What next?

The Maoist ceasefire is greeted with ambivalence and scepticism

Five days have passed since the Maoists declared a unilateral ceasefire and now everyone is asking ‘what next’? Given the fate of previous ceasefires and how they were used for tactical advantage, there is also scepticism about the motives behind the Maoist move. Many pundits believe that the rebels have effectively cornered the king, while ordinary Nepalis who seek only peace are worried that the government and army haven’t yet reciprocated. “In similar conflicts elsewhere, when one side calls for a ceasefire the other side usually responds positively,” says former peace negotiator Padma Ratna Tuladhar. Other activists also believe this is a great opportunity for the government to match the Maoist offer.

In a statement Wednesday, Maoist leader Prachanda said the rebels would be willing to talk to the king if he agreed to halt the fighting. The seven political parties are keen to talk as soon as possible with the Maoists although they don’t have a clear plan. They hope that the unilateral truce will translate into an ability to function in the rural areas and the Maoists seem to be making appeasing noises on that front.

Meanwhile, there is some division in the all-party alliance, with some insisting that the rebels have to give up arms before talks and others calling for talks right away. “We will also move a step ahead and work for a permanent ceasefire,” UML leader Bamdev Gautam told us vaguely, without bothering to explain how a party that is not in government can do that. In fact, a ceasefire is a matter between two warring sides, and this effectively keeps the parties out of the picture.

Although there is a lot of bad blood between the armed rebels and the parties’ rank and file—who have borne the brunt of Maoist brutality over the past decade—differences between the parties and the rebels are narrowing. The Maoists have said they will accept a multiparty system while the parties have agreed to their constituent assembly demand. “The only way for a lasting ceasefire is for the king to give up his powers and return the government to the people and then a final truce can be made through the multiparty government,” argues Gautam. However, the rebel leadership is said to be taken aback by the lukewarm response of the international community to the ceasefire call.

Only the Swiss gave what could be considered an enthusiastic response. “We hope that His Majesty’s Government of Nepal will reciprocate and look for a constructive dialogue with the democratic forces as well as with the insurgents,” said Geneviève Federspiel, deputy country director of Swiss aid agency SDC.

Although other players said they welcomed the move, their statements were ambivalent and there was no direct and open appreciation. Even the message from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was read as being carefully worded and not appreciative enough. The Europeans went for a consolidated message that even-handedly targeted the rebels and the government. The EU’s stand favoured assistance from an independent and credible external partner for facilitating the peace process.

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

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**ONE-SIDED TRUCE**

The announcement last week of a three-month unilateral ceasefire by our ruling party went to show that they are way ahead of the government in the propaganda war. The truce has been welcomed by one and all (see p.14) and for a rather dazed royal cabinet everyone is pretty ecstatic.

Prachanda’s carefully crafted truce statement was also masterful timing. It torpedoed the king’s planned trip to the UN in which he was expected to forcefully define the war on terrorism in Shanghai.

The international community welcomed the truce. Kofi Annan sees the possibility of peace and civil society here hailed it. The Maoists to make the gesture and India sent an ambiguous response to a repetition of the royal-

The monarch seems to have overlooked the fact that our misguided comrades will finally realise the futility of an outdated dogma that believes in wrecking a country in order to rebuild it. After all, they look pretty foolish standing there with their guns when parliamentary parties didn’t need to kill a single person to be even more radical than them.

They claim that this is a new regime that is looking most foolish. The grubby cowards who were handpicked for ministership lacked the confidence and courage even to welcome the announcement. Asked to comment, a government spokesman just reacted with a sly grin in front of TV cameras and another snarled at reporters. What they should have done was double the stake and announce a six-month ceasefire. It appears someone had his head deeply buried in sand.

When we urged a ceasefire three weeks ago (‘Ceasefire’, #25) in this space, we had expected the government to show such magnanimity. It would have given the reins and the groundwork for the royal visit to New York in search of support for peace efforts home. But the problem with non-representative governments is that they are so far removed from the people they can think get away with doing nothing.

Two days before Prachanda’s truce call, the new question in the Nepali Times/nepahweb.com Internet poll was: ‘Should the security forces and the Maoists declare a one day Dasaain-Iftar ceasefire?’

Aside from the uncanny coincidence, nearly four times the usual number of respondents voted and four out of every five who did gave a resounding ‘yes’.

This unilateral peace is like the sound of one hand clapping—it must be converted into a three-way handshake. No matter how much of the country. In the mid-19th century, the 1990 movement made the people/Forbes/ISBN 978-1-4299-7768-3"

Status, the NC and UML have withdrawn their composition that would include the Maoists and hold elections to a constituent assembly.

But even as we have this disturbing vision of radical reform, a serious barrier remains. Those with the right-wing’s side are adamant that the king should have more power than provided by the 1990 constitution. All this is happening parallel with the monarchy losing the confidence and respect of more and more people.

But no one has emerged in the political leadership who can fill this vacuum. No mechanism has been established with a clear work plan and led by a collective leadership. This is possible only if the parties come up with a clear agenda for political reform. The international community cannot remain silent by excluding the Maoists to make the gesture and India sent an ambiguous response to a repetition of the royal-

The challenge now is to fit a ceremonial palace’s policy-drivers were always dualistic. They respected each other’s contributions and commitments but disagreed vehemently on who should prevail. Until 1996, the king had way. Perhaps King Gyennudd had this duality in mind when he told the media recently that the relationship between monarchy and parliament was never close.

The monarch seems to have overlooked the possibility that he was being patronised, which changed the stable equation of mutually adversarial respect between the palace and political parties forever. In

Between red and blue

Nepal may not be a republic tomorrow but the clock is ticking

The NC threw away his majority and called for a repeat of the royal-

The problem is that the Maoists are a willing victim to the time-tested theory of divide-and-rule and Gajendra Prasad Koirala is a master-at-majority and called for midterm polls. But instead of the RPP, the UML emerged as the biggest party in the new house.

The 1990 movement made the people/Forbes/ISBN 978-1-4299-7768-3"

Marty Logan

NEVER has this country been at such a historic crossroads

**22 May, 4 October, 1 February**

In the late 18th century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah forged the physical unity of the country. In the mid-19th century, Jang Bahadur Rana created an administrative structure and compelling the people to emulate the tried and tested methods of the Maoists, created a new house.

UML emerged as the biggest party in the midterm polls. But instead of the RPP, the NC emerged as a clear

The Maoists to make the gesture and India sent an ambiguous response to a repetition of the royal-

The Maoists hate the revival of parliament so much, there may be some merits in it after all. Either way, the people are waiting. And watching.

**STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal**

In the late 18th century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah forged the physical unity of the country. In the mid-19th century, Jang Bahadur Rana created an administrative structure and compelling the people to emulate the tried and tested methods of the Maoists, created a new house.

