instruction, educational information and entertainment. *Hamro Pathshala* is effective distance learning for students during times when schools are disrupted due to the conflict. Today the program reaches 27 VDCs and Tansen municipality and there are plans to include 60 schools and 15,000 students. ● Gunakar Aryal is an economics teachers who has converted part of his house into a community radio station Radio Madanpokhara of which he is station manager

Mediawatch

Refusing to let go

A week after the Supreme Court ordered the government not to take any legal or administrative moves against Nepal FM 91.8, and radio stations across the country resumed broadcasting news and current affairs the government has taken the unprecedented step of appealing to the apex court. The petition by MOIC secretary Lok Man Singh Karki on behalf of the government argues that it has the right to curb news broadcasts under ‘natural law’ and makes the controversial claim that press freedom pertains only to print media and not to broadcasts. ‘Press freedom is a right that the state dispenses,’ Karki argues. Legal experts are astounded the government is behaving like an ordinary litigant and appealing to the court to overturn its previous verdict. The court has summoned Nepal FM to discuss the issue next week. Meanwhile, an international advocacy mission made up of press freedom organisations worldwide has issued its findings in which it comes down heavily on the government and the Maoists for threatening press freedom in Nepal and especially on the six-month ban on news on FM. “Despite claims by government officials to the contrary, FM and community radio stations in many countries around the world broadcast news. This ban in Nepal is depriving the population of free access to information, threatening the financial viability of FM and community radio, as well as causing large-scale unemployment for radio journalists and broadcasters,” the report adds.

Global support

The International Federation of Journalists is organising a Global Day of Action for Press Freedom in Nepal on 30 August. It includes the Nepal Crisis Signature Campaign with an online petition at <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/622930457> Signatures collected will be submitted to the UN General Assembly scheduled to meet in New York from 14-17 September, which will be attended by King Gyanendra. ‘There is an urgent need for increased international pressure on the Nepal government to restore democracy and press freedom and stop the torture, abduction and harassment of media personnel and other forms of censorship,’ IFJ said in a new release.

EU human rights award

The Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal and the Federation of Nepali Journalists have announced the opening for entries for the 2005 Lorenzo Natali Prize for journalists reporting on human rights and democracy. Winners in the annual global competition receive prizes worth from Rs 127,000 to Rs 850,000.

नेपाल कृषिप्रधान मुलुक हो । यहाका ८० प्रतिशतभन्दा बढी जनता कृषि पेसामा आधारित छन् । कूल राष्ट्रिय आयको फन्दै ४० प्रतिशत हिस्सा अहिले पनि कृषि क्षेत्रले नै ओगटेको छ । सिङ्गो मुलुकको आर्थिक, सामाजिक मेरुण्डको रुपमा र हेको कृषिक्षेत्र उपेक्षित हुनु हुदैन । कृष्कहरू देशका वास्तविक नायक हुन् । उनीहरूलाई सम्मान र कदर गर्नुपर्छ । कृष्कहरूले पनि आफ्नो पसिनामाथि विश्वास गर्नुपर्छ । नयाँ नयाँ कृषि प्रणाली अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्छ । पढ्दैमा खेती गर्नु नहुने होइन । फन् कृषिक्षेत्रलाई आधुनिकीकरण गर्न शिक्षित र सचेत कृष्कको खाचो छ । त्यसैले कृषि पेसालाई आदर गरौं, कृष्कलाई सम्मान गरौं ।

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- Experience in MS Office preferred by not required
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Kadirgamar's passing

Muted coverage of the assassination shows how far we have yet to go to attain true regionalism

The minimalist manner in which Southasia as a whole greeted the assassination of Lakshman Kadirgamar at age 73 indicates the failure of regionalism.

The Sri Lankan foreign minister, killed by a sniper close to midnight on 12 August, was a towering regional figure whether you

liked his politics or not. A Tamil

Christian from Jaffna who actively sought to discredit the Tamil Tigers and thereby earned the undying enmity of one of the most vicious militancies in the world, Kadirgamar was courageous and steadfast in his chosen mission. He represented the old-world colonial-era graciousness that Sri Lanka retains more than any other former colonies and was a notable orator who as recently as March of this year had

been feted by his alma mater, Oxford University. The last time most of us saw and heard him was during a prickly discussion on the BBC's HardTalk program that same month.

