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ONE-SIDED TRUCE

The announcement last week of a three-month unilateral ceasefire by our wily comrades just 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 1,4) and except 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 defend the 'war on terror in Shangri-la'.

The international community welcomed the truce, Kofi Annan sees the possibility of peace and civil society here hailed it. The political parties protesting the king's takeover took credit for pushing the Maoists to make the gesture and India sent an ambiguous statement that could be interpreted in many ways.

More than all that, it gave us a glimmer of hope that our misguided comrades will finally realise the futility of an outdated dogma that believes in wrecking a country in order to rebuild it.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.

It is the royal regime that is looking most foolish. The grouchy cronies 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 silly 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 ('Cease fire', #261) in this space, we had expected the government to show such magnanimity. It would have snatched the initiative and laid the groundwork for the royal visit to New York in search of support for peace efforts at home. But the problem with non-representative governments is that they are so far removed from the people they think they can get away with doing nothing.

Two days before Prachanda's truce call, the new question in the *Nepali Times*/nepalnews.com Internet poll was: 'Should the security forces and the Maoists declare a one month Dasain-Tihar 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 some monarchists and mainstream parties hate each other, they must hang together if they do not wish to be hanged separately.

The onus of forging a unity between constitutional forces, however, lies in the hands of he who broke it up in the first place. And if the Maoists hate the revival of parliament so much, there may be some merit in it after all. Either way, the people are waiting. And watching.



The Council of Ministers of the interim government formed after 1990's return to democracy was given parliamentary mandate to use the same article. A government formed under this provision could create an all-party government that would include the Maoists and hold elections to a constituent assembly.

But even as we have this tantalising vision of radical

reform, a serious barrier remains. Those who are at the king'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 political parties nor neglect its responsibilities towards human rights and humanitarian laws in Nepal, which is already regarded by the outside world as a country facing a humanitarian crisis.

At a time when the parties, civil society and the international community were coming together, there was a need for the Maoists to take a firm initiative to create peace. And they have done so by declaring this unilateral truce.

If history were a guide, were the political parties to now propose a common plan, they would surely get the people's support. The palace is in a fix: roll back the drift towards authoritarianism or sacrifice the monarchy itself. Happily, the history of Nepal is also replete with examples of cooperation and reconciliation. Failing to take positive political action now could jeopardise everything this nation has ever stood for. ●

Subodh Raj Pyakhurel is chairman of human rights group INSEC.

22 May, 4 October, 1 February

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

In the late 18th century, King Prithbi Narayan Shah forged the physical unity of the country. In the mid-19th century, Jang Bahadur created an administrative structure. Democratic aspirations took root in Nepal in the 20th century, at the time of anti-colonial struggles in Asia. It was the Nepali Congress that forged political unity around the values of socialism and democracy.

The relationship between the NC and

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal



the ruling elite was always dualistic. They respected each other's contributions and commitments but disagreed vehemently on who should prevail. Until 1990, the king had his way. Perhaps King Gyanendra had this duality in mind when he told the media recently that the relationship between monarchy and the parties was like a quarrelsome couple.

The monarch seems to have overlooked the impact of the 1990 People's Movement, which changed the stable equation of mutually adversarial respect between the palace and political parties forever. In

deference to King Birendra, political leaders never articulated it in public but the pledge never to accept a secondary role in national politics became the theme of all political parties. When asked about his response to a repetition of the royal-military coup of 1960, a frail and visibly ailing Ganesh Man Singh (GM) had said: "One more fight. The last but the best."

The 1990 movement made the people sovereign. Narayanhiti was uncomfortable with this reality from day one. But there was little the courtiers could do once the elections were held under international scrutiny and the NC emerged as a clear winner. Despite machinations, the monarchist RPP failed to produce a hung house.

The parliament then became the site of contestation. The NC itself became a willing victim to the time-tested theory of divide-and-rule as Girija Prasad Koirala threw away his majority and called for midterm polls. But instead of the RPP, the UML emerged as the biggest party in the new house.

Premier Man Mohan Adhikari had adroitly pulled the 'nationalist' rug from under the feet of the RPP by raising the

issue of the 1950 controversial treaty with India. The isolation of the palace was complete. But the sudden rise of the UML (*Time* magazine saw it as the hammer-and-sickle atop Mount Everest) created a red scare. An unapologetically rightist Sher Bahadur Deuba lead the charge. The NC jettisoned its socialist moorings and once again played second fiddle to the palace. Unfortunately, GM was no longer there to caution over-enthusiastic free market fundamentalists. Second-rung NC leaders had become too soft to continue with ideological convictions of their party. Even though the NC won the third parliamentary polls, it compromised its creed for political gain. NC leaders began to emulate the tried and tested methods of earlier rulers to maintain their hold over state power even as Narayanhiti was surreptitiously expanding its role into Singha Darbar.

