Just when dark clouds were gathering and a storm looked inevitable, a slanting sun brought out this rainbow on Saturday evening above Boudha.

The release of 60 soldiers who the Maoists captured in Kalikot last month, the unilateral three-month ceasefire announcement by the rebels and an approaching Dasain have given the Nepali people a sense of cautious optimism. But will it, like this rainbow, be an illusory hope? See p 11.
The aid precipice

Unless the government is able to rejuvenate the reform process the World Bank will have to move the Nepal program to the ‘low case’

In 2002, the World Bank agreed to increase the volume of its assistance to Nepal several fold. This decision recognised the government’s significant reforms in banking, primary education, health care, telecommunication, anti-corruption and public expenditure management among other areas. A year later, the World Bank even provided budget support of some $70 million in the form of the first Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC). Despite the political uncertainties and the conflict, there was a measure of optimism that these reforms would address some of the failures of the RCCC in support to Nepal’s development.

In the days after the royal proclamation of 1 February, some donor representatives, human rights activists and others have argued that the World Bank should cut back its support to the government and in particular withhold the second budget support operation (PRSC). Ill until significant progress was made on the political front. These skeptics claimed that PRSC can be seen as an endorsement of the political situation in Nepal. The World Bank did not agree with such a stance, for it does not link its support to the government’s political developments. The Bank said it would continue to provide aid to Nepal as long as its government sticks with the reform process and is able to sustain development activities.

Since the need for a new political situation, the World Bank is deeply concerned that some of the fundamental constraints to reforms have not been met. This could lead to a sharp reduction in the Bank’s assistance to Nepal. To be fair, the slowdown in the pace reforms happened last year, when a coalition interim government took the helm. But some people expected, quite reasonably, that the new government would accelerate the reform process.

All in all, King Gyenduta himself made it clear that the new government was committed to continuing economic reforms, reducing poverty and fighting corruption. Besides, many argued that, lacking in parliamentary legitimacy, the new government had every reason to deliver good public services and development programs, and build a performance legitimacy.

While some good reform initiatives that had started earlier continued to be implemented, few new reform initiatives of...
The World Bank is in the process of reviewing its Country Assistance Strategy (CAS). As in the past, it strongly links the overall assistance level to the policy performance of Nepal, or its ability to use money well to further its development objectives. In the ‘base case’, the annual range of assistance was set at $120-200 million. If the reforms slip significantly, then assistance would be lowered to a ‘low case’ and the annual commitment level will be sharply reduced to a range of only $0·5-50 million. In the low case, there would not be any budget support.

I have had many rounds of discussions with senior HMGN leaders about pending reform actions over the last several months. Priorities of reform actions have been made time and again. But few concrete actions have been taken. Therefore, unless the government is able to rejuvenate the reform process in the coming weeks, the World Bank will have to conclude that HMGN’s priorities are elsewhere and that the effectiveness of HMGN as a promoter of development is slipping. In such a situation, the Bank would have to move the Nepal program to the low case.

What is at stake in terms of aid is big. First of all, Nepal would lose about $100 million or more in new assistance every year from the World Bank alone, or about six percent of HMGN’s total Fiscal Year 2005/06 budget. This loss would include PRSC II ($70 million or more), which is the most powerful financial support the World Bank can give to HMGN’s development efforts, for it disburses over many years. Without this aid, HMGN’s priorities are slipping. In such a situation, the Bank would have to move the Nepal program to the low case.

For the World Bank, however, this is not a justification for financial support. Our support is for development, which appears to have been relegated to the back seat. Some senior leaders of this government have said that no country has died from the lack of aid. True, but this issue is, what kind of life would Nepalis have in the absence of the strong commitment to reforms and development?

Ken Ohashi is the World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

Nepal is eligible for debt relief for the so-called ‘Heavily Indebted Poor Countries’ (HIPC). Rough calculations show that if Nepal qualifies for this benefit, it may stand to gain around $30 million a year in debt service reduction right now and even more in the future. To qualify for these debt relief measures, however, Nepal’s reform program needs to be on track.

The bigger loss, of course, comes from the slowing down of the development process itself. The kind of reforms that have been stalled and are causing the World Bank to reconsider its stance are easily designed to improve public services to average Nepali citizens, to improve transparency and accountability, and to create a better economic environment for job creation. There may be some measures that are more difficult to implement in this highly charged political environment. But other measures should have broad public support and immediate benefits in many cases. Why they have proven so difficult to implement is a mystery.

The flipside of the ‘politically neutral’ position of the World Bank is that it would not continue to provide funding to this government on account of political considerations. Yes, we understand that the country faces a serious domestic challenge from the insurgents whom the government calls ‘terrorists’. Some donor countries may be willing to help the government deal with this problem with more generous aid.

For the World Bank, however, this is not a justification for financial support. Our support is for development, which appears to have been relegated to the back seat. Some senior leaders of this government have said that no country has died from the lack of aid. True, but this issue is, what kind of life would Nepalis have in the absence of the strong commitment to reforms and development?

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I will soon be three years since King Gyanendra dismissed Sher Bahadur Deuba for being ‘incompetent’ because he failed to hold elections within the constitutionally stipulated period. The country is no closer to national elections today. Meanwhile, the king crosses the country in televised tours. This week he was in central Nepal, as far away from New York as could be.

His absence at the UN summit was a direct result of the declaration of unilateral ceasefire by the Maoists, reluctance of world leaders to “seek an audience” with the king despite intense lobbying and indications that the streets of Manhattan were going to resonate with anti-monarchist slogans.

Instead, the royal helihopping this week seems to have been hastily arranged to divert attention from the cancelled summit. Like all chief executives, the monarch will be judged by what he does and not by what he says. Politicians can get away with rhetoric, a monarch who craves an active role has to deliver results to justify it.