UML emerged as the biggest party in the midterm polls. But instead of the RPP, the NC emerged as a clear

The Maoists to make the gesture and India sent an ambiguous response to a repetition of the royal-
In his long and rambling interview to the state-run media (and I think Ganesan Singh was a ramble), the king has compared party-police differences to a squash between a husband and wife. (‘We mustn’t get stuck at every bend’; #264). Metaphors and analogies, but who is the husband here and who the wife?

At least so far he has to put the royals firmly on a pedestal to dictate terms of any palace-party-embryo, but he should know that the parties are already serving their divorcing papers. The maharajah, always dysfunctional because the partner has thought of themselves as adversaries, has already reached the point of collapse. The king better run after them with a bunch of roses and some sincere apologies if he wants to save the marriage. Personally, I think we should all look forward to a divorce between the palace and parties to get out of this 55-year-old mess that started in 1950. Like his great-great-grandfather and father, this king is after political supremacy. The marriage has not worked in the past, it never will. It is time for the country to get out of a hurtful and dysfunctional arrangement.

Name withheld on request

• For all the ridicule that has been heaped on His Majesty’s tour of western Nepal and his interview on NTV, one thing comes across loud and clear: the sincerity of the monarch in finding a way out of the country’s number one problem—the conflict. That the king has told people what he wanted on this trip and that is what he is determined to do. The parties and their infantile antics and the self-righteousness of the international community is just a distraction. This king will do what he has to do.

Rishi B Singh, Kathmandu

• Your editorial ‘Seeing enemies everywhere’ (#263) has done us all a great service. The whole story line vis-à-vis the palace and the parties has always been a cloak and dagger affair. The only difference today is that it is no longer happening in the open. This showdown should have taken place decades ago, that we would perhaps not have faced such ordeals. That struggle for supremacy has taken its toll: the king’s fixation on NTV, one thing comes across loud and clear: the sincerity of the monarch in finding a way out of the country’s number one problem—the conflict. That the king has told people what he wanted on this trip and that is what he is determined to do. The parties and their infantile antics and the self-righteousness of the international community is just a distraction. This king will do what he has to do.

G Regmi, Oilli Bajar

• In this Guest Column, ‘Achh and au’, (#262) Subindra Bogati hit the nail on the head with his assertion: ‘After 10 years and 13,000 lives even if we find a solution we owe it to the victims to once...’ That’s what the people told him they wanted on this trip and that is what he is determined to do. The parties and their infantile antics and the self-righteousness of the international community is just a distraction. This king will do what he has to do.

Rishi B Singh, Kathmandu

SKY NEWS

Congratulations to the Nepal Times and Kedar Sharma Badu for the clear notes on planet positions ('September sky', #263). Keep us informed of coming celestial events. I wonder, however, about the position of the moon in the star chart.

Bill Robbins, St Xavier’s, Jawalakhel

CEASEFIRE

Is somebody going nuts? A ceasefire during Dasain/Tihar and then back to the Killing fields. (![](https://www.nepalnews.com/internet_poll_263.png))

Rishi B Singh, Kathmandu

PEOPLE FIRST

Mr Bihari K Shrestha (#263) seems hell bent on advocating the positive aspects of authoritarian rule. Democracy and autocracy are two opposite extremes, never the twain shall meet. You can’t have both. It is democracy alone which can best serve the people’s interests. A democracy lead by a constructive monarch is not the solution. Mr Shrestha in his long exchange with Sambhav Sharma in your Column number two months has talked of corrupt politicians but what about the present regime doing the same thing? They will be no better than the rulers who reigned over Nepal for the past 237 years. They have deprived the Nepali people of their fundamental rights of education, information, equality, self-dignity and self-governance. In this era, everyone needs to know that the Kingdom of Nepal belongs to the entire sovereign people of Nepal and not to a section of people or any institution. Regarding the appointment of ex-army generals, there is no doubt that they are respectable citizens of Nepal. But so are other Nepalis. The appointment of an ex-army general after the February First move can cost a doubt on anybody and everybody. It’s a well-known fact that the RANA is first responsible to the institution of the monarchy and only then to the people of Nepal. Recent appointments make it all look like the Rana regime revisited.

Pramod Bhagat, Tri-Chandra Campus

This debate is now closed - Editor

CORRECTION

‘KU bocch takes off’ (#263) erroneously stated that the department offers a masters program. It should have been a bachelor’s.

Dan Prayag, Naxal

WE PROMISE CREATING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE ON OPTICAL FIBRE
Say it in Nepali

Alienated from Nepali, half-related to English, we grew up owning neither this nor that

Just as we cannot choose our parents, or the culture we are born into, we cannot choose our mother tongue. It is the language we are given to us and it forms us before we decide what we want to be formed. In that language we record our first impressions of our world. We communicate our first thoughts. It is the language that takes us long before we can take up another.

For many of us who grew up in Kathmandu, that language happens to be Nepali. We might have adopted English as our medium of education but it is Nepali that defines and embodies our existence. By discarding Nepali, we prevent ourselves from penetrating our most immediate, intimate surroundings. Especially in a country where only a handful know English and nearly all information reaches us in Nepali, the importance of Nepali remains incontestable. Without Nepali, our understanding of the world is bound to be limited. Our social and political awareness is, at best, inadequate. The English language has opened up wondrous possibilities of growth for us but it cannot fulfill the role of Nepali in our lives.

Yet, a notion prevails that incompetence in Nepali is a proof of competence in English. Stumble over every second word while reading a sentence in Nepali and you will be complimented on your competence in English. Some of us were even fired for uttering Nepali words.

Nepali was made not only unnecessary but also tedious and unfashionable. In our minds it was the language of politicians, speaking in Nepali would ruin our chances of mastering English. Some of us were even fined for uttering Nepali words.

We were made to feel ashamed of our mother tongue. Parents are anxious for us to speak ‘good English’, which, apart from being necessary for academic success, was also a sign of urban class and culture. Teachers made a rule of speaking in English at all times. They believed speaking in Nepali would ruin our chances of mastering English. Some of us were even fined for uttering Nepali words.

Our educators must use their authority and imagination to encourage the learning of Nepali. They should, first of all, convince their students that inability to read and write in Nepali is a handicap. They must teach them that a solid foundation in Nepali will enhance, rather than impede, their command of English. They must teach them that a solid foundation in Nepali will enhance, rather than impede, their command of English. They must teach them that a solid foundation in Nepali will enhance, rather than impede, their command of English.

As for the children of the new generation, they should be exposed to both languages at home. They should be taught to communicate in the language of their environment as well as in the language of their family. They should be taught to appreciate the richness of their own language and the beauty of the language of those around them.