Soon, the NC became a house divided and began to collapse. By dissolving parliament in the dead of the night on 22 May 2002 when he knew that elections could never be held in six months due to the raging insurgency, Deuba handed the state back to Narayanhiti. October Fourth

and February First just completed that move.

Today, the country is back to square one as palace propagandists have once again begun to portray political parties as 'miscreants' just as they did before 1990. But despite their supposed unpopularity, the parties aren't as unsure of themselves as they were in the aftermath of the People's Movement. Under pressure from their cadre, the NC and UML have withdrawn their support even to constitutional monarchy. It doesn't mean that Nepal will turn into a republic tomorrow but the stopwatch is ticking.

Whenever Maoists opposed the monarchy, political parties resolutely stood in its defence. Now the king is left to fend for himself in an environment extremely hostile to the idea of privileges of birth. His coterie will desert the palace the moment they perceive that protection and patronage is no longer available.

The challenge now is to fit a ceremonial role for hereditary kings into the constitution of a democratic republic. The 21st century decidedly belongs to the people not ruling monarchs, be they constitutional or constructive. ●

LETTERS

JOI-POI

In his long and rambling interview to the state-run media (and I thought Ganeshman Singh was a rambler) the king has compared party-palace differences to a squabble between a husband and wife. ('We mustn't get stuck at every bend', #264) Metaphors are metaphors, but who is the husband here and who the wife?

The king's effort so far has been to put the royals firmly on a pedestal to dictate terms of any palace-party embrace, but he should know that the parties are already serving their divorce papers. The marriage, always dysfunctional because the partner have thoughts 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 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 is 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-righteous indignation 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). Nepali polity 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 shadows. 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 and 'allergy' to party politics is no longer a secret. You say that 'to fix things all (the king) needs to do is sit down jointly with the party leaders and sort it out over tea'. Wish it was as easy as that. Apres moi le deluge is not the solution, but we may as well get this confrontation over and done with as soon as possible so we don't have to procastrinate?

G Regmi, Dilli Bajar

● In his Guest Column, 'Aceh and us', (#262) Subindra Bogati hits 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 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.' Brilliant, and a sentiment I wholeheartedly endorse. The perpetrators of this calamity are either lodging in their safe sanctuaries across the border or in fortified bunkers in Kathmandu. Meanwhile in Pili and Salyan and Kailali and Chitwan, it is ordinary Nepalis who are laying down their lives. In his tour of western Nepa, King Gyanendra quoted the *Gita* to ask the people not to look for rewards but to work hard. The Nepali people have suffered enough, let's not ask them to endure anymore.

P Bhupati, Naya Baneswor

MERO PHONE

Shiva Gaunle mentions the name of certain royal relatives who have a stake in the new private mobile venture ('A phony business', #262). The involvement of the ministry, the NTA in this deal is a scandal that will one day need to be probed. But don't hold your breath while this group is in power. The increasing involvement of the civil (and uncivil) service in business is now becoming too blatant to ignore.

S Kumar, Sanepa

KARNALI

Jivan Shahi deserves congratulations for informing all Nepalis and outsiders how the poor are made poorer by doling out subsidies and aid ('Don't kill the Karnali with your aid', #260). Politicians, donors, bureaucrats and contractors should learn this lesson. Shame on all of them. In the meantime why shouldn't local inhabitants stop making raksi out of precious rice and encourage

serving locally grown staple foods even to outsiders. Let's hope *Nepali Times* will give us more thought-provoking articles like this in future.

Murari P Gautam, Kathmandu

CHINA CARD

'Chinese investors may be interested' (#262) could mean that China could be the saviour of our sick industries. The robber barons have pocketed the borrowings and tied up the banks in Rs 50 billion in bad debts so who is going to rescue them? They have padded the project costs and used patronage of their political cronies and squandered the public's savings. If the Chinese take over these industries as FDI it will inject fresh funds into the country and perhaps even set off a competition with the Indians who will also flock in. It will rescue us out of the clutches of our own domestic defaulters who have used the banner of privatisation to plunder the nation in cahoots with politicians.

Dan Prayag, Naxal

SKY NEWS

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

Bill Robins, St Xavier's, Jawalakhel

CEASEFIRE

Is somebody going nuts? A ceasefire during Dasain/Tihar and then back to the killing fields. (*Nepali Times*/nepalnews.com Internet poll #263) Sounds as if the current fighting's some kind of occupation not taken seriously enough by the guay daura suruwal, pot-bellied politicians like India-tilted Girija Koirala who have destroyed Nepal. Rather than the ceasefire during this festive occasion why not let the military and insurgents carry on so that this time families needn't shop for firecrackers?

Wakey, wakey—the inferno is getting bigger and bigger while India is adding more ghee to the hom.

Yagya Rai, Farnborough, UK



MARTY LOGAN

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 Letters column over the past 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 cast a doubt on anybody and everybody. It's a well-known fact that the RNA 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 biotech takes off' (#263) erroneously stated that the department offers a masters program. It should have been a bachelor's.

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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 that is given to us and it forms us before we decide how 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.