Unfortunately, performance-wise this royal regime makes the Deuba administration look like Singapore in comparison.

The country is no closer to peace, good governance, corruption control or ‘meaningful’ democracy in the past three years. Not that we had any doubts about creeping authoritarianism but this blatant disregard for all accepted norms has exceeded our worst fears.

Now that the Maoists have stolen the thunder, the monarch will be judged by what he does and not by what he says. Politicians can get away with rhetoric, a monarch who craves an active role has to deliver results to justify it.

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Naming and shaming
Grading countries on progress in meeting development targets may goad them to do better

KUNDA DIXIT

W hen Nepal’s prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala attended a summit of world leaders in New York in September 2000, he signed the UN Millennium Declaration pledging to meet time-bound and reasonable targets to reduce deprivation in Nepal by 2015.

Called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) world leaders agreed in each of their countries to reduce poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote equality between men and women, reduce by two-thirds child deaths, bring down the number of women dying at childbirth by three-fourths, halt and reverse the spread of AIDS, TB and malaria, and raise living standards without destroying the ecology.

All this was to be achieved within 15 years. World leaders are recommending this week, to review progress in the past five years towards meeting those goals. But Koirala is not in New York. Neither is King Gyanendra, which is just as well because Nepal is at the bottom of the heap.

To be sure, we have made progress in meeting at least four of the goals and will probably achieve the targets by 2015. If the statistics are to be trusted, the surprising thing for many is that despite the conflict Nepal’s performance isn’t worse than it is.

But there is a real danger of reversal of the gains of the 1990s if the conflict drags on. Nepal’s modest achievements were directly related to better service delivery after 1980, and delays in restoration of grassroots democracy could hinder that target fulfillment.

Last week in Manila, the UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) issued a regional report card to name and shame countries that are not going to meet targets. They divided the region into three clusters: those that have already achieved targets, those that are on track but making very slow progress, and countries that are going backward.

The good news is that Nepal is not regressing. The bad news is that in many of the indicators we are the worst-performer in South Asia, as bad as war-ripped Afghanistan. On the most basic indicator of extreme poverty and hunger, Nepal scores last with 43.3 percent of under-five children—even lower than Afghanistan which is at 48 percent.

The questions is will these failing grades goad Nepal to do better? In Manila last week, ESCAP Secretary General Kim Hak-Soo praised Nepal for “taking the millennium development goals very seriously” but added that it needed to really catch up.

On universal primary education by 2015 and for female literacy Nepal, track to meet the millennium goals. Progress in child and infant mortality is slow but with extra effort we could still reach targets by two-thirds in ten year’s time. Nepal’s maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in Asia, but the numbers of women dying at child birth has been going down and the UN estimates we can meet the goal of reducing it by three-fourths by 2015.

Where Nepal is actually regressiing is in its anti-AIDS effort and in providing safe drinking water. The ESCAP-ADB report clusters countries by performance in meeting millennium targets. Of the 95 countries in the region, half are off track for more than half their indicators. Five Asia-Pacific countries are in danger of not meeting even one of the high-priority targets (Afganistan, East Timor, Papua-New Guinea, Uzbekistan and Mongolia). Nepal is not one of them, but only by the skin of its teeth.

The Nepal MDG Progress Report 2005 released last week by the National Planning Commission (NPC) assesses the most recent data from the world Bank’s National Living Standards Survey which were not fully included in the ESCAP-ADB report. It concludes that the country is likely to meet the targets on poverty, child mortality, tuberculosis and access to safe drinking water, and potentially meet the goals set for hunger reduction, gender equality, maternal health and malaria. (See p.5) But even by the NPC’s own estimates, at the rate we are going Nepal is unlikely to achieve universal primary education and arrest the spread of AIDS.

Another UN report released this week, Human Development Report 2005, ranks countries by the Human Development Index and Nepal scores above Bangladesh and below Pakistan by climbing four points from 140 to 136 out of 177 countries. The reason seems to be better performance on poverty, but since HE Kахo uses freedom and democracy parameters, Nepal may again drop in the list next year.

Indeed, what is surprising is that despite the conflict, political instability, economic stagnation and growing inequality, the number of Nepalis categorized as absolutely poor dropped from 42 percent in 1996 to 31 percent by 2004. The reason: remittances from Nepalis working abroad, income from labour, increase in economically active population in the non-farm sector with the spread of roads and rapid urbanisation.
Computer on credit

Mercantile Solution has teamed up with Himalyan Bank to offer a nation-wide computer loan scheme. The loan will require a down payment of 30 percent with the balance to be paid over 12-18 months at an eight percent interest rate. The scheme will be available at all Mercantile dealers. Mercantile Personal Computer (PC) is ISO 9001:2000 certified and comes with a two-year parts replacement warranty.

Flying again

Austrian Airlines resumed its Vienna-Kathmandu service on 15 September after its four month off-season break. The airline has switched to Boeing 767s from Airbus 340s and aims to take advantage of the autumn late in tourist arrivals.

Austrian operates the flight once a week except for October and November, when it offers two flights weekly.

Focus on health

Deurali Janata Pharmaceuticals has started a new division called Suwashtha that will be responsible for the company’s drugs aimed at treating long-term diseases related to the heart and nerves. Today, the company sells 80 different kinds of medicines. Established in 1989, Deurali Janata employs 174 people and is ISO 14001, ISO 9001 and WHO-GMP certified.

Swiss certified

Data Analysis and Software Solutions (DASS) of Nepal has been awarded the ISO 9001:2000 certification for software design and development by SWISO, a Swiss certification body. Launched in 2003, DASS’ services include: software engineering solutions, customized software development, design and development of information technology (IT) based systems and IT consulting.