The reason for this is in our schooling. Parents are anxious for us to speak ‘good English’, which, apart from being necessary for academic success, was also a sign of urban class and culture. Teachers made a rule of speaking in English at all times. They believed speaking in Nepali would ruin our chances of mastering English. Some of us were even fined for uttering Nepali words.

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Hurricane Katrina relief fund

The Nepal Chamber of Commerce has established a Hurricane Katrina Relief Fund with a ‘token’ deposit of $1,000. It is appealing to Nepali businesses, broader civil society and civil societies to contribute to help the victims of the devastation in the US states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The death toll in the city of New Orleans alone could be as high as 10,000 people, according to his mayor. A current account (# 85403) has been opened in the main branch office of the Rastiya Baniya Bank, Bishal Bajar, Kathmandu.

UN torture expert arriving

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak will arrive in Kathmandu on Saturday for a fact-finding mission. According to UN officials, during his 10-day stay Nowak will meet senior government officials, top brass of the security services, representatives of civil society, media and other professionals. He will also travel outside Kathmandu to assess the situation. According to the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT) Nepal, there are almost 100,000 cases of torture reported in the country every year affecting around 20,000 families.

Miss Nepal on wheels

Trading Concern has signed an agreement with The Hidden Treasure, organiser of Miss Nepal 2003. It promises to present the soon to be crowned Miss Nepal with the kinetic Nova scooter. The gearless 135cc bike with self-starter has proven popular among Nepal’s scooter lovers. Kinetic vehicles are available in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Bhaktapur, Biratatgar, Lahan, Janakpur, Nepalgunj, Dang, Dhangadi and other major cities.

### Getting over the blame game

#### KIRAN NEPAL

When King Gyanendra took over on February First, FNCCI, and its sister organisations were quick to congratulate him and even organised a felicitation programme. But with the economy now spiralling downward, these once rising businessmen are becoming restive and there are signs that businesses are distancing themselves from the king. We talked to leading businessmen, here are selected sound bites:

**Chandiraj Dhakal, president, FNCCI**

The country’s business is not in a good state at all and heading towards disaster. The morale is very low. The pressure from the state authorities is that it is looking to us to pay the increasing expenses for security operations. But the government can no longer expect anything from us if it fails to provide peace and security. The private sector has been the victim of the political differences between the king, parties and Maoists. We are the ones who are pressurised to pay both taxes to the state and donations to the rebels.

**Binod Bahadur Shrestha, former president, FNCCI**

We have the same respect for the palace today as we had when the parties were running the government. But the king and parties have to narrow the gap between the two. We made no effort as we were slated as royalists from the beginning. If we are to give priority to peace and security, then we have to cooperate with the king. His step will bring some results.

**Binod Chaudhary, president, Confederation of Nepal Industries (CNI)**

February First sparked hope that the king would deliver what the parties had failed to. Frankly, there has been no improvement in the situation. Nepal’s doors to foreign investors have been closed. China has been providing Rs 800 million and added Rs 70 million when we asked. Everyone knows that Rs 70 million is really nothing.

**Prabhatar SJB Rana, chairman, Sailesh Group**

The private sector cannot distance itself from the country’s political life. The impact of conflict on our economy has occurred not only at a micro level but on a macro scale. The business community wants to be left alone in the conflict between the state and the Maoists. After all, industries are needed wherever comes to power in future.

**Rajendra Khetan, vice president, CNN**

The entrepreneurs have themselves built a negative image by doing politics instead of business, fuelling conflict with each other, cheating banks and not delivering. The business community failed to act as a catalyst between the king and parties to reduce the conflict. We could have played a key role in that even though this is not possible in the case of the Maoists.

**Subash Sanghal, Sanghal Group**

Everything is related to poverty. The problem will persist unless poverty is not reduced. But the problem is we don’t have any basic policy. People go wherever they find food and don’t feel somebody once they find work. The question is, however, why didn’t the political parties support us when the situation demanded? They did not speak a word when the tea businesses closed down. If the parties did not offer support thinking that we would cite the example of the recent floods in Mumbai and talk about how long it would take India, with its poor infrastructure, to catch up with China. There was too much ridicule in response to the Mumbai floods.

### Managing disaster

**Hurricane Katrina provides devastating messages**

In the US this hurricane always lived up to the moniker, ‘the biggest disaster on record’. Most people would cite the example of the recent floods in Mumbai and talk about how long it would take India, with its poor infrastructure, to catch up with China. The comparison was themselves the headlines for 29 November, during the stay in place and FM radios free to broadcast news at least until then.

**ECONOMIC SENSE**

**Artha Beed**

both about the government and the place per se. The aftermath of Katrina perhaps has made many Americans think twice. Natural calamities are the same everywhere at anytime and likely all governments take time to assess and respond. The tv footage of the Gulf Coast reminds all of us that nature can play havoc and even the US government can do little against them.

The way people have suffered in this disaster is unprecedented especially in a country where money is not a problem. The government has enough resources to fight many wars, but is running away from its own territory. However, in any nation the people at the bottom of the pyramid always suffer. Every country has its own Western Katrina, the Bajhangs and the Bajuras, that federal governments sitting in urban settings forget to think about. It is also always important to understand that beyond a certain point, monetisation becomes immaterial, so does government. The footage of people unloading stores for necessities or simply to amass wealth also reminds us about the fundamentalists who owns the nation’s resources, who can use them and who can profit from them. This event also showed clearly that in dire circumstances the haves-not have all the ways to fulfil their basic needs, even to the point of raising arms. Therefore, when we examine conflicts we also need to probe the economic conditions underlying armed struggles. The lives of the people living below the poverty line do not have much value.

This event has also demonstrated that people are so absorbed in their own lives that it takes them quite while to fathom the impact the disaster made in the lives of many. Initially, it is seen as just another news event in another part of the country, then people feel ‘at least it is not in my city’ and only after does the ‘human’ come clear and people realise what a tragedy affected many lives.

Katrina has come as a subtle reminder to the world’s richest nation that at times certain slippages take place. With such monetary power it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that anything and everything can be bought but nature constantly reminds us it cannot. Thus, economics has to consider much more microcommutations, GDPs and CNPAs.

Any such devastating event, be it last year’s Tsunami, Katrina this year or the earthquakes in Iran or Bhuj, provides us the constant reminder to question oneself. What if, god forbid, something happens? Do we have plans? Do the plans work? How would essential supplies be distributed? How would we help lines other countries? Is there logic in the practice still seen in traditional societies of storing food grains and other necessary edibles in one’s house? Can we imagine the public health and emergency response system we need to be investing in?

Everyone ponders such issues whenever a natural disaster occurs, but we never quite cross the line to the normal human reaction. However, it is important to be able to learn from such events. Surely with Katrina the lesson is that even if you are a superpower, nature can always throw your plans and plans out of gear.
Nepal is losing out on export income because authorities are fixated on hemp’s ‘high’

Clockwise: Stem of the Cannabis Sativa plant, Udaya Shamsher Thapa of Heaven Hemp shows his products, Sophia KC of Basu’s Export House in the factory.