NEPALI PAN
Shradha Ghale



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 our 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 fulfil 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 command of English. Some are quick to announce that their Nepali is “hopeless”. They speak their own language with such deliberate uncertainty, such beaming unfamiliarity.

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.

Nepali was made not only unnecessary but also tedious and unfashionable. In our minds it was the language of politicians, bureaucrats and musty old professors. Our introduction to Nepali literature began and ended with *Mahendra Mala*. Names like Debkota and Parijat, Bhupi and Sama evoked an antiquated world to which we did not belong. Picking up a Nepali newspaper, let alone a Nepali novel, was unthinkable.

Soon, we were unable to speak a Nepali sentence without peppering it with English. Some even believed that a halting Nepali added something to their personality. When school exam results came out they cheerfully declared that they almost failed Nepali. Here is a test: how many of you reading this can say ‘87’ in Nepali? We learned to live with, but not love, our own mother tongue. Alienated from Nepali, half-related to English, we grew up owning neither this nor that.

In the name of quality education, Nepali children are being deprived of a vital source of knowledge and wisdom. Certainly there are many among them who would willingly embrace Nepali if they know the value of doing so. But that can’t happen without an environment that nurtures their inclination.

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 can show them the beauty and richness of our language through the works of our poets and writers. And perhaps remind them that every work of literature that has stood the test of time and transcended the boundaries of culture, religion and politics, was written in a mother tongue.

Then maybe children in English-medium schools will pick up a Nepali book—not dutifully but joyfully. Not to be of ‘service’ (*bhasa seba*) to the mother tongue but to enrich their lives through the language that essentially shapes their identity. ●



WAITING FOR A SIGN:
Nepal’s villagers just want peace.

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

“It has to be reciprocal”

The Maoist ceasefire may mean no war for now but it doesn’t mean peace

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA in DHARAN and **RAMSWOR BOHARA** in NEPALGANJ
BHASKAR ARYAL IN CHITWAN

“We met Maoists on the way but they said nothing about a ceasefire,” says 27-year-old Bal Bahadur Rai, who arrived in Chhatara after walking along the Kosi for two days from Bhojpur district. Rai and his group were herding goats to the market towns of the tarai. “Ceasefire or no ceasefire, it makes no difference to us,” added Man Bahadur Rai, 65.

Even after the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Maoists, there seems to be either a lack of communication or a break down in the chain of command. Rebel road blockades are intact in the district headquarters of Pachthar and Taplejung in the east and local Maoist commanders are saying that the ceasefire statement from their leader was not clear so they have decided to maintain their blockades.

Many passengers started their travels after the ceasefire went into effect but were sent back from Rakke Bajar on the highway between Ilam and Phidim. Due to the blockade, vegetables and fruits are still rotting on the sides of the road, just as they did before the ceasefire.

“For ordinary civilians, ceasefire may mean suspension of the war but it doesn’t mean peace—but they are hoping that this will happen soon,” says human rights activist Bhola Mahat in Nepalganj. He also thinks the message of Prachanda’s statement hasn’t yet filtered down to the grassroots cadre. “The Maoists themselves

are not clear about the ceasefire,” adds Mahat. They don’t know if it also includes an end to extortion, abductions, school closures and recruitment.

Two days after the ceasefire announcement, the Maoists abducted constable Kripa Ram BK in Hapur near Nepalganj where he was travelling to visit his relatives. Activists are now calling on a coalition of 25 human rights organisations to immediately start independent monitoring before similar incidents take place.

In Tehrathum, a yearlong Maoist ban on NGOs remains in place. “Even community-based organisations are not able to work,” says Dambar Guragain of the group People Awareness Campaign. The construction of a 27-km road from Myanglung Bajar to Basantapur has also stopped. “We are hoping that the Maoists will change their mind but no decision has been taken as yet,” says Guragain.

Dozens of NGOs working on health, poverty alleviation, women’s development and social mobilisation are also unable to continue their work with the poorest of the poor.

Community leaders in the east say the situation may improve only if the government reciprocates the ceasefire. Otherwise, too much distrust remains between the two warring sides and as long as it persists rural Nepal will be trapped in the middle. In the east, many community-run schools shut down by the rebels remain closed.

“If the ceasefire is reciprocated,

it should be beneficial to development activities since it ought to be easier to carry out such work when there is no fighting going on,” says Mark Mallilieu of British aid ministry DfID, in Kathmandu.

In Risku and Tribeni areas of Udaypur, the rebels are still extorting taxes. Villagers there said the rebels approached them after the ceasefire demanding 20 kg of rice and cash from each household.

However, Chitwan has seen some positive development since 3 September. Maoist students have postponed school and college strikes scheduled to start on 9 September. “We are hopeful that the situation will improve. The government needs also to respond to capitalise on the ceasefire,” says Ranendra Barali of the Janmorcha Party in Chitwan.