Drive and fly

Buy a Proton, Daihatsu or Ssangyong Motors vehicle and you get a free holiday for two to Malaysia (three nights and four days) thanks to a promotion by Hansraj Hulaschand and Company in association with Air Nepal International and Nabil Bank. Test-drive a vehicle from any of those carmakers and you can win a free round-trip tickets to Malaysia. Other benefits included in this offer are financing of up to 90 percent at seven percent interest and a 50 percent discount on a NABIL Bank credit card.

NEW PRODUCTS

HEALTHY TEETH: Dobar Nepal has introduced herbal toothpaste Babool in the market. The product contains extracts of pudina and Babool (Acacia Arabica) a herbal plant known for centuries in its medicinal value. The plant’s extract helps fights plaque and cures spongy gums while pudina has a role in preventing bad breath. Babool is available in 55g, 95g and 190g sizes, priced respectively at Rs 14, 25 and 35.

Tips to reach the top

Finding a first job is easy—launching a successful career is hard work

A n article in the latest issue of Himal Khabarpatrika talks about the mismatch between the supply side and the demand side of the job market in Kathmandu. Human resource professionals say there are plenty of jobs for the right candidates. But most applicants just do not know how to approach the job market in a manner that makes them a winner.

They submit CVs riddled with irrelevant information. Few know the importance of doing internships and of acquiring the right set of skills. Others never think about how to present themselves effectively at interviews. And most fail to persuade potential employers about a match between what they can do and the demands of a particular job. What’s more, many cannot give reasons as to why they are the best candidates available. The result is that most applicants end up wasting their and others’ time and money. When things go wrong they find it easy to blame their own failures on the supposed unfairness of ‘source’ forces.

If landing a job is difficult for most first-timers, maintaining an upwardly mobile career path is triply so for most jobholders. Unless your father owns the business, doing well in a career these days means subjecting yourself to fiercer competition for fewer top positions. In today’s job market, an ability to remain competitive for much of one’s working life has become a new skill in itself—something that’s not as yet taught in Nepal’s management schools. From what I have seen, most otherwise smart professionals repeatedly trip up in the career game and feel stuck for years in jobs they hate. Could they do something to be more strategic about their career path? The following observations might help.

I have noticed that most Nepali professionals sit on careers and jobs as the same. They are not. You can have a job, even a series of jobs. But you may not have a career that puts you on the path to the top. Some people move from one job to another and are happy being serial employees. But if it’s a career that you are looking for, then you first need to build up skills and knowledge in at least two niches in your field in which you can claim expertise. Being a generalist as in one who knows many things has its charms. But market pressures are the best candidates.

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However, if the king wants to save the monarchy, he should completely hand over the government to the people, by his own free will. Yet he remains unwilling to do this. His efforts to control corruption have been deemed ineffective and politically influenced. There is no sign of peace returning. With rise in prices of all basic commodities, public dissatisfaction towards the king is also mounting. His efforts to gain international support have been in vain. Even the US government, which formerly appeared positive towards the palace, has started to speak out and is now looking for alternative ways to return the country to democracy.

Washington will not leave any stone unturned to put more pressure on the king. Always strongly opposed to the Maoists, the US government is against the parties’ move to align with the US. The US government is against the Maoists, who seek a new constitution through multiparty democracy and the Nepalese people. It also worries about this development. Its officials there still have not granted them a hearing. “As soon as they start driving the pillars in, it’s like an earthquake of 7 on the Richter scale has hit the area,” says Sudharshan Gurung.

Not too late

Excerpts of a report submitted by chairman Surya Bahadur Thapa to his Rastryia Janadhan Party’s central working committee meeting, Kathmandu, 13 September 2005

The Nepali Congress appears to have deviated from its contrast course to a leftist approach after replacing constitutional monarchy with democratic socialism in its statute during its recent general convention. The CPN (UML) too has abandoned its critical support for constitutional monarchy and has been favouring a republican set-up and constitution. The shift in the two parties’ policies and the Maoists’ unilateral council have created a new political climate in the country. This novel environment has paved the way for the rebels to enter the cities and areas where they can chant slogans for peace. A campaign has been launched to drag the king into never-ending contention for such an arrangement. The eldest, Srijana, said they survived on what they could find in the house for a couple of months. They had already used the 30kg of rice the Maoists gave them. The children also used to eat whatever they could find in their backyard but these were recently destroyed by insects. The youngsters say that since March the children have been living on food collected with the help of villagers and have also spent their scholarship money to buy food. Local groups have started a grain collection campaign to feed the children and have also appealed to the food distributors. The children go in search of temporary work on Saturdays. When they are successful, they receive Rs 40 for an entire day’s work. Now another obstacle has arisen—the family is in debt on a grain collection campaign to feed the children and have also spent their scholarship money to buy food. Local groups have started a grain collection campaign to feed the children and have also appealed to the food distributors. The children go in search of temporary work on Saturdays. When they are successful, they receive Rs 40 for an entire day’s work. Now another obstacle has arisen—the family is in debt on a
“We need storage systems for hydropower”

Interview with Sandip Shah, chairman of the Independent Power Producers Association, in Abhiyan, 12-19 September

Abhiyan: It is said big energy projects are more expensive and Nepal would benefit more from small power plants.

Sandip Shah: That’s not completely true. Small, medium and large-scale projects all have their roles. For example, small hydropower projects can bring electricity to remote areas outside the national grid while medium projects can meet domestic and industrial power demand. But none of these can store water and generate power when water levels in rivers go down.

So why do we still have power cuts?