Many other countries, including China, the UK, Canada, India and even several US states have already legalised the production of Cannabis for commercial and medical purposes and are reaping huge benefits as a result. Nepal has one of nature’s best varieties of the plant, but it’s illegal to grow Cannabis here because it is known more for its psychoactive properties as ‘ganja’. Cannabis Sativa, one of the most useful species, grows naturally from Mahakali to Mochi and Nepal’s Himalayan climate allows for three crops a year while most other hemp harvesting nations can only manage two.

Admittedly, Nepal’s Cannabis Sativa is famous among marijuana users worldwide for its natural high and unique flavour but it is not just a product of the flower power generation when hippies flocked to their Mecca—Nepal—because Nepalis have also been using hemp, the fibre derived from the Cannabis plant, for eons. Among the rural folk of the western hills of Bajura, Bajhang, Rolpa, Rukum and Darchula, hemp collection is an important pastime. Shepherds spin the fibre into thread while grazing their sheep and cattle.

Cannabis plants grow to a height of 20 ft. After harvesting them, villagers shred the leaves, tend the bark is separated from the rest of the plant, smoked above a fire and boiled in ash water. Thin strips are then removed from the bark by hand. The older generation used to have holes in their thumbnails through which they passed the strips of fibre and wove them to make thread,” says Prem Dahal, proprietor of Hemp House. Dahal has been in the hemp business for over 19 years and is one of few who still use Nepali hemp for his products, even after the emergence of Chinese hemp in the market.

Dahal buys Rs 3-4 million worth of raw hemp every year from villagers who travel to sell it in Kathmandu. “I have to buy whenever they come because you can never tell when they will have the chance to come back,” says Dahal. He explains that the growth of the carpet business in the last five years boosted the price of hemp from just Rs 100 to Rs 300-400 a kg. Dahal exports his products, such as clothes, bags, cushion covers and small carpets, to seven countries and estimates that Nepal’s hemp business is worth up to Rs 800-900 million a year.

Another anchor on the industry’s growth is the poor reputation of Nepali hemp in the international market. There are two reasons for that: pure Nepali hemp is too roughly woven to be used in fabric, and so most producers here use low grade Chinese hemp bought in Khasa, then mix it with Nepali fibre, which eventually gives Nepali hemp a bad name in the international market. “The problem with Nepali hemp is that we have not been able to produce fine quality thread because of the lack of investment,” says Dahal.

Although hemp comprises only a small fraction of the international textile market, there is growing awareness of fibres. But here, neither the government nor the private sector, such as the Garment Association of Nepal (GAN), have shown much interest in the possibilities. The fact remains that GAN does not collect statistics on how much hemp products are shipped overseas, and their grouping of hemp together with nettle exports shows their lack of concern for this sector.

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“IT IS POSSIBLE TO PRODUCE TOP QUALITY FABRIC FROM NEPALI HEMP BUT BECAUSE IT’S ILLEGAL NO ONE WANTS TO INVEST.” SAYS UDAYA SHAMSHER THAPA OF HEAVEN HEMP, WHO HAS BEEN EXPORTING CLOTHES MADE FROM NEPALI HEMP FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW.

Willing investor

Because nepal hemp is collected seasonally, exporters of hemp products cannot count on a sure supply of the material. That’s the reason Sophia KC of Basu’s Export House, the country’s biggest importer, decided to switch to Chinese hemp to make her products. Sophia imports 8,000-10,000 kgs of Chinese hemp two-three times a year, mixing it with nepali hemp to make different types of fabric. She says she would like to use Nepali hemp and is even willing to invest in producing high quality fabric and says “there were just too many obstructions. If it could be legalised there are plenty of willing investors and it will benefit a lot of people.”
ith September’s arrival, Kathmandu starts preparing for a month of festivals, get-togethers, parties and travel. Nobody wants to think about the short, dreary winter days of December and January. But as Tihar ends, it becomes painstakingly clear that winter is not too far away. Come November, Kathmandu starts bundling up in fleece, down coats, legwarmers and Khastos.

Nothing is more Nepali than a Damber Kumari Khasto, a delicate hand printed cotton wrap, sandwiched between two layers of the finest muslin cloth. Khasto’s cotton makes it easy for both young and old to wear and the typical Nepali prints make them trendy for youngsters to drape themselves in during winter or to take abroad as souvenirs. The three layers of the Khasto have been keeping Nepalis toasty warm in dreadful winters from Boston to Moscow.

The Damber Kumari Khasto is named after the daughter of Jang Bahadur Rana, who brought the art of block printing to Nepal from India’s city of Banaras. On a religious trip to the city with her father in the mid-1800s, Damber Kumari and her entourage learnt the technique and carried it home.

In Nepal, Damber Kumari created her own style by wrapping cotton in two thin layers of muslin cloth, fortifying the shawl for the Kathmandu winter. Since then the Khasto has become one of the most popular wrap-arounds, found in most Nepali households. And to this day, this method of block printing and the name of the Khasto itself are referred to as Damber Kumari.

Unfortunately, the graceful designs of earlier days were slowly replaced by less refined work that was easy to mass produce. Soon, the beautiful block printings of lotus, rhododendron, peacock and fire were replaced by tacky red and green block-printed hearts. But just when Khasto fans thought the art was dying, Gautam Rana (also known as G2) stepped in to revive the age-old tradition.

Today in partnership with the Museum Shop at Babbar Mahal Revisited he and Rosha Chitrakar, who looks after the management side of the business, are working to revive the nearly forgotten craft of Khasto making.

The shop’s first round of Khastos, put on display in July, were sold out immediately. The designers have developed stunning patterns using a range of conventional motifs. Temple panels, dragons, vajra, lotus, flame, moons and flowers are some of the 25 designs the painters are working with. “The actual art of block printing is in hitting blocks with different colours at exactly the right places,” Rana says.

The blocks are carved by one set of artists, then another group does the hand printing. Finally the Khastos themselves are sewn by a set of tailors. Thus, the shawls are completely handmade, except for the cotton and muslin. Rana plans to make at least 10-12 Khastos weekly and sell them through the Museum Shop.

Production has been slow during the monsoon as the paintings need to be slowly dried in the sun but the group is looking forward to a sunny and productive winter. G2 Rana believes the initiative will revive the kind of block paintings Damber Kumari herself may have envisaged. “Art is handed down from one generation to the next but the challenge lies in getting the next generation interested,” he says.

Entrepreneur Gautam Rana is reviving the art of Khasto making and his products are flying off the shelves.

MALLIKA ARYAL

G2 Rana in front of an antique Damber Kumari.
Below: The first descent rafting team struggles to stay on course between Tsele and Kagbeni... and then the winds picked up.