There is an air of cautious optimism in Nepalganj too. But there are also concerns that security operations by the state might jeopardise the ceasefire. Security forces have been intensifying searches and on the day of the ceasefire arrested three Maoists near midnight in Hawaldarpur, 10 km outside of town. The yearning for peace is so great that even local police want the government to announce a ceasefire. “It will be better for everyone if both sides agree,” says a local policeman at a sandbagged picket in the centre of Nepalganj. But Kumar Sharma Acharya of the Nepal Bar Association says this won’t happen without pressure. “We have to step up our lobbying for the state to also announce an



KIRAN PANDAY

FM's in business

On Wednesday the Supreme Court decided it would forgo a hearing on a stay order that allowed FM radio stations to resume airing news in August and judge the legality of the core issue: whether the stations, like other media, are protected by the constitution's guarantee of freedom of expression. But the SC scheduled the hearing for 29 November, leaving the stay in place and FM radios free to broadcast news at least until then.

Banner year for bank



For the second time in three years Nepal Investment Bank Limited (NIBL) has been named Bank of the Year in this country by the Financial Times Group's *The Banker*. The award is based on growth and performance in terms of capital, assets, return on equity and management. NIBL's net assets rose from Rs 5 billion to Rs 13 billion after Nepali management took over the bank in July 2002. In fiscal year 2003-2004 it boosted net profit by 32 percent and its return on equity was 21 percent.

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 industrialists, businessmen, associations and civil society 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 go as high as 10,000 people, according to its mayor. A current account (# 65403) has been opened in the main branch office of the Rastriya Banijya 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



Shrestha International Trading Concern has signed an agreement with The Hidden Treasure, organiser of Miss Nepal 2005, 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, Butwal, Biratnagar, Birtamod, Lahan, Janakpur, Nepalganj, Dang, Dhangadi and other major cities.

Managing disaster

Hurricane Katrina provides devastating messages

In the US this Beed always loved to hear the India-China comparison. 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. There was a lot of ridicule in response to the Mumbai floods,

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 can happen anywhere 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 it. 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 miles 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 Karnalis, the Bajhangs and the Bajuras, that federal governments sitting in urbane settings forget to think about. It is also always important to understand that beyond a certain point, monetisation becomes immaterial, so does governance. The footage of people ransacking stores for necessities or simply to amass wealth also reminds us

about the fundamentals: 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 have-nots can go all the way to fulfil their basic needs, even to the point of raising arms. Therefore, when we examine conflicts we also need to probe the economic compulsions 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 a 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 one's country, then people think 'at least it is not in my city' and only after does the 'human' come clear and people realise this 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 than monetisation, GDPs and GNPs. 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 seek help from 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—it is perhaps just 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 reactions and plans out of gear. ●

Getting over the blame game

With the economy freefalling business leaders finger the various players for blame, even some of their own

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, despair is mounting. Leading 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 is immense: 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 them. 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 Nepali 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 gradually closing. China has been providing Rs 800 million and added only Rs 70 million when we asked. Everyone knows that Rs 70 million is really nothing.



Padma Jyoti, Jyoti Group
Entrepreneurs can be vocal only during a normal situation but can say nothing when guns are involved. But some must have made statements against the political parties hoping for something from the king's move. Some individuals from our business community did so to become ministers. There will no future for anyone if the differences between the powers persist.



Prabhakar SJB Rana, chairman, Soaltee Group
The private sector cannot distance itself from the country's situation. 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 whoever comes to power in future.



Rajendra Khetan, vice president, CNI
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 Sanghai, Sanghai 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 terrorised 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 were pro-king then they were making a serious error.



Legalise it

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.

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It's called weed because it grows everywhere. Fuel, food and fabric can be obtained from the Cannabis plant and cultures the world over have been using it for such purposes for thousands of years. Nepali villagers are no different but authorities here have ignored traditional culture and see Cannabis only as an enemy in a 'war on drugs'.

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 Mechi 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 and soak the stems in water for up to 20 days. When they are tender 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 fibre. 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. "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. ●

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Willing investor

Because Nepali 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."



ALLPICS: KIRAN PANDAY



Crazy for Khastos

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

MALLIKA ARYAL

With 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 Dambar 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 Dambar 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, Dambar Kumari and her entourage learnt the technique and carried it home.

In Nepal, Dambar 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 Dambar Kumari.

Unfortunately, the graceful designs of earlier days were slowly replaced by less refined



G2 Rana in front of an antique Dambar Kumari.

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, dragon, vajra, lotus, flame, moon 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.

The block painters are excited about reviving an art that has been in their family for ages. "As the patterns get more complicated, we will need more workers, more creative minds and the price will rise a little bit, but it will not be unaffordable," says painter Ujjwal Shrestha.

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 printings Dambar 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. ●



Sangeeta Thapa models latest Dambar Kumari.

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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 15th 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.