The only reservoir project for hydropower is Kulekhani. All the others are ‘run-of-the-river’ types. In winter, when the demand for power is highest, the flow in the rivers goes down and power production is reduced by half. In the monsoon, these schemes run at their optimum capacity but our transmission capacity is not up to mark and can’t handle all that power. To solve both problems we need medium-scale storage projects in the 150-500 megawatt range and aim for 30 percent excess capacity to ensure system stability and upgrade the transmission system.

How come with all our hydropower potential, electricity in Nepal is the most expensive in the world?

Our projects are located in remote areas and expensive access roads are part of the cost. State-run plants are built with soft credit from donors but the government is charging a high interest rate to the companies running them and that cost is passed down to the consumer. Also, in such projects we have to accept consultants, contractors and expensive equipment according to the wishes of the donors. The contractors also set up cartels and this drives prices up. Private power producers operate with a business outlook but the investment needed to generate power in the early stages of the project is high. They also have to hand back the plants to the government within 30-40 years even though the average lifespan of a project is 75-100 years.

Why aren’t local banks investing in power projects?

Hydropower projects are highly capital-intensive and beyond the scope of the Nepali capital market. Because of the limits to banking liquidity and Rastra Bank rules, banks can’t invest in more than one project of up to 50 megawatts in size simultaneously. In the absence of a more liberal investment regime, foreign capital is necessary.

Are outside investors in hydropower getting disillusioned?

Nepal still isn’t on the international investment map. Investors are worried about the country’s rules and their laws, which change all the time and there is an erosion of confidence because of poor implementation of policies and non-adherence to contractual obligations. NEA is the main buyer of power but there are all kinds of other players: the Ministry of Water Resources, Electricity Tariff Regulatory Commission, National Planning Commission, Electricity Development Board, etc. Because their responsibilities aren’t clear, there is duplication and even triplication. NEA must be made autonomous and profit-oriented. If the Minister of Water Resources remains NEA chairman, there will be political interference. The board must be turned into a purely professional body.

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Ever since King Gyanendra proposed Nepal as a transit for India-China trade after Jakarta’s Afro-Asian Summit in March there has been renewed interest in north-south trans-Himalayan highways. But there are also doubts about whether our giant neighbours actually need such a link, and more importantly, if Nepal would really benefit.

Bilateral trade between India and China reached $13 billion last year and is expected to double in five years. India is emerging as an exporter of foodgrains and China is a nett importer. Lhasa will be connected to China’s industrial heartland by a railroad to be completed in 2007. Nepal could take advantage of its strategic location to offer transit facilities and benefit from trade and taxes.

At present only the 400-km Birganj-Kathmandu-Kodari serves as a highway link between India and China but there is no through-traffic. There are possibilities of developing other north-south routes, of which the 365-km Birganj-Kathmandu-Rasuwa could be completed the quickest. But there are seven other routes, most of which follow north-south Himalayan rivers and could shorten the distance between Tibet and northern India.

The Chinese are currently helping build a 22 km section between Syabru and the border. When the Galchhi-Trisuli section of the road is finished in two years, it will effectively open the Birganj-Trisuli-Rasuwa link. “This will be the fastest, most efficient road corridor connecting Nepal’s northern and southern borders at present,” says Durga Prasad KC, director general of the Department of Roads.

However, the ancient trade route between India and Tibet through Nathu La in Sikkim is due to open for crossborder traffic next month and would be the shortest distance between Lhasa and...
Calcutta. The Chinese are completing a highway from Lhasa to Nathu La to connect to India and are unlikely to go for another road through Nepal at present. A Kathmandu-based Chinese expert told us: “China will opt for the Nepal transit only if it is cheaper, but a feasibility needs to be done first and find if there is real benefit for Nepal.”

However, Nathu La is far from India’s manufacturing belt and a Nepal link could be shorter. At 3,500 m Nathu La is also snowbound for four months in a year and the serpentine highway needs to be widened to take multi-axle container trucks.

Nepal’s proposed Kosi Highway from Rani-Kimathanka could be a faster all-weather road link between India and China with an easier gradient. The other attractive north-south highway is the Sunauli-Kusma-Jomsom-Korala route of which an 18 km section from Korala to Lo Manthang is already complete and there are sections along the Kali Gandaki that are under construction.

But in the final analysis, the feasibility of a road system needs to take into account the level of future trade between Tibet and India (which at present is negligible) as well as the comparative cost with sea transport.

“The challenge is to design a transit service that can compete with sea transport on cost so that it is attractive and efficient to promote bilateral trade between India and China,” says Kamal Raj Pande, at DoR’s Planning and Design Section which is trying to look at optimal routes that would also promote domestic integration.

Indeed, Nepali planners have to look at whether it is better to invest scarce resources in building highway links that serve domestic priorities. One such link would be the fast-track from Hetauda to Kathmandu which would save billions of rupees a year on fuel alone. Some experts doubt that a China-India land trade route through Nepal is feasible at present. Tibet is sparsely populated and China’s industrial heartland is on its eastern seaboard, 5,000 km away from Tibet. “Even if India and China were to find it feasible, the big question is whether Nepal would benefit from being a transit point,” says one senior Nepali official, “we need to build north-south highways for our sake and according to our own priorities, not for India-China trade.”

It is clear that not enough homework has been done. India had formally conveyed its interest on transit rights through Nepal for its China trade at an inter-governmental meeting in Kathmandu in 2004. But Nepal hasn’t officially responded, and the subject hasn’t cropped up in India-China bilateral meetings. China agreed to developing Nepal transit highways during recent bilateral economic and trade talks in Beijing.

“The benefits to Nepal needs to be thought through,” says British highway consultant John Howell, “otherwise there is a risk that environmental damage from pollution and even HIV/AIDS incidence along transport corridors will outweigh the benefits.” Indeed, the Swiss have now stopped container trucks from trans-Alpine corridors between Germany and Italy. All containers must ride trains.