Above left: Ace Kvale photographs Arlene Burns as she emerges, still in her kayak, from the lower reaches of the Kali Gandaki’s slot canyon. The Tsele bridge and Nilgiri are in the background.

Above: Buckwheat in bloom at the town of Tsarang, which is presided over by the 16th Century Tsarang Gompa.

Next page, from left to right: Mani Dangol, Madhu Chetri, Maila, Tsewang Bista, Raju Bista and the author. Not pictured: Chhimi Rinzin Gurung, Arlene Burns and Ace Kvale.
“Tan, Maia, tan!” Mani Dangol shouted from the back of the raft with an urgency that, until we got used to it, sounded like swearing. I’m grateful we have Nepal’s silver medalist bodybuilder, Major Mani, barking instructions because the six of us in a five- man inflatable watercraft have little collective rafting sense. Our only strength is our ability to follow instructions.

“FORWARD!” Mani erupted again. In rafting terminology that means, effectively, “Paddle your butts off before we run aground on that damn gravel bar over there!”

For a first-ever, water-borne descent of the upper reaches of the Kali Gandaki River, perhaps it was a bit ambitious to launch a raft and kayak into the shallow waters of Dhee, at 3,300 m near Lo Manthang. The monsoon flow fluctuates wildly here and though horses can cross the river at many spots, the nominal leader of our rag-tag expedition gave even odds to being swept away by a torrent or getting snagged on a river boulder.

The first circuitous, meandering channel was probably taken when expert river runner Arlene Burns, photographer Ace Kvale and I boarded the plane in Los Angeles. With support from the National Geographic board the Kali Gandaki or Kalopani, that is, where the river optimistically proposed—and genuinely support from the National Geographic board—began to sink in a “hole” behind a rock but those on the shore. A corner of the raft entered the current in reverse which made it easy, if nothing else, to wave goodbye to the impromptu launching pad. “Yes, I’m used to dealing with extremes of the natural environment but when it’s static, not in motion, swirling all around me.”

I was suddenly gripped by a sense of responsibility for the others’ safety. I looked at Arlene, our river leader. She had kayaked and rafted many of the world’s rivers, including a first descent of the Modi Khola, below Ghandurung. One of her sports television personality gigs was announcing the ‘Extreme Games’, which I now hoped we weren’t inadverently qualifying for.

“It’s not perfect, that’s for sure,” Arlene said, lifting her eyebrows. “But I think we can do it. It’s...well...doable.” She was mainly concerned that we had Mustangi royalty on board who, though masterful in most things worldly, had little rafting experience. Our expert boatmen, Mani and Maila, on the other hand, couldn’t wait to launch. And besides, a hundred or so villagers had already gathered. Women were tying katas to the bow of the two craft and our motley crew, already zipped into their life jackets like Michelin men, were posing for pre-victory photos.

Arlene launched her kayak, instructing the raft to follow close behind. Mani and Maila shoved us off and the raft entered the current in reverse which made it easy, if nothing else, to wave goodbye to those on the shore. A corner of the raft began to sink in a “hole” behind a rock but we were immediately buoyed by the hilarious laughter and bright smiles of the crew. We were moving forward, they were paddling hard and all were having the time of their lives.

We quickly learned to read, though not avoid, telltale shallows where the raft would come to a lurching, grinding halt on submerged rocks and gravel bars. In one fast moving channel, the raft jerked briefly, sufficient to launch Chhimi Gurung into the river. Two of us grabbed the collar of his life preserver and yanked him into the boat, expecting to find him struggling and spitting. Instead, he was laughing, thrilled at the baptism.

“Kat, Maia, kat,” Major Mani yelled again, hoping to reorient the raft to avoid the next obstacle. The rest of us dutifully paddled forward, vainly trying to synchronize our strokes, while Maila—perched protectively in the bow—anchored the hilt of the paddle in his hip for a mid-course correction. Two paddles forward, one paddle back, yielding a net sideways movement.

Below the village of Ghiling, the Kali Gandaki flows into a vertical-walled sandstone canyon for several kilometres.

Horses travel this slot canyon in winter, wading down the river current, and the surging monsoon flow prohibits us from safely scouting the route. “It would be a complete rip-off center that,” Arlene said in an understatement. “There’d be no coming back upstream if you got stuck, no climbing out the canyon walls and there’s no kayaking either if the river has filled the canyon between its walls.”

Oddly, the solitude and mystery of the canyon drew us like a siren. Maia and Maila appeared ready to take it on. “There’s a place in there,” our pony driver Tashi chimed in, “where the walls of the canyon have formed a giant cauldron of swirling water. More water flows into that place than flows out.”

Gulp. We portaged the raft and kayak a day’s walk around the village of Tsaile, one day north of Jomsom, and scouted a tamer but still daunting section of the slot canyon at its tail end. We viewed it brieﬂy in the twilight, 400 feet above the water.

“I can’t sleep,” Arlene announced the next morning. “I’m a mountain guy, not a river guy,” I remarked to Madhu, officer-in-charge of the Lo Manthang Royal Mustang Excursions, at 4470087, 98510-46926 or tsewangbista@yahoo.com. The LGJ Foundation and are available for hire through the more extended family operation, Royal Mustang Excursions, at 333 98786.

Broughton Coburn has spent two decades working in conservation and development in Nepal and has written ﬁve books about the people and places of the Himalaya.

The first-ever rafting descent of the upper Kali Gandaki in Mustang

The first-ever rafting descent of the upper Kali Gandaki in Mustang

BROUGHTON COBURN on the KALI GANDAKI
Imagine a neighborhood with beautiful wardrobe club with all the modern facilities. Imagine children play or where you could sit in the terrace enjoying quality time. Making memories. Living a lifetime of Saturdays. Whether you’d like to all, terraces is the unique community your part of the family at terraces, the place.
IT'S A ONCE IN A LIFETIME IN YOUR DREAM HOME.

Main Entrance to Terraces

BUILT IRON FENCES, WALKING AND JOGGING PATHS, A COMMUNITY GORGEOUSLY LANDSCAPED GREENS WHERE YOU CAN WATCH YOUR SHADE OF A TREE AS WATCH THE HIMALAYAS CHANGE THEIR HUE.

EASY ROUTES TO SHOPPING, DINING AND WORK. THAT'S TERRACES, SUNAKOTHI.