The muted response to the assassination is evident from the newspaper headlines. Granted, editors all over were caught unawares because the killing happened when most of them were closing their pages. By the time news arrived from the wire services, it was too late to give a banner headline for the papers of the 13th. Nevertheless, one could have used bold black headlines instead of the small items tucked on the side, if at all.

By the 14th, the story was too old in this age of 24-hour television news to make the front page leader. The only exception was *The Hindu* of Madras, the Indian newspaper that is most interested in what is happening across the Palk Strait. For most papers in the rest of India, Bangladesh, Nepal and

Pakistan, follow-up on the Kadirgamar assassination joined the inside 'international' section.

The media indifference seemed to go beyond the press and television editorial sections. One really had to look around for discussions organised in the wake of an event which threatened to take Sri Lanka back to the edge of societal disaster. What impact would the assassination have on the fragile ceasefire between the government and the LTTE? Who killed the foreign minister and for what purpose? Was it the LTTE or some of its rogue cadres? Was it disgruntled elements within the Sri Lankan Army? Was it the JVP? Not enough people in Southasia outside Sri Lanka cared to seek answers and interest was limited to signatures on forlorn condolence books kept at the Sri Lankan embassies.

Kadirgamar was a key player in the Sri Lankan conflict, principal aide to President Chandrika Kumaratunga and controversial

as anyone in his position would be. Sri Lanka has seen two decades of continuous violence that has pushed itself into the headlines and newscasts year after year after year. If there is one conflict that Southasians know beyond Kashmir due to continuous coverage of carnage it is this conflict.

The passing of Kadirgamar might as well have been an assassination of an obscure politician in a faraway African or Latin American country for the kind of interest it generated in the media and intelligentsia in the region. This indicates the inadequacy of Southasian consciousness amongst even the English-speaking and reading classes of the countries of the region. Obviously, there is some distance yet to be travelled before empathy develops for the neighbour.

It could be that the lack of interest across borders is because the lives of our peoples are not intertwined either by politics or economics. Empathy which will ultimately bring Southasia together has yet to develop. The mild reaction to the killing of Kadirgamar shows there is some distance to travel yet on the road to Southasian regionalism. A sobering thought as SAARC prepares for its rescheduled summit in Dhaka in November. Lakshman Kadirgamar will not be there. ●

The Social Inclusion Research Fund Secretariat

seeks applications from qualified Nepali citizens for the position of

Social Inclusion Research Associate



Netherlands
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Organisation

The **Social Inclusion Research Fund** is supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and administrated by SNV/Nepal under the Country Management Agreement. This initiative has been taken in response to certain challenges and concerns raised by a study on social inclusion and nation building. The study identified that the question of social inclusion/exclusion is paramount in addressing poverty and human security and that there is a strong need for high quality and empirically founded research-based knowledge to stimulate the policy debate in facilitating deliberative democratic process for accommodating and managing diversity.

The **Research Fund** aims to promote and support research programmes that focus on structural inequalities and their implications for building a more inclusive nation; programmes that allow for representatives of excluded groups and civil society organisations to advocate their interests to influence parts of the research agenda. The Research Fund also aims to facilitate the dissemination of critical discourse related to the outcome of the research programme, as well as allowing for advocacy groups to use the research results for their own purpose.

The **Social Inclusion Research Associate (SIR Associate)** will lead all activities of the Research Fund with overall responsibility of the Administration and Management of the key programs. The SIR Associate shall report to the Coordinator of the Social Inclusion Research Fund Secretariat.