Although in the short-term it is hard to see big benefits from India-China trade for Nepal, transit highways could ultimately bring payback from taxes, trans-shipment services, jobs, fuel stations, better north-south connectivity and also stimulate investments in hydropower and decentralise Nepal’s development.

For now, though, Nepal may have to consider its own immediate domestic infrastructure priorities. One India-Nepal trade expert quipped: “There is the terrifying thought of Punjabi drivers pushing underpowered and overaged Tata trucks groaning and belching black smoke past Dhunche towards the Tibetan plateau.”

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In Transit

1. Birganj-Nabadu-Kathmandu-Dolakha-Koderi 393km
2. Birganj-Patla-D Track Kathmandu-Koderi 262km
3. Birganj-Pattaya-Trisuli-Rasuwa 265km
4. Sunauli-Mirchi-Kusma-Jomsom-Korala 467km
5. Rani-Hita-Tumlingtar-Kimathanka 418km
6. Janakpur-Dolakha-Lamabagar 395km
7. Nepalganj-Rupahi-Junta-Simikot-Misho 436km
8. Kusaha-Iam-Phidim-Taplejung-Olangtangpo 486km
9. Brahmadeb-Jophysa-Darchula-Tinkar 415km

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LONG AND WINDING ROADS: The Mugling junction along the Prithvi Highway shows how mountain roads need to follow rivers (overleaf).

The Dharan-Dhankuta Highway winds its way up the mountains in eastern Nepal (below).
Rashmila demystifies Kumari myths

A former Kumari tells her story of being a living goddess

The innocent yet exotic, gajala face of Nepal’s living goddess, the Kumari, looking out from the wooden windows from her palace has inspired writers and photographers since time immemorial. Scott Berry is no exception: perhaps the only difference between him and many others who have written about the goddess is that Berry was fascinated by the life of an ex-Kumari.

From Goddess to Mortal is the story of a former Kumari, Rashmila Shakya, who was chosen to be the living goddess at the age of four and spent eight years away from her parents at Kumari Ghar living a life vastly different from that of a conventional young girl. The book describes her struggles as she makes the transition from the world of innocence to a life of common matters. This is also a young woman’s quest to correct the world’s exotic misconceptions about Kumari.

Rashmila also not only gives a childhood account of her Kumari life but also offers a historical perspective to the changing role of Kumari. The book’s most poignant section describes Rashmila’s transition from the life of a Kumari to that of a normal 12-year-old. The situation was a little better for the Kumari girls at the time of writing—there is a lack of enmity between religions. One of the things I love today is the improving relationship between Hindus and Buddhists, which is important message for the world when there is constant fighting between religions.

What was the reaction of the Shakya family towards the book? As I mentioned earlier, we haven’t exposed any secrets to readjust to society, particularly with a new life of a Kumari to that of a normal 12-year-old. Life after Kumari Ghar is not easy for the former Kumari, but there is no reason why a former Kumari cannot be a normal person. Personally, I wanted to emphasise the importance of tolerance for the world when there is constant fighting between religions.

Scott Berry: A former Kumari tells her story of being a living goddess

From Goddess to Mortal proves that a lot of the more spectacular stories we hear about Kumari are wrong. The book is successful in calling attention to reporters who are keen on writing stories about exotic lands without doing formal research and is a good example of how, with repetition, writers’ misconceptions become accepted as the truth over the years.

Nepali Times: How did the idea to write From Goddess to Mortal come about?

Scott Berry: It is a long story that goes back to the 1980s. When I was living with my family in Nepal, I was far from where Rashmila was living as a Kumari. My daughters Maya and Laxmi were fascinated that a young girl, not much younger than them, was living the life of a goddess, a life that was so different from theirs. They used to go around the Kumari Ghar hoping to see her. One day Rashmila asked my daughters if they wanted to play. Gradually, they developed a rather unusual friendship.

Then we moved away and did not return for 15 years. When we did we had no idea who Rashmila was because we only knew her as Kumari. But we had lots of pictures of her. We showed her picture to one of the jewelers who recognised her and arranged for a meeting. At that time Rashmila did not know who we were but when we showed her our daughters’ pictures she immediately recognised them as her old friends.

We became friends with the family. Rashmila told us that she was hoping to write a book about her life, largely because there are so many mistakes made by everyone who writes about Kumari. Some writers have said things like she has no playmates, she can get no education and she has to walk on a white cloth inside the Kumari Ghar.

Rashmila also wanted to write the book to show that with proper understanding and a bit of help from the family there is no reason why a former Kumari cannot be a normal person. Personally, I wanted to emphasise the lack of enmity between religions. One of the things I love about Nepal and Kathmandu in particular is that people here share temples and deities. Rashmila is a Buddhist girl who became a Hindu goddess. I think that is important message for the world when there is constant fighting between religions.

What are some of the other important aspects of the Kumari story?

What Rashmila wants most is to have the misconceptions about Kumari corrected. She has suffered her experience as a Kumari very well. Today, she is a successful college student and has a good future ahead of her. Rashmila received very basic education when she was a Kumari. The situation was a little better for the Kumari who came after Rashmila because her father petitioned the government to let her be given normal lessons while she was Kumari.

But Rashmila does not feel like she was oppressed or that her human rights were violated. Perhaps it depends on the personality of the girl involved. She is a happy student now and one would hardly recognise her as a former Kumari if they ran into her on the street today.

BOOK

Malika Ayal

From Goddess to Mortal chart Rashmila’s life and duties as a goddess, focusing on the festivals that are significant to a Kumari. No one describes the streets of Kathmandu better than Rashmila. As the reader follows the Indra Jatra procession through the eyes of a Kumari on a palanquin, the sights, sounds and smells of Hanuman Dhoka, Thamel, Kilaquil Talab, Jyothi, Asan Tul, Juna Baha and Indra Chowk flood the reader’s senses.