A decent first

BROUGHTON COBURN on the KALI GANDAKI

"*Tan, Maila, 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 medallist 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, I (the nominal leader of our rag-tag expedition) gave even odds to being swept away by a torrent or getting snagged hopelessly 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 Society's Expeditions Council we had optimistically proposed—and genuinely hoped—that if the uppermost stretch of the Kali Gandaki within upper Mustang were navigable to Jomsom and below, there might be potential not only for boosting tourism but for commercial uses such as transporting apples and produce down river. As far as Lete or Kalopani, that is, where the river enters the world's deepest and most vengefully furious gorge. Here, the Kali Gandaki is regarded respectfully by river people as 'non-navigable'.

To determine this—or at least to join us

for some fun—we relied upon some prominent, interested "locals": Tsewang Jongden Bista, member-secretary of the Lo Gyalpo Jigme Foundation (an NGO registered in Mustang), Raju Bista, Tsewang's nephew, fellow member of the Mustangi royal family and treasurer of the foundation, Chhimi Rinzin Gurung of the Snow Leopard Conservancy and Madhu Chetri, officer-in-charge of the Lo Manthang Unit of ACAP, a wildlife expert and experienced rafter. Not all of us were fully confident, however.

"I'm a mountain guy, not a river guy," said Ace, our photographer, standing on the sandy bank below Dhee that was chosen as 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 Ghandrung. One of her sports television personality gigs was announcing the 'Extreme Games', which I now hoped we weren't inadvertently 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 *kata* 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 sputtering. Instead, he was laughing, thrilled at the anointment.

"*Kat, Maila, 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 synchronise 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 Ghilling, the Kali Gandaki flows into a vertical-walled sandstone canyon for several kilometres.

Horses travel this slot canyon in winter, wading down the river course itself, but the surging monsoon flow prohibited us from safely scouting the route. "It would be a full commitment to enter 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 stopping either if the river has filled the canyon between its walls."

Oddly, the solitude and mystery of the canyon drew us like a siren. Mani 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 to the village of Tsaila, 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 couldn't sleep," Arlene announced the next morning. "I was thinking about that canyon, and I don't feel comfortable about not being able to see all of it."

We decided to take another look, from a variety of new angles, in better light. The slot canyon shone beautifully in the morning sun, reflecting every shade of red and brown. Its walls did seem to channel the water nicely, like a canal. Arlene gave the nod and we ran it. The sensation was of floating through the sanctified halls of a natural, Sisyphean cathedral, its mysterious corners illuminated by biblical shafts of light.

The Kali Gandaki bisects the town of Jomsom and during the monsoon is impassable for tourist rafts like ours. Many stretches of river between there and Tukche are equally daunting. They will remain for intrepid kayakers or for rafters wanting to take them on during a season of lower flow.

"We've made history," a team member said as we pulled our crafts from the water at the north end of Jomsom and perhaps we did, in a tiny way. We did feel elevated, perhaps by the excitement and novelty but mainly by the comradeship.

"It's sweet how they called me 'Didi'," Arlene said after the trip. Personally, I was wondering how, over the years I've spent in Nepal, my own generic appellation had migrated so quickly from *bhai* to *bajay*.

"I'm an old man," I remarked to Madhu, a feeble appeal for sympathy. "I don't know how many more of these sorts of outings I can do."

"Oh no, you're not old—not until you're 55."

"Well, I'm 53."

"So—you have two whole years left!"

The rafts are now in the possession of the Lo Gyalpo Jigme Foundation and are available for hire through the more commercial wing of Tsewang's and Raju's extended family operation, Royal Mustang Excursions, at 4470087, 98510-46926 or tsewangbista@yahoo.com. The LGJ Foundation is dedicating all net profits from such river trips to the worthy education and childcare projects the foundation supports in upper the Mustang District. ●

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.

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descent of
the upper
Kali Gandaki
in Mustang

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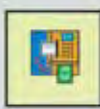
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Ceasefire

Historic opportunity

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 4 September

कान्तिपुर

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.

Sliver of hope

Editorial in *Nispakshya*, 7 September

निष्पक्ष

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 supporters of peace talks. It is a well-calculated ploy to supersede the king’s government and to mislead the people.

Yet whatever their intentions, the fact remains that the Maoists, labelled “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’re acting for their own interest now. If we fail to move forward, the Maoist’s terrorism will result in even worse bloodshed.

Trilateral talks

Editorial in *Rajdhani*, 4 September

राजधानी

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 sensationlised 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 erase 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.

No apparent leader

Interview with Durga Subedi in *Sanghu*, 5 September

साधु

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

Sanghu: 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 table talks and I played a mediator’s role. I was also involved in many discussions with leaders like Krishan Dwoj Khadga and Mumaram 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. But they didn’t believe me and Deuba told me he had already discussed this with the rebel leaders.

Who should the Maoists hold talks with?

Even within the seven parties, the relationship is not so cordial. Any movement has one commander but the parties have several leaders. When the Maoists join the alliance then the group will become eight parties. When that happens, who will lead the talks with the king?

But who should be the overall leader?

There hardly seems anyone good enough. There is no leader within the seven parties who the public really respects. There are some remarkable members within civic society groups who could properly lead the people, parties and the Maoists.