The position will be held on a contractual basis for **3 years** and will be based in **Kathmandu** at the Social Inclusion Research Fund Secretariat housed in SNV/Nepal, Kathmandu.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SIR ASSOCIATE INCLUDE:

Management and Administration of Research Projects/ Apprenticeship Programmes

- Identify priority areas, develop proposal screening criteria, conduct initial screening and coordinate scientific review of proposals
- Coordinate promotion activities for calling research proposals
- Assist Research Committee members
- Disseminate information to the researchers
- Manage research grants and administer contracts
- Monitor contracted activities and research projects to ensure accepted quality standards of scientific practices

Management of the Capacity Building Component of the Research Fund

- Identify capacity building needs of researchers
- Develop and coordinate capacity building activity plans and mobilise funds for their implementation

Others

- Manage events, workshops, seminars and interaction with civil society forums
- Promote Social Inclusion Research Fund and its activities
- Develop and maintain public relation and professional networks

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCIES:
A minimum of Masters in Social Science with strong research background is required; Ph.D. in Social Science is desirable, with minimum of 3 to 5 years of experience in managing research grants and scientific screening/review of research proposals. The candidate should have a very good understanding of inclusion/exclusion issues (Dalit, Indigenous, Women and Madhesi issues), previous experience in conducting research in social sciences, contract administration and capacity building. Strategic orientation with hands on experience in financial management, developing networks, maintaining good public relations along with gender sensitivity and cross cultural exposure is also required.

Applications are to be sent to the address below along with a cover letter, latest curriculum vitae, daytime contact number, a recent photograph and the names of two referees with their contact address/telephone numbers. Only short-listed candidates will be notified; *written assessment and final interviews will take place in the week of September 26, 2005.*

Deadline for submitting applications: 5:00 pm Sunday, September 11, 2005.

Job description is available for pick up from **Organisation Development Centre (ODC)** from **August 23, 2005** onwards or can be accessed through our website **www.odcincorp.com** under the category **"Recruitment"**. Candidates unable to pick up or access the website may request for it through e-mail.



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Yes to prostitution

NEW YORK - A US-based family-planning charity is formally challenging Washington's 'anti-prostitution' policy, calling it an unconstitutional infringement of speech that is undermining international efforts to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.

DKT International filed its lawsuit in district court against the US Agency for International Development (USAID) challenging the requirement that US and foreign NGOs receiving USAID funding adopt a policy 'explicitly opposing prostitution and sex trafficking'.

USAID adopted the rule in June as one of a number of policies advocated by the 'pro-life' religious right. (*IPS*)

Work in India

NEW DELHI - India's Congress-led communist-backed coalition government passed revolutionary legislation in parliament on Tuesday that guarantees 100 days of employment annually to every rural household in India, ignoring critics who said the law was impracticable and would foster corruption.

'This is the most important piece of legislation on behalf of India's impoverished millions since India won its independence in 1947,' said Prabhat Patnaik, professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act promises wage employment to every rural household in which adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. (*IPS*)

Hardly a drop

STOCKHOLM - The statistics are staggering: one person out of every five people lack access to safe water and two in five do not even have basic sanitation.

Still, says Stockholm International Water Institute Executive Director Anders Bernzell, a global plan of action due to be approved by world leaders at the upcoming UN summit has brushed aside the importance of water in fighting disease and eradicating poverty under the much-ballyhooed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). (*IPS*)



RAMESHWOR BOHARA

Girls at the bat

Pakistan hopes cricket will keep them in school

LAHORE—The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) have launched a groundbreaking campaign using cricket to focus on girls’ right to education and sports.

UNICEF representative in Pakistan, Omar Ahmed Abdi and PCB Chairman Shahryar Muhammad Khan signed the agreement on Thursday in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore, as part of the regional Fair Play for Girls initiative.

“The campaign across South Asia is a creative response to one of the biggest development challenges facing the region. The focus is on how to get more girls into schools and keep them there while they receive quality education,” said Abdi in his speech.

The program in Pakistan is aimed at helping young women to start playing cricket, in the context of school sports. Cartoon film character Meena, who is already familiar to the Pakistani audience as a role model for girls, will lead the campaign. She will be seen playing cricket in videos, on posters and in leaflets, all reaching out to the young

audience.

PCB’s Shahryar Khan told reporters that the board had joined hands with UNICEF to help young Pakistani women to participate in the sport, which is very popular amongst men and boys across the region.

“I believe cricket is an ennobling sport and can help bring about great change. It transcends the barriers of difference and the divisions of culture, language and race. Cricket buttresses fraternity, fair play and equality,” he said.

Women’s cricket was first introduced to Pakistan in 1996 by Shaiza Khan and Sharmeen Khan, two women who studied in England and had played for Middlesex women’s team. They were amongst the first female members of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in 2000, when the club allowed women to join for the first time in its 212 year history.

The PCB organised its first National Women’s Cricket Championship earlier this year. Teams from Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Multan, Quetta, Hyderabad, Peshawar and Faisalabad took part. The tournament was seen as a key

development in female participation in sport, as women from even the most conservative parts of the country took part and displayed their skills on the field.

Under the UNICEF-PCB campaign, two women’s teams will play an exhibition match on 14 September. An invited crowd of 20,000 youth and family members will watch the 30-over match.

The event is designed to explore the potential of girls and promote girls’ education and the right to play women’s cricket. ‘Our main focus is on two things. First the game is being played in every part of the country today in which it has become an obsession. We need to channel it and secondly we need to make women’s cricket a success,’ said Shahryar Khan.

The PCB formed a women’s section last year to improve the standard of women’s cricket in Pakistan, in accordance with International Cricket Council (ICC) guidelines. The PCB’s women’s section chairperson, Mira Phailbus, said she saw the event as promoting girls’ participation in education and sports. ● (IRIN)

Regroove your game

Take aim with those practice swings

That swing feels so good. It even looks great. It’s going to produce a fantastic shot. Day after day we watch players taking those lovely practice swings as they wait their turns on the first tee. Then the moment of truth arrives.

A few days back one of my students summed it up when he asked, ‘Why can’t I repeat my practice swing while actually hitting the ball? If I could repeat that during the swing that counts I think I would be a better player.’

He couldn’t be more right. Stand witness to just about any average golfer taking two or three beautiful practice swings and then, as they approach the ball for their shot, they uncannily conjure up some strange motions that produce a distorted result.

So why that sudden mess up when it matters? While making a practice swing a player is not under the same pressure as they are while making the actual shot. Thus, thoughts like squaring the clubface at impact or hitting fat don’t enter the mind. The swing is freer. However, when the ball has to be hit, the subconscious is aware that the clubface must be square and proper contact made. Tension sets in causing all sorts of faults and often results in a terrible shot.



What’s the cure? From my experience most amateurs take practice swings without any aim in mind. Just an air shot. These swings are great for loosening up the muscles but they’re no good when it comes to hitting a ball. The proper way to take a practice swing is to aim at something, such as a blade of grass, with the leading edge of the club. Having a target will help you learn to square the clubface at impact.

Another thing to keep in mind is that most golfers have two different swing speeds—one for practice and another for the real swing. Be conscious of the speed of the swing as the different pace can not only break down the body’s angle and balance but the swing plane itself.

So please, do take a practice swing before every shot and try to brush the target spot on the ground. Beware though not to damage the course by taking big divots and don’t take too many of those warm up swings as it unnecessarily delays the game.

Practice your practice swings the proper way and re-groove your game. ●

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

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NEPAL'S LITTLE IRONIES (#12)

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Next Change: Our HeroJig investigates reports that Pizza, Pepsi, and Comics have usurped the People's Movement in the Western Regions...

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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **World Photography Day** at Babar Mahal Art Council Gallery, 19-26 August. 4220735
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999

EVENTS

- ❖ **Krishna Astami** 26 August.
- ❖ **Talk Program** on Lain Singh Bangdel at Shanker Hotel, 26 August. 4721181
- ❖ **Paleti No. 8** at Nepa-Laya R-Sala (opposite Patan CDO office). Aavaas will sing songs on romance, tragedy and beyond, Rs 500. 5552839/5542646
- ❖ **Funk Night** with Mctwister at Moksh, 7:30 PM onwards, Rs 150, 26 August. 5526212
- ❖ **Monsoon Mela** with many artists, designer labels from India and Nepal, 27 August, Hotel Yak and Yeti 10AM-8PM. 4221720
- ❖ **The Art of Forgiveness, Loving Kindness and Peace** one day course by Tenzin Namdrol, 27 August, 10AM-4PM. 441483
- ❖ **Teej Celebration with a difference** at 1905 Kantipath on 3 September, 2-7PM. 4215068
- ❖ **International Literacy Day** 8 September.
- ❖ **Dabur Vatika Miss Nepal** at Birendra International Convention Centre, 10 September.
- ❖ **St. Xavier's Monsoon Rendezvous** fundraising dinner, September 10, 6PM onwards. 5521050/5521150
- ❖ **Film South Asia '05** entry forms and details www.himalassociation.org/fsa, 27 September-2 October.
- ❖ **Intercultural Exchange Program** Every Wednesday at Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali, 4.15 PM. 4250871
- ❖ **Tai Chi** Demonstration and group meditation at Swayambhu. 4256618
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Garage sale, pet practices and more. 4215068
- ❖ **Art Workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689



MUSIC

- ❖ **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, Thamel, 7PM. 4701208
- ❖ **Ladies Nights** Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live acoustic music. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 8PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Eat Beer ! Drink Beer !** exclusive items brewed in beer at The Pub, Hotel Yak and Yeti, 19-30 August, 12-11PM, 4248999
- ❖ **Malaysian Food and Culture Promotion** at the Cafe, Hyatt Regency, 1-7 September.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **International Buffet** Lunch at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, every Saturday and Sunday, Rs 625 plus tax with unlimited drinks.
- ❖ **Daily Delite** Lunch at Shambala Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat. 4412999
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** BBQ for Rs 625/ person at Dwarika's, Fridays at 7PM. 4479448
- ❖ **Boire and Manger** at Vineyard, Baber Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Special Combo** Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali speciality restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Fridays at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Three Days** at Nagarkot, health oriented program 30 September-2 October. Info@goldenagersnepal.com
- ❖ **Spa** Seasonal rates valid till 21 October at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Stay one night** get one Night at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742

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Call 4442220 for show timings

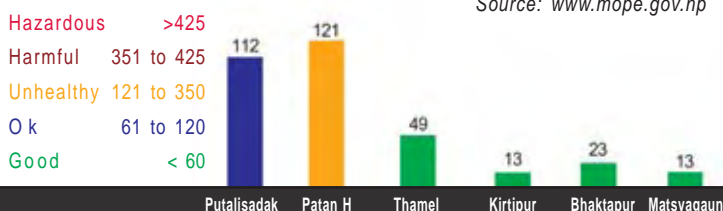
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The average concentration of PM10 particles (those small enough to lodge in the lungs) at Patan Hospital remained unchanged from last week—just one unit above the national standard. Due to the low PM10 concentration at Putali Sadak station over the weekend, the average value there remained below the standard. A below-60 count at the other stations indicated the air was good for breathing. The Valley average decreased about 21 percent from the previous week.

14-20 August 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



This week's precipitation was expected but it more than made up for the August deficit. Taken as a whole the monsoon is now catching up and the weather models will have to change to take into account what looks like a trend towards later monsoons. This week's rain was a result of a twin system of troughs that grazed the southern flanks of the Himalaya bringing copious rain to central Nepal and the Ganges plains in India. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows the systems have now merged and are washing up along the Himalayan midhills, so expect a wet weekend with gradual clearing early next week. The cloud cover has sent the temperature plunging but it will rise again next week to more normal levels.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

HIT BY BOTH SIDES : Students of Patan Campus vandalising the Lalitpur District Post Office on Sunday to protest fuel price hikes. On Wednesday suspected Maoists placed a pressure cooker bomb in the post office, which the army’s bomb squad needed three hours to defuse.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

AMBHIYAN MEANS BUSINESS: Suresh Acharya, editor of the new Nepali language business weekly *Aajako Abhiyaan*, at the newspaper’s launch at the Soaltee Crown Plaza on Sunday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

THAT’S ME UP THERE: Rajesh Hamal, the brand ambassador for Samsung’s new Samurai television set, speaking at the launch ceremony in the Radisson Hotel last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

DUST TO DUST: A sidewalk roast-corn seller douses a fire set by students protesting the fuel price hike at Putali Sadak on Wednesday so she can use the charcoal for her work.



BDS

GAY JATRA: More than 5,000 people took part in the annual Gay Pride parade for Gai Jatra on 20 September organised by the Blue Diamond Society. Traditionally used to remember the deceased, Gai Jatra has become an important occasion for Kathmandu’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Hooked to books

Two years ago, a group of positive-minded Nepali luminaries including banker Himalaya Rana, former TU vice-chancellor Kedar Bhakta Mathema, ex-ambassador Durgesh Man Singh, geographer Harka Gurung and NC politician Narayan Khadka among others got together to lament the fact that Kathmandu didn’t have a public library.

Suddenly it dawned on them that they were indulging in the favourite Nepali past-time of complaining and complaining, but not doing anything. “So we decided then and there that we’d set up a world class library,” Narayan Khadka recalls. It took time for things to get underway, but the library took off. The Society for the Kathmandu Valley

Public Library got a Rs 1 million budget allocation last year under Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari and used it to renovate and rent premises at Bhrikuti Mandap.

Already it is hard to keep up with the response from the public. Just a month after it opened the library has already seen 4,000 visitors. Children have to be literally dragged out by parents when the library closes at five, and there has been an over-whelming response from Nepalis and expats alike with book donations.

“I just can’t believe it—we have got 10,000 books in one month,” says Khadka, who was busy showing around Bernadete Vasseux from the

French Embassy when we were there (above). The response from other Kathmandu-based embassies have been great, with the Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, Australian and American missions contributing books, as well as the British School and Lincoln School.

Ultimately the library will be an archive for rare and valuable books from Nepal that are now in libraries in London and elsewhere, as well as for books in other languages about Nepal. But more than anything else, Kathmandu needs a world-class public place for reading.

Khadka’s committee has written to King Gyanendra asking for a piece of land near the Health Ministry to build a permanent library and a response is awaited. ●

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Signs of return to normalitude

Your Loyal Highnesses, Honourable Ex-convicts, Fellow-skeletons rattling in the Cabinet, Heads of Extra-Constitutional Organisms, Captains of Cottage Industries, Ex-cellencies, Willing Defaulters, Respected Givers and Takers of Huge Kickbacks, Overseers and Undertakers, Visiting Arms Merchants, venerable members of the Society of Nepali Intellectuals (Undemocratic), Members of the Journalistic Persuasion, Distinguishable Guests, and Mr Rishi Dhamala.

It is both a pleasure and a pain in the butt to be invited here once again to the Repeater's Club for the Faeces to Faces Program today to speak to you about how well the country has been doing after February First. Since I am among fellow-oxymorons here I don't need to belabour the obvious and waste your and my time speaking about how the country is doing very well, thank you. Actually, if I don't need to tell you, then why on earth am I doing exactly that? This is a question that has bedeviled me, and I often ask myself the same question every time I am invited to speak at fora like these, but my speechwriter hasn't yet come up with a satisfactory answer.

That is why today I am departing from my prepared text to speak frankly and to toot my own trumpet here, if I may. It must be clear to all you political observers, anonymous analysts and western diplomatic sources who don't want to be quoted by name that despite some impedimentations and difficultivities we are well on track to normalitude in this country.

In fact, just this morning while attending to a call from Nature I was temporarily disconnected because Nature as usual wasn't calling me on my landline, but when we lost contact again I was naturally delighted. It was proof that things in Nepal are rapidly returning to normalness.

Nepal Telecom needs to be commended for reconnecting our pre-paid, post-paid, and un-paid mobiles after a six month hiatus. And the fact that because of network congestion the phones don't work anymore again is the surest indication so far that things are back to the pre-February First situation of business as unusual. Even if the rollback of the royal takeover may take some more time because of delays in the demolition of the Democracy Wall, we are already rolling back on the telecommunications front. And thank Lord Vishnu for that.

The other sign of normalment is that bricks are flying again at Ghanta Ghar, the aroma of burning tyres and tear gas once more assail our nostrils outside campuses, the gridlocks are back on Tundikhel. It's a riot out there, and this is a sure sign that the days of autocratesque abnormalesence are over.

We promised to bring democracy back on track in three years, and it is my pleasure to inform you today that we are way ahead of schedule. I admit, the level of anarchy hasn't reached last year's intensificacy, we are still behind our objectivity in the arson attacks and bandas department, but we're getting there. Government cars are being set on fire outside Ascol just like in the good old days. And yesterday we had our first attempted bombard of a post-office. OK, the pressure cooker didn't go off, but the message was loud and clear: we are returning this country to normalification with a vengeance.

At the pace we are going we should restore full-blown demagoguery by mid-September. Not that it would make any difference to most of you here who are fast asleep. Hey, wake up, the speechification is over. ●

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