The book’s most poignant section describes Rashmila’s transition from the life of a Kumari to that of a normal 12-year-old. Life after Kumari Ghar is not easy for her. When she leaves her palace she is virtually illiterate. Put in Grade Two, she works doubly hard to catch up with her classmates, and the struggle continues through her teenage years. To the most part she succeeds, but at times reality hits her with a thud.

Berry, who has lived in Nepal for several years, is the author of A Stranger in Tibet and tells the former Kumari’s story in simple yet vivid language. For her part, Rashmila uses From Goddess to Mortal for a few specific purposes. She is very critical of the media, both western and Nepali, for often resorting to clichés about the Kumari. For instance, she explains that she was never made to spend a night in a room with 108 freshly severed goat and buffalo heads to prove her courage. Nor did she have to often resorting to clichés about the Kumari. For instance, she explains that she was never made to spend a night in a room with 108 freshly severed goat and buffalo heads to prove her courage. Nor did she have to undergo a particularly rigorous physical examination. Rashmila says she cannot claim the 32 signs of perfection that Kumari are said to possess: “If unusually fair skin had really been one of the criteria, I wouldn’t have stood a chance,” she says.

Not only a critic, she also points out that life for present and former Kumari is improving—a goddess now has a chance of being educated while she is serving. But many institutional changes are still needed and Rashmila makes some suggestions: serving Kumari need to be treated like goddesses and more like normal young girls, while a scholarship to finance higher studies would cost the government much less than a pension for life. If such changes were to be put into place, Rashmila says she would have no qualms about advising other young girls to serve.

From Goddess to Mortal proves that a lot of the more spectacular stories we hear about Kumari are wrong. The book succeeds in calling attention to reporters who are keen on writing stories about exotic lands without doing formal research and is a good example of how, with repetition, writers’ misconceptions become accepted as the truth over the years.

It is also very clear from Rashmila’s story that it is possible and not exceedingly difficult for a former Kumari to readjust to society, particularly with a little help from her family.

From Goddess to Mortal: The True Life Story of a Former Royal Kumari Rashmila Shakya as told to Scott Berry

Vajra Publications

2005

152 pages

Soft cover Rs 650

Rashmila Shakya

Rashmila Shakya as told to Scott Berry

Vajra Publications

2005

152 pages

Soft cover Rs 650
Ceasefire fears

SUBEL BHANDARI in AACHHAM

Local Nepali Congress leader Ram Kumar Khatri does not bat an eye when the ceasefire is mentioned. For him, it’s just part of a good strategic game plan. “When the king can describe himself and parties as husband and wife, the Maoist ceasefire is neither a surprise nor is it of any good,” he derides. “Anything is possible.”

Instead, Khatri seems preoccupied with what is going to happen next in his little town of Jaygadh about three hours northeast of Samphe Bagar. Locals believe that when the government failed to agree to the ceasefire, local Maoist cadres felt at risk and left the area’s villages to seek refuge in the far-flung hills. Villagers say they now feel even more unsafe and exposed because with the rebels gone, security forces are free to fill the vacuum.

“That is what they usually do, come when Maoists are not around and trouble the villagers,” says shopkeeper Min Raj Timilsina. He remembers two years ago when Maoists attacked Samphe Bagar and Mangalsen and the Armed Police Force (APF) retaliated against the locals. “We were all tortured. Whoever was not beaten in this town, let them speak. Three villagers were even killed.”

Locals blame DSP Abhaya Kumar Khatri and Inspector Dilraj Kumar Chaudhary for the atrocities. The villagers’ faces change when they hear these names. “Shows us the Maoists, they used to say. And where do we bring them Maoists from?” questions Prithvi Rawal.

Although the police’s behaviour improved after the two officers were transferred, the villagers are still terrified. “No one from the security forces ever checked on us day and night for a year. But who knows what will happen now,” Rawal asked.

In the interim, all new faces are suspect. Every visitor is stopped and interrogated. If they show written permission from the Maoists, the locals arrest them and hand them over to the rebels. “We can’t take chances and neither can we trust the security forces. With what we have been through, we are safer with the Maoists than with the security through, we are safer with the Maoists,” they say.

The Maoists have often made them take part in their campaigns and they harass those who speak against the rebels. To travel east and north from Jaygadh locals need written permission from the rebels. “Jaygadh itself is their undeclared territory.” Min Raj Timilsina says.

Nobody dares speak against the Maoists. But if they do the rebels target them later. One Padum Bahadur Swar had to leave his shop when the Maoists took over. “That’s what they usually do, come when Maoists are not around and trouble the villagers,” says shopkeeper Min Raj Timilsina. He remembers two years ago when Maoists attacked Samphe Bagar and Mangalsen and the Armed Police Force (APF) retaliated against the locals. “We were all tortured. Whoever was not beaten in this town, let them speak. Three villagers were even killed.”

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Maoists have fled for the hills leaving locals anxious

Comrade Sangarsha points out a 65-year-old man carrying a jerry can of kerosene and a bag of sugar. “See how much the villagers love us,” he says. But after he left the shopkeeper spoke up. “What can we do, say no and be in their little black book? We just do what they say and do our work too simultaneously. It’s their country here.” Many villagers have stopped dreaming. Others say they are waiting for an overnight change that will lead to peace and prosperity. “In Nepal, sudden change overnight is not all that outlandish,” they say.

The people of Aachham are not ready to give up hope but the ceasefire doesn’t seem to offer any.