What about the king?

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.

Sliver of hope

Samaya, 8 September

समय



Former prime minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, once considered an ‘evergreen servant’ of the palace, 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 Koirala has not specifically stated that there is no possibility for talks. Nor is UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal against an agreement.

Have you made any efforts toward forging an agreement?

No I have not. And neither am I in any official position to do so. Neither has our party, which agrees that the king and the political parties must come to an agreement. Fighting will only harm the country and people. We have not found a formula for negotiating but even if it’s for the sake of intellectual exercise it must be done.

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 Nepalis coming together that will solve our problems. If there is an agreement amongst us, outside intervention will not be necessary.



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

समय *Samaya*, 8 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



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

Baburam Bhattarai in Maoist weekly *Janadesh*, 6 August

Repeatedly double-crossed

Rastriya Bimarsha, 28 August

गुरु काल

Why did the Nepali Congress delete reference to 'constitutional monarchy' after 60 years of its establishment? The NC is the only party that had unfailingly 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 helped enthrone King Tribhuban after the overthrow of the Ranas on his return from India in 1950. Although he originally promised a constituent assembly and democracy, Tribhuban 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



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

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 constituion 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 constituion, 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 weilded 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 compositon 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 to Dipta Prakash Shah in 2002.
- King Birendra kept his 'quota' of ambassador appointments.
- Prime Minister Deuba put forth the candidacy of Biswanath Upadhyay, but King Birendra kept dangling the appointment until Deuba was forced to accept Nayan Bahadur Khatri 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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BP Koirala's son Shashank Koirala in *Deshantar*, 4 September

देशान्तर

After the reinstatement of democracy, the Nepali Congress ruled the country for 10 years. During that time, there was much development, including construction of hospitals, roads, schools, colleges and banks, among others. But when all this was happening, the NC never did real politics. There are so many units in the NC but all hold meetings only once in five years and only for elections. This is one tradition of the party that needs to be fixed.

Every unit of the party should reach the people. They should also implement the party's programs

and keep records of its workers and activists, something the party's central office cannot do. That is why we need to activate the units of every village in the country. These units have the duty of reflecting the people's opinions in the party's important decisions. This is where I see my role fitting.

The first priority of the NC should be to consolidate its organisation and to advance its movement in a stronger manner. We need to create an environment in which people can come out on the street. In the last few weeks, people have begun to attend the street protests. Civil society has also emerged in a vibrant way.

It is wrong to say that our party does not have internal democracy. Even in the world's biggest democracies like India, only the party president is elected. He or she nominates the rest of the members, including the leaders of the youth organisations. In our party's sister organisation, many leaders are elected.

There are many from the Koirala family who have lost elections in the party's general assembly. Those who managed to win have made some contributions to the NC. The Koirala family has been in politics for three generations now, which is why it is natural to see family members emerging as leaders. Seeing so many Koirala family members in present-day politics, I used to say that I would not enter the political arena. I had in a way decided to stick to my own profession (medicine).

But in the last few years I have come to believe that I can make some contribution to politics. That is why I entered politics. I will always stand by the principles of BP (Bisheshwar Prasad Koirala). I am bearing a huge responsibility. How far I will be able to carry it, only the future will show.

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Joint Commission INTERNATIONAL
United States of America



KIRAN PANDAY

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 primary 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

Complete Basic Education			Gender Equality	
	Grade (A-F)	Rank (out of 14)	Grade (A-F)	Rank (out of 14)
India	D	8	D	9
Nepal	E	14	D	10
Pakistan	E	13	E	13
Philippines	B	4	B	7
Sri Lanka	A	3	A	1
Thailand	A	1	A	4

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 Kemakeza are all labelled 'F' for their dismal performances. *Must Do Better* assesses not just the countries but also their heads of states in order to name and 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 disrupting 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 handing over schools to community management. Teachers need to be motivated so that they are more creative and do not just indulge in 'chalk talk'.

Must Do Better recommends that the Nepal government make primary education its first priority—an argument that educators here have often made and that the state has consistently ignored. The report also stresses the need for a strong secondary education system and making adult literacy an integral component of basic education. School fees should be

eliminated to achieve education for all. The five indicators also help evaluate whether governments are paying special attention to the quality of education. Here, Nepal receives a miserable 'D' for items such as 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



DFID Department for International Development

APPOINTMENTS 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.

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Completed applications should be addressed to Bidushi Rai, HR Section, DFID Nepal. The closing date for applications is Friday 21st October 2005.