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST. THAT'S WHAT TERRACES OFFERS YOU. A DO EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN, OR NOT MUCH OF ANYTHING AT ENTIRE FAMILY CAN ENJOY. VALLEY HOMES INVITES YOU TO BE A WHERE YOU WANT TO BE. WELCOME TO TERRACES, WELCOME HOME!
Ceasefire

Historic opportunity
Editorial in Kantipur, 4 September

The ceasefire announcement came just as the parties and the Maoists were taking forward their rapprochement through unofficial contacts. The parties have cautiously welcomed the ceasefire. Even by itself a ceasefire is a positive step towards replacing guns with talks. The royal government must respond with its own cessation of hostilities and a commitment that it is ready to forge a politically negotiated settlement. Since the conflict is now a trilateral one, it is not enough for two forces to sit together. The lesson from past ceasefires is that there has to be a confidence building effort and for this there is a need to accept international mediation for which the UN may be the right body. But for this, there has to be agreement and cooperation from neighbouring countries.

Slaver of hope
Editorial in Nepapaheli, 7 September

The Maoists announced a unilateral ceasefire under pressure from India. The rebels quickly orchestrated this scenario after they learned that King Gyanendra would be attending the UN General Assembly (the visit has been cancelled) and that the international community would surely lash out at them during the meeting. The announcement is also aimed at engaging the seven political parties, which have echoed the rebels’ demand for a constituent assembly and to silence the ambassadors of the US and the UK, the chief of the UN human rights commission’s Nepal office and European Commission officials among others, because they have been condemning the rebels.

The Maoists know the ceasefire will provide them a breathing space in which they can treat their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get them a breathing space in which they can treat their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as their wounded cadres, collect donations, get organised and consolidate their strength. They are also well aware the move will reveal them as

This is not the first time the Maoists have declared a ceasefire. But it is precisely because they were used as a political tactic that there is still distrust among the parties about their sincerity. The rebels have sensationalised the ceasefire to distract rival political forces and to strengthen their own position. This is another opportunity for the Maoists to display political integrity and establish trust. The Maoist leadership must know this. The fact that the Maoists have cited the international move to declare Nepal a failed state shows their nationalist credentials and also proves that they are trying to ease the perception that they are sponsored from abroad and exhibit their democratic credentials. It is now necessary to turn this unilateral ceasefire into a bilateral one and to initiate trilateral talks with the royal government. There will be no solution without involving the state.

Trilateral talks
Editorial in Rajdhani, 4 September

Hang on, chairman. Let me turn this mike in that direction. If they still can’t hear, you could do bargaining later on.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

‘Let it be known that we did not announce this ceasefire out of defeat or exhaustion.’

Baburnam Bhattarai in Maoist weekly Janaubash, 6 August

No apparent leader

Interview with Durga Subedi in Sangh, 5 September

Subedi is a former Nepali Congress leader and a mediator during the first round of peace talks in 2001.

Sangh: You were active during the ceasefire between the Maoists and Deuba’s government.

Durga Subedi: I used to have regular contact with the Maoists and when Deuba became the prime minister he told me to organise the talks between the two parties and I played a mediator’s role. I was also involved in many discussions with leaders like Krishan Dwag Khadga and Mumaran Khanal.

You failed to notice the loopholes in talks when you had played a key role in them?

The problem was that there were people from both the Koirala and Deuba camps in the negotiating team and they had conflicting views. The signs of failure were imminent.

So do you blame Girija?

It was his stubbornness that led to failure in the first round. He had his mind set on crushing the communists. He could not tolerate the Maoists at all and even tried to destroy the UML, which was gaining momentum in the communist movement.

Didn’t the Maoists give prior notice to mediators before attacking the barracks in Dang right after abandoning the peace talks?

They had informed me that the talks would end because their agenda had failed. They asked me what to do. I told them to make the best decision. But which underground power will inform you about its planned military attacks?

But you didn’t immediately tell the prime minister that the rebels were going underground?

I had already cautioned Deuba as well as Chiranjibi Wagle that there would be no talks if the government failed to agree to a constituent assembly and that the Maoists have cited the international agreement amongst us, outside intervention will not be necessary.

Yet whatever their intentions, the fact remains that the Maoists, labeled ‘terrorists’ by the government, have announced a three-month halt. Even if they made the move with ill intentions, the government, parties, civil society and the international community must use this development for the good of the people. All quarters should take initiatives to transform this temporary ceasefire into a permanent one. Such actions will compel the rebels to accept a permanent ceasefire, even if they are acting for their own interest now. If we fail to move forward, the Maoist’s terrorism will result in even worse bloodshed.

King failed to work for the good of his institution. He has to now distance itself from the king. What do you feel about that?

After February First the international community seems to be distancing itself from the king. What do you feel about that?

The king failed to work for the good of his institution. He has to now understand that no regime runs with the help of the gods alone but only by and through the people. No matter what steps the king makes, they only help to strengthen the democratic movement and erode the integrity of the monarchy.

No I have not. And neither am I in any official position to do so.

Have you made any efforts toward forging an agreement?

No I have not. And neither am I in any official position to do so.

What do you feel about that?

Deuba’s government.

Former prime minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, once considered an evergreen statesman, seems disappointed with the king’s direct rule.

Samaya: Has the possibility of agreement between the king and the political parties decreased?

LBC: The king and the political parties must come to an agreement. From what the parties are saying it seems they have kept the option open for an agreement.

Can you point out the possible basis for an agreement?

It seems that the possibility of talks is there. Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala has not specifically stated that there is no possibility for talks. Not UML leader Madhur Kumar Nepal against an agreement.

After February First the international community seems to be distancing itself from the king. What do you feel about that?

Ours is a small country. The priority should be to solve our problems among ourselves. Even in the coming days it will be Nepal coming together that will solve our problems. If there is an agreement amongst us, outside intervention will not be necessary.
Why did the Nepali Congress delete reference to 'constitutional monarchy' after 60 years of its establishment? The NC is the only party that had unflinching stood for constitutional monarchy. The answer lies in this list of consistent double-crossing of the party by the monarchy over the decades?

- The NC allowed Bishnu Prasad Bhattarai to recontest Prime Minister and King Tribhuvan after the overthrow of the Ranas on his return from India in 1950. Although Bhattarai promised to set up a constituent assembly and democracy, Tribhuvan reneged on his promise, so the power of the Ranas went not to the people but to the Shahs.

- In 1957, the NC began a civil disobedience movement for a constituent assembly. But King Mahendra set up a constitutional committee and bestowed on himself sovereign powers and called for elections in 1958 in which BP Koirala’s NC swept to power. But Mahendra couldn’t get along with BP and staged a coup in December 1960, jailing all leaders. Then he banned parties and two years later declared the Panchayat constitution which stayed till 1990.

- In 1990 too, democracy was declared not because the people demanded it but King Birendra acted to save the monarchy from hundreds of thousands of people protesting on the streets.

- Although Birendra lifted the ban on parties, he first tried to get away by nominating Lokendra Bahadur Chand as prime minister. It was only when the people poured out into the streets again that an interim government led by KP Bhattarai was formed.

- Even after that Birendra was keen to announce a multi-party Panchayat rather than a multiparty democracy. However, due to popular protests he was forced to disband a constitution reform committee.