LEFT DANGLING: Children play on a suspension bridge near Jaygadh, under a Maoist flag. APF Inspector DeB Bahadur Chand checks identification of cyclists on a peace tour at Samphe Bagar.

Maoists free soldiers

Sixty soldiers of the Royal Nepali Army who were abducted after Maoists attacked the army’s Karnali Highway construction camp in Pili of Kalikot on 7 August were freed late Wednesday.

They were released from Lamidanda in Jajarkot at the initiative of an eight-member team of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who walked two days to mediate the release. The ICRC said its delegates walked back with the soldiers and ensured that all of them were returning of their own free will. They were handed over to the army at Jayajot district headquarters late on Thursday.

“The ICRC’s confidential bilateral dialogue with the parties to the conflict was key to bringing the operation about,” said an agency statement. On Thursday itself, one policeman and a soldier were also handed over to the ICRC by the Maoists in Udayapur. The two had been captured separately in Lahan in late August. Since 2001, the ICRC has now secured the release of 208 policemen, soldiers and civil servants captivated by the Maoists in various incidents.

The army has claimed 64 soldiers were abducted in the Kalikot battle and four remain missing. Ninety-six people were killed in the clash, including 55 soldiers, according to a report released by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Wednesday. The report stated that the Maoists forcibly recruited villagers in Kalikot for the attack against mostly non-combatant soldiers recruited to build the highway. “The security personnel of the Pioneer Battalion were equipped with some weapons, general training and combat fatalities for self defence purposes and thus fought throughout the night,” concludes the NHRC report.

Sagarmatha resumes BBC Nepal

Rai区域性, Sagarmatha, Nepal has now resumed its live relay of the BBC Nepal Service news program from Thursday saying it had valid permission from the government to do so. Short FM in Sukhelt also resumed BBC news from Thursday and some of the other 12 stations used BBC are also expected to start their services. The government had stopped the relay of BBC Nepal service after the royal takeover on 1 February, and also banned all news and current affairs programs on FM. Broadcasters resumed news programs after the Supreme Court issued an interim order last month. The government still blocks the first 15 minutes of the BBC World Service news in English that is relayed by the state-owned Radio Nepal’s transmitters on 103 FM 24 hours a day.

Saving our mothers

Nearly 30,000 Nepali children die yearly in their first month of life, the third highest rate in the world. Children, and mothers, die because they do not receive skilled care during delivery from doctors, nurses and midwives and because they do not receive emergency care when they develop life-threatening complications. Most women in Dang deliver babies at home so saving the lives of mothers and newborns will require promoting deliveries in institutions, with the help of skilled birth attendants and changes in attitudes, says UNICEF.

Ozone whole

Local environmental activists will mark the international day to preserve the ozone layer with a rally and seminar. Friday’s walking rally starts from Basantapur at 7.30 AM and will go to Hanuman Dhoka, Jutha Salk, New Road Gate, the post office and Sundhara.

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Sudharshana

NILKHET: During the seminar on Ozone whole at Nilkhet, participants express their views on the protection of ozone layer.
hambassadors in New York are now working day and night to hammer out the details of the current UN reform proposals to be debated at the summit of heads of state. But whatever they manage to agree upon, as a long-time UN official I am conscious of how much the UN has changed since I joined 27 years ago.

II had suggested to my superiors at that time that the UN would one day observe and ever elections in sovereign states, conduct intrusive investigations for weapons of mass destruction or set up international criminal tribunals and coerce governments into handing over their citizens to the tried by foreigner under international law, they would have told me that I did not understand what the UN was all about. Yet the UN has done all of these things and more, during the last two decades. It has administered territory, conducted peacekeeping operations with nearly 80,000 soldiers in the field and deployed human rights monitors to report on the behaviour of sovereign governments. In short, the UN has been a highly adaptable institution.

Today’s imperatives can be traced to international divisions over the Iraq war. A 2003 poll in 20 countries revealed the UN’s standing had declined in all of them. The UN’s reputation suffered in the US because it did not support the Bush administration on the war–and in the 19 other countries because it was unable to prevent the war. As we face the new challenges of our time, let us not forget the old ones. The combination of poverty, drought, famine and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa threatens millions of lives more than terrorism or tsunami ever did. This summit must reaffirm the Millennium Development Goals and rethink the world to achieving these targets by 2015. There is no longer any excuse for leaving well over a billion people in abject misery.

To change the world, we must change too. The UN can be a much more effective instrument if its member states in the General Assembly and the Security Council are better organised and give clearer directives to us in the Secretariat–along with the flexibility to carry them out–and hold us clearly accountable.

Just another ‘talk shop’?

Shashi Tharoor

To change the world, we must understand what the UN was all about. Yet the UN has done all of these things, and more, during the last two decades. It has administered territory, conducted peacekeeping operations with nearly 80,000 soldiers in the field and deployed human rights monitors to report on the behaviour of sovereign governments. In short, the UN has been a highly adaptable institution.

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Shashi Tharoor is a UN under-secretary and author of *The Bookless in the Future*. He is an associate professor at the United Nations University, Doha campus in Qatar. He has been a UN diplomat for ten years. He has travelled around the world, called on every head of state, and accompanied the UN secretary-general on many visits.

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**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Senior Advisors**

Human Rights and Good Governance

The Danish Human Rights and Good Governance Advisory Unit (DanHoRUGGO) invites applications from qualified Nepali citizens for the following positions:

**Vacancy No. : 01**

**Position**

Senior Advisor, Human Rights Organizations Component

**Duties and Responsibilities**

The part of Senior Advisor to the Human Rights Organizations Component has been created in order to further strengthening Danish/HUGGO’s efforts to support human rights organizations in their pursuit of promoting and protecting human rights. Presently, an Advisor handles the Component.

**Required Qualifications**

- Advanced University degree (Masters Degree or equivalent) in social or political science or a related field and at least eight (8) years of relevant working experience, possibly from the academia, civil society, and donor agencies of which at least four (4) years should have involved aspects related to human rights and/or good governance partnerships.
- Experience with managing projects, preferably of a complex nature, including the application of Logical Framework Approach and/or other project tools, would be a significant asset.

**Senior Advisor to the Human Rights Organizations Component will be under the overall guidance of DanHoRUGGO’s Programme Coordinator and will be directly supervised by the Deputy Programme Coordinator**

**Vacancy No. : 02**

**Position**

Senior Advisor, Electoral Activities Component

**Duties and Responsibilities**

The main tasks of the Senior Advisor are to develop the Electoral Activities Component Description further on the basis of existing reports and other documents and to subsequently identify and assess potential partners and projects, coordinate with partners and other donors, and monitor and review project activities within the scope of DanHoRUGGO’s Support to Electoral Initiatives.

**Required Qualifications**

- Advanced University degree (Masters Degree or equivalent) in social or political science or a related field and at least six (6) years of relevant working experience, possibly from the academia, civil society, and/or donor agencies of which at least three (3) years should have involved aspects related to human rights and/or good governance.
- Experience with managing projects, including the application of Logical Framework Approach and/or other project tools, would be a significant asset.

**The Senior Advisor to the Electoral Activities Component will report directly to Danish/HUGGO’s Programme Coordinator.**

For both positions, the successful applicants must have advanced analytical skills, excellent communication skills (spoken, written and presentation), extensive report writing skills and experience, good inter-personal skills and good computer skills (word processing, spreadsheets, and data management). The selected candidates will be based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The closing date for applications is 30 September 2005.

If you are interested and qualified, you should submit an application, including the following: 1) letter in which you describe your motivation for applying for the position; 2) up-to-date curriculum vitae; 3) names and contact details of three references; and 4) recent passport size photograph. Your application should be sent to Danish/HUGGO, P.O. Box 6320, 670 Embassy of Denmark, Kathmandu, Nepal in an envelope that is clearly marked with the names of the vacancy you are applying for. Only written applications will be considered and telephone contacts will not be entertained. Shortlisted candidates will be contacted for an interview. Detailed job descriptions for the positions can be obtained from Danish/HUGGO’s office or by forwarding a message to the following e-mail address: huggo@hug-go.org.
Awesome Open

Watching the world’s best battle at 1AM in New York leaves our columnist breathless.

Oh my! What a great US Open that was. Two weeks of tennis at its best filled with comebacks, dramas and pure magic on the court. What a fitting ending it was to see an ageless legend (Andre Agassi) battle for the title on the last day of the tournament. Here are my seven highlights of the 2005 US Open.

1. Roger is still the king. Sporting an astounding 23-0 record in finals, Roger Federer collected his sixth grand slam title and became the first man in the Open era to win Wimbledon and the US Open back-to-back in consecutive years. Federer’s ability to raise his game to a higher level in critical moments sets him apart from his peers. Roger is on his way to becoming the greatest ever to play the game of tennis.

2. Amazing Andre. At age 35, Andre Agassi played four back-to-back five-set matches. With sets tied 1-1 in the final, he was up 4-2. Disappointed with his comeback (down two sets to love) against James Blake in the quarterfinal was an instant classic. There is nobody like AA.

3. Queen Clijsters. It was great to see Kim Clijsters win her first grand slam title in her fifth attempt. Clearly the fittest woman on the women’s tour, she showed the mental fortitude that deserted her in previous finals. The women’s title could not have gone to a better person than Clijsters.

4. The pride of India–Sania Mirza. Feisty and gutsy are two words that came to mind when I saw this 18-year-old sensation from India. The first woman from her country to reach the 16th round at the US Open, Sania captured the hearts and imaginations of tennis fans worldwide. Her torpedoes-like forehand stands out but her confidence and ability to speak her mind make her special. I have only this advice for Sania: get in better physical shape and you can be in the world’s top 10 soon.

5. The demise of the Williams sisters. I have been a fan of Serena and Venus for many years. They changed the women’s game with their athleticism, flair and power. Also, they were able to put the game of tennis in reach for players from ethnic minorities. No longer was tennis just a sport for the privileged. Now, I get the sense they have lost respect for tennis. No longer is the game their #1 priority. It was no surprise that neither of them got past the quarterfinals. They tested out of gas and very soon we might view them as pretenders and not contenders.

6. New York, New York. I am fascinated with this city. It is fast and loud but it has its unique flavour. The NY fans at the US Open love underdogs and warriors such as Conners and Agassi. They understand the game of tennis and have respect for players who give their 100 percent. The night matches at the Open are amazing. At 1.15 AM last Wednesday, 20,000 fans stood and gave Agassi and Blake a standing ovation. Now tell me, where else can you find such fans?

7. Katrina and 9/11 bring a proper perspective. Disappointed with the Agassi loss? Wait a minute! As the US Open began, we saw the destruction that hurricane Katrina delivered to Louisiana and Mississippi and the finals were played on the fourth anniversary of 9/11. These are reminders to keep tennis in perspective. It is, after all, just a game.

Nepal #1: Hira Thapa

Courting youth

Kids to kickstart squash in Nepal

When your sport’s number one player has held top spot for more than a decade and his closest challenger is half a century old it’s time to shake things up. And that’s just what Nepal’s squash bosses plan to do.

“We need talented coaches and referees to conduct good international standard games and to be able to get new blood into the game,” says Aamir K Simha, president of the Nepal Squash Rackets Association.

While the top players’ legs are getting a little wobbly, no one is complaint about the national squash academy, built a year ago as part of the Birendra