Southasia beyond SAARC

Afghan elections and Aung San Suu Kyi also matter

As the postponed 13th SAARC summit comes nigh in Dhaka in the first half of November, we must 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

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit



then. This is good so far as it goes but

Southasia’s people deserve better. While the seven-nation formula is of course one way 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 enmeshed within our own national economies and politics or forced by the globalised television media to concentrate (as in the last month) on the evacuation of Gaza, Katrina and the bewilderment of George W. But if we look at the Southasia beyond the boundaries of SAARC, there is surprisingly a lot happening that we should be aware of. Take the cases of Afghanistan politics, railways in Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi. Afghanistan goes 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 cloak-attired former Unocal 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—politicians. If it happens, this 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 Yunus Qanooni, leader of the New Afghanistan Party, a former cabinet minister under Karzai. He 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 Qanooni, so too must we 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 migration, industrial activity and demographic transformations that will make the



Dharamshala government-in-exile even more beleaguered. What does Tenzin Gyatso, the 13th Dalai Lama, think of the railway line? And how will it affect the social fabric of the Tibet Autonomous Region, already in tatters? At the end of this month, the Nathula border point between Sikkim and the TAR is to open for trade under an agreement signed between Beijing and New Delhi in 2003. The expectation has been that this route, first opened by Francis Younghusband in 1904 but

locked up since 1962, would provide Lhasa its closest access to the sea and that Siliguri and Calcutta would benefit mightily. What is going to happen now that a railway links TAR directly with the mainland on the other side? Aung San Suu Kyi, epitomising all the Gandhian values of mind over matter, should be the world’s most revered Prisoner of Conscience— but we rarely ever think of her in her house arrest. As Burmese, she is more Southasian than Southeast Asian and has lived in New Delhi (Lady Shree Ram College), Thimphu and Kathmandu and written books on Bhutan and Nepal. Let us be frank: we do not really care that much for Aung San. The geopolitics that swirl around Burma makes her a heroine but holds her cause hostage. It gives Rangoon’s generals breathing space. The Thais just want to do business with Burma, all China wants is a docile neighbour and New Delhi has decided to engage the junta rather than let it disappear completely into Beijing’s sphere of influence. Which is why, in a roundabout way, we do not to get to hear about Aung San. Aung San Suu Kyi’s incarceration began on 20 July 1989. She is under house arrest now, and has been for 10 of the last 15 years. She refuses to be “bribed into exile”, in the words of Vaclav Havel. She is 60 years old. She is a Southasian Prisoner of Conscience. ●

Asia’s mountains threatened

BANGKOK— In a new report, experts warn that 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 document 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. Conversion of pristine areas into farm and grazing land is aggravating the situation.

Thai Muslims flee to Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR—The assassination of an imam (Islamic religious leader) in Thailand’s restive southern Narathiwat province has already spooked a group of 131 Thai Muslims into fleeing across the border into Malaysia’s Kelantan state. Now, there are fears of a larger exodus of Thai Muslims into Malaysia, which has deep historical and cultural ties with southern Thailand. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar has said that while 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 militants seeking autonomy for the Muslim-dominated southern provinces of Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, in which several people were killed.

Pakistan pressured on Israel ties

ISLAMABAD—The Pakistani government has begun to appear apologetic 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 condemnation, 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’s government on the defensive. “Musharraf first betrayed the nation by compromising on the Kashmir issue and now he is ready to negotiate Pakistan’s principled position on the Palestinian issue,” said Liaquat Baloch, deputy leader of the powerful Jamaat-i-Islami party.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

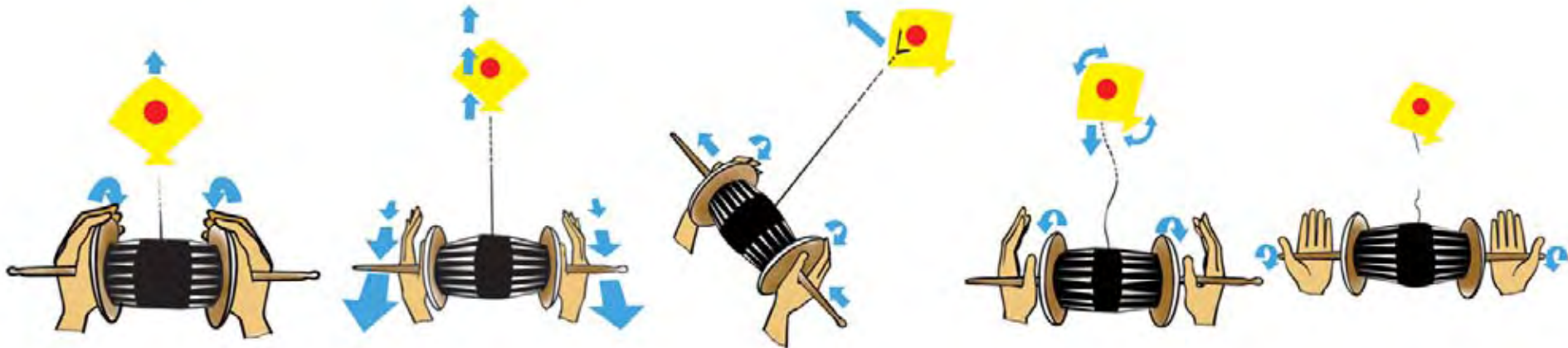
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To go up: reel in while kite is pointed up. To go up faster: pull while reeling in when kite is pointed up. To go left: reel in while kite is pointed left and yank lattai to the right. To go down: reel out until kite points down then reel line in quickly, pull lattai if you want to dive. To reel in fast: hold lattai with palm up and pull in line, useful after kite is cut if you don't want to lose line.