- The interim government finally set up a Constitutional Commission but the palace didn’t stop its behind-the-scenes lobbying to undermine multiparty democracy with the help of 12 generals who pressured Prime Minister KP Bhattarai to keep sovereignty in the king’s hands.

- While the commission was working on the new constitution, King Birendra tried to sneak in his own version of the constitution. The interim government rejected it and published the king’s constitution in Gorkhapatra, torpedoing the plan.

- The new constitution handed sovereignty to the people. It had a provision that the constitution could be changed with a three-fourths majority in parliament meaning if the people didn’t want, it could dump the monarchy. But the palace put intense pressure for this to be deleted.

- The king was finally supposed to announce the constitution in 1991 but Birendra took out a piece of paper and said he was “using the special state power” he wielded to announce the new constitution. The new constitution was therefore tainted from the very day it was announced.

- This constitution makes it mandatory for the ministerial council and prime minister to approve all royal decisions except the succession. But within a month the king appointed Kalyan Bikram Adhikari ambassador without cabinet approval.

- King Birendra and King Gyanendra both ignored the constitutional provision that the cabinet should decide the composition of the Royal Council.

- The constitution says, the king with the prime minister’s approval will nominate 10 members to the upper house but he has been doing it pretty much by himself. The palace also forced members of the upper house it didn’t like to resign as it did Dipa Prakash Shah in 2002.

- King Birendra kept his ‘quota’ of ambassador appointments.

- Prime Minister Deuba put forth the candidacy of Bishwanath Upadhyaya, but King Birendra kept delaying the appointment until Deuba was forced to accept Nayan Bahadur Khatti to the post.

- After the royal massacre, Dipendra was made king even though he was the one who committed the killings and was also in a coma. There is a clear provision that only those of sound mind can become king.

- After ascending to the throne, King Gyanendra has been unraveling the constitution and overturning it provisions one by one. Then using Article 127 he took over complete state power.

- When the parties started their agitation, the palace actively tried to split the movement and then nominated a series of its own prime ministers.

- February First was the final act that transferred all remaining power to king’s hands.

Change in operating paragraph in the NC statute:

Before: The NC’s goal is social, political and economic development through the establishment of a just and progressive society under a constitutional monarchy, multiparty parliamentary system devoted to the ideology of nationalism, democracy and socialism.

Now: The NC’s goal is social, political and economic development through the establishment of a just and progressive society by restoring a multiparty parliamentary system, sovereignty of the people and inclusive democracy devoted to the ideology of nationalism, democracy and socialism.

## Defending the NC

BP Koirala’s son Shashank Koirala in Deshantar, 4 September 2005. The interim government rejected it and published the king’s constitution in Gorkhapatra, torpedoing the plan.

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## Repeatedly double-crossed

*Rastriya Bimashra, 28 August 2005*
In a failed state

Nepal gets an F in a survey of education in Asia-Pacific nations

MALLIKA ARYAL

Nearly a third of Nepal’s children don’t attend school, over half are not in secondary school and more than two-thirds of the adult population is illiterate. So it’s no surprise that Nepal’s rulers have been given failing grades by a recent comparison of education in Asian countries. The study, Must Do Better, is published by the Global Campaign for Education and the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education. It is designed to resemble an actual school report card. It uses five indicators to analyse how 14 countries in the Asia Pacific region provide complete basic education, giving grades like ‘A’ and ‘B’ for each category. Overall, Nepal ranks 11th.

The indicators are based on the fundamental principle that it is the responsibility of the state to fulfil the basic rights of all its citizens to provide free basic education of good quality, the document says. Must Do Better features a page for each country, with rankings below a photo of each nation’s head of state. While Thailand’s Thaksin Shinawatra is shown smiling next to an overall grade of ‘A’ and a big yellow star, Pakistan’s Pervez Musharraf, Nepal’s King Gyanendra, Papua New Guinea’s Michael Somare and the Solomon Island’s Allan Kemenukata are all labelled ‘F’ for their dismal performances.

Must Do Better assesses not just the countries but also their heads of state in order to shame them. And since Nepal is such a poor performer, King Gyanendra is singled out for blame. Nepal’s rulers, the report says, lack the political will to improve the quality of education, make schooling accessible to all by removing fees and there is an acute lack of attention to female education. This is nothing new to Nepalis who have suffered poor public education for decades but it is the first time we can compare how badly we are doing next to countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Most education experts say disrupted and shutting down schools doesn’t solve any problems. A much more constructive approach would be to work together to improve the quality of instruction in government schools and replicate best-practice models of high-quality government schools and teacher training. Remedial classes anyone?

Its results are a wake-up call to civil society and organisations that regularly monitor, critique and evaluate the government’s performance. It is time to move beyond mass education and focus also on quality, gender equality and equity across gender, ethnic, caste and rural-urban divides. Remedial classes anyone?

Must Do Better recommends that the Nepal government make primary education its first priority—implementing that education for all by providing adequately paid and trained teachers, quality learning materials, safe schools and favourable learning environments.

In contrast, the report says, ‘Sri Lanka’s leadership is truly serious about meeting its promise of education for all. Primary school age children are in school, access to secondary schooling is admirable, adult illiteracy is steadily being reduced (and) public basic education is completely free!’ Nepal also ranks poorly for gender equality in education and if it is any consolation we are only just ahead of countries like China, Pakistan and the Solomon Islands. Monitoring gender parity in classrooms alone is not sufficient, the report reminds us, there has to be much more proactive enrolment of children.

The publication uses UNESCO’s composite indicators, which track school enrolments, survival rates of girls in schools and if a country’s education system promotes gender equality by enabling women to be active, equal participants in all spheres of life. Its results are a wake-up call to civil society and organisations that regularly monitor, critique and evaluate the government’s performance. It is time to move beyond mass education and focus also on quality, gender equality and equity across gender, ethnic, caste and rural-urban divides.

Remedial classes anyone?

Must Do Better, Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (www.aspbae.org) and Global Campaign for Education (www.campaignforeducation.org) 2005

APPPOINTMENTS TO DFID’S ADVISORY TEAM IN NEPAL

DFID is a major bilateral development agency in Nepal. Our commitment is to help reduce poverty. We give priority to support for economic opportunities and essential services to poor and disadvantaged communities, including those currently affected by conflict, and to social justice and governance reforms. We are committed to delivering assistance transparently and with full accountability locally.

The DFID Programme in Nepal is designed and supervised by a team of advisers including specialists in governance, health, economics, rural livelihoods/infrastructure, social development, and conflict studies. We want to further diversify our team to include Nepalese expertise covering Livelihoods and Human Development (to support our health and education work).