Soaring and sparring

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

The monsoon will subside, the sky will again turn deep blue, the wind will change direction and the ripened rice fields will bloom golden. Dasain. Time to shop, party, eat, drink and...fly kites.

Kathmanduites will climb to their rooftops and terraces and the collective victory cry of 'Chaaaaaaaaaaaaaait!' will ring in the ears of city folks. Nepali kite flying is unique—we don't fly kites just for fun, we fly kites to fight other kites. Thus, not only should your kite be easily manoeuvrable, it should obey the flyer and (ideally both) should have a killer instinct.

Nepali style kite flying requires a big reel (*lattai*) for the string. You hold it by two smooth sticks that protrude from each side and nestle between your thumbs and index fingers. You bring the kite closer or let it out by spinning the sides of the reel.

To start your flight, have a friend walk some distance with the kite and then toss it in the air. Simultaneously, pull the *lattai* toward you so the kite shoots up and into the wind. The more string you let go the higher your fighter rises. Once the kite is above ground you can manoeuvre it by reeling the string in and out.



KIRAN PANDAY

There are various ways to steer a kite. To send it left, for example, wait for the kite to point left and give the *lattai* a tug toward the right side of your body. The same principle applies if you want to go right, up or down. While reeling the *lattai* the kite often rotates so you have to be careful not to reel in while the nose is pointed down as it could send your flyer into an uncontrolled dive.

After the basics comes the battle. The way a kite behaves in the sky indicates the personality and dexterity of its pilot. Since the idea is to send the enemy kite down, you need every advantage you can get, starting with special string armoured with ground glass and a good *lattai* to reel in

and out faster than the enemy. The winner shouts 'cha cha cha chaaaaaaaaait' and performs elaborate victory rolls when the challenger is cut adrift.

If you are in a dogfight with another kite, it is a big no-no to start rolling the sting in from your *lattai*. If you are smart you will let your string go, wait for your opponent to make a mistake of reeling in from his *lattai*, wait for friction to do its trick and watch as your opponent's kite is cut off.

The earliest written account of kite flying comes from about 200 BC when Chinese General Han Hsien flew a kite over the walls of a city he was attacking to measure how far his army would have to tunnel to reach beyond its defences. Knowing this distance his troops reached the inner city, surprised their enemy and were victorious.

It is believed that kite flying was eventually spread by traders from China to Korea and across Asia to India. Each area developed a distinctive style of kite, flying techniques and the cultural context in which to fly them. Thus, we don't know whether kite flying came to Kathmandu from the north or the south.

In the past, people used to

make their own 'armoured' line, called *maajhaa*. Kite experts still have the secret time-tested recipes of the strongest *maajhaa*, reputedly made of a witch's brew of boiled slugs, aloe vera and gum, mixed with powdered florescent lamb bulbs. But caution: these have to be mixed carefully—you don't want a *maajhaa* that is so sharp that it cuts your own line inside the *lattai*.

One needs to watch out for pirates with *mandalis* while kite fighting. You may be so busy concentrating on the dogfight that you don't notice a surface-to-air *mandali* dart out of a neighbourhood roof, snare your string and capture your kite (and your enemy's too).

Choosing a kite is an art in itself. The Nepali kites have no tail, two sticks of equal lengths are crossed and tied in the center.

A string pulled tight across the back of a cross-stick bows the surface making the kite self-balancing. A specialty of Nepali kites is the *lokta*, hand-made paper, out of which they are made.

However, these days kites made from *lokta* paper are becoming extinct as people prefer the lighter and more manoeuvrable 'Lucknow' variety, flattened with a conch shell and sporting distinctive stripes. Lucknows are the Spitfires among kites, with classic dog-fighting qualities: capable of sharp turns and diving attacks, they emit a hissing sound in a dive and have good line response.

The cost of a kite in Kathmandu ranges from Rs 5-50 and the lines cost Rs 200-1000. The most popular kite shops are in Asan and Kalimati. ●

Babache	: kite with bottom half of a different colour
Chakchake	: kite with attention deficit disorder
Dariwal	: kite with symmetrical pattern on bottom left and right
Dharke	: kite with stripes
Gwankh	: paper weight to balance kite
Hi-chait	: cut kite
Kakaa	: string at point where it is tied to kite
Lappa	: stall
Lato Changa	: idle Kite
Maajhaa	: line armour
Mandali	: stone on string used to prey on low-fliers
Phuin	: show-off kite aerobatics
Puchhare	: kite with tail
Tthini	: launching kite by copilot
Tiktike	: sluggish side-by-side movement of kite
Tauke	: kite with pattern on top quadrant

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