Applicants should be able to demonstrate they have the necessary professional and practical expertise in either livelihoods (Ref No L001) or human development (Ref No HD001), and have a successful record of achievement working as a professional in a national or international development agency. Applicants must be able to demonstrate strong competencies in relation to working with others; leading and managing; forward thinking; communicating and influencing; and analytical thinking and judgement. Finally, applicants must have a relevant post-graduate degree or equivalent and be fluent in both English and Nepali.

Located in the DFID office in Kathmandu, the posts are based in a fast paced multicultural environment that places a high premium on inclusive team working. You will have opportunities to work closely with all levels of Government and non-governmental agencies and interact with Nepalis from all walks of life and front all over the country. Though based in Kathmandu, in-country and some international travel will be required. The post will be permanent.

There will be an attractive and competitive local salary and benefits package.

DFID is an Equal Opportunities employer. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from women, Dalits, disadvantaged Janajatis and those with a disability. Selection is on merit. For an Application Form and Job description, please e-mail brai@dfid.gov.uk or collect from DFID Main Gate, Jawalakhel, Telephone No. (977-1) 5542979.

Completed applications should be addressed to Bitashi Rai, HR Section, DFID Nepal. The closing date for applications is Friday 21st October 2005.
Afghan elections and Aung San Suu Kyi also matter

Southasia beyond SAARC

As of the postponed 13th SAARC summit comes nigh in Dhaka in the first half of November, we once again go through the exercise of trying to understand our region beyond the matrix defined by SAARC. That formula itself is simple: seven nation states, seven capitals, seven power elites, one under-funded secretariat and a summit every now and then.

Southasia’s people deserve better.

While the seven-nation formula is of course more to consider the Subcontinent and surrounding islands, we must seek other definitions. There is no reason why Afghanistan, Tibet and Burma should be neglected when we consider Southasia.

As consumers of news, each of us is either interested in the political and economic conditions of small countries or forced by the globalised television media to concentrate (as in the last month) on the evacuation of Afghans, Katrina and the bewildering of George W. But if we look at the Southasia beyond the boundaries of SAARC, there is surprisingly little that we should be aware of. Take the cases of Afghanistan politics, railways in Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Afghanistan is for its first ever general elections on 18 September, a historic occasion even for those who detest the fact of the post-9/11 American invasion. By the grace of George W, we have the hyenas transformed into a corporate employee Hamid Karzai as our constant companion on the television screen, carefully maintaining his gracious profile, cloak and all. But this inevitable election exercise, pushed through to burnish George W’s credentials more than anything else, is bound to throw up new faces who are—at long last—political. If this happens, it will be a pleasant shift away from warlords like Dostum and the late Massoud.

One of the persons to watch in the Afghan politics is Yuna Qamooni, leader of the New Afghanistan Party, a former cabinet minister under Karzai. She is unhappy with the way the elections are organised but is willing to go with it. He believes that the balance of power will have to shift from the office of the president to the new Afghan Parliament.

If we need to know about Qamooni, so too we must keep abreast with the fact that a 1,118-km railway line is reaching south from the Chinese mainland (Golmud in Qinghai) all the way into the heartland of eastern Tibet, crossing the Kyichu River and arriving in downtown Lhasa. The railway is bound to change the face of the high plateau by opening it up for further population integration, industrial activity and demographic transformations that will make the

Thailand. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar has said that his country has accepted the fleeing Thais on humanitarian grounds, this should not be interpreted as giving them refugee status. Members of the group claimed they fled after Thai security forces launched an operation against suspected militant camps. The operation was targeting areas near the Thai-Myanmar border.

Pakistan pressured on Israeli ties

ISLAMABAD—The Pakistani government has begun to apologize about its plans to open diplomatic links with Israel, as criticism builds against a budding liaison between two nations founded in the late 1940s in the name of religion. Waves of condemnations, from both liberal and fundamentalist groups, have followed the highly-publicised meeting in Ankara last week between Pakistan Foreign Minister Khursheed Kasuri and his Israeli counterpart Sylvan Shalom, putting President Pervez Musharraf on the defensive. "Musharraf first betrayed the nation by compromising on the Kashmir issue," said Laqau Baloch, deputy leader of the Pashtunistan Unified Movement party.

A 3-month Nepali language course for candidates with knowledge of Nepali or
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Asia’s mountains threatened

BANGKOK—in a new report, experts from the mighty Himalaya and other mountains of Asia face growing threats from a rapid rise in development that could also harm the region’s water supplies, vital for around half the world’s people. The report was released in advance of a meeting of the world’s heads of state to assess progress on achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals, including the target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The new report, The Fall of Water, launched by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the UN Environment Program (UNEP) claims that the unchecked and piecemeal building of roads and settlements near the mountains along with overgrazing and deforestation are likely to increase rates of forest loss triggering increased levels of erosion, pollution and other potentially harmful effects.

Analysis and reporting: analysis of conditions of detention, general situation and

Oral interpretation: from Nepali to English, and English to Nepali during

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Your tasks

• Oral interpretation: from Nepali to English, and English to Nepali during

Thai Muslims flee to Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR—The assassination of an imam (Islamic religious leader) in Thailand’s restive southern Narathiwat province has already sparked a group of 131 Thai Muslims into fleeing across the border into Malaysia’s Kelantan state. Now, a group of 131 Thai Muslims into fleeing across the border into Malaysia’s Kelantan state.

Pakistan pressured on Israeli ties

ISLAMABAD—The Pakistani government has begun to apologize about its plans to open diplomatic links with Israel, as criticism builds against a budding liaison between two nations founded in the late 1940s in the name of religion. Waves of condemnations, from both liberal and fundamentalist groups, have followed the highly-publicised meeting in Ankara last week between Pakistan Foreign Minister Khursheed Kasuri and his Israeli counterpart Sylvan Shalom, putting President Pervez Musharraf on the defensive. "Musharraf first betrayed the nation by compromising on the Kashmir issue," said Laqau Baloch, deputy leader of the Pashtunistan Unified Movement party.
To go left: reel in until kite points down and yank lattai to the right.

To go down: reel fast until kite points down then reel in quickly, pull lattai if you want to dive.

Soaring and sparring

Nepali kite flying is both an art and a form of warfare

Nepali kite flying is an art and a form of warfare that involves strategy, skill, and creativity. It is a tradition that has been passed down through generations, and it is a popular activity during the Dashain festival. The kites are colorful and beautifully designed, and they are flown in the open fields or in the streets of Kathmandu. The players use a special type of kite string called maajhaa, which is made from a mixture of various ingredients, including powder and gum. The kite controllers use this string to maneuver their kites and to compete with each other. The game involves making elaborate victory rolls and toying with the opponent's kite. The players also use various techniques to fly their kites, such as pulling and releasing the string to control its movement. The kites are often decorated with patterns and designs, and the winners of the game are celebrated with much excitement and joy. Overall, Nepali kite flying is a unique and exciting activity that is enjoyed by people of all ages and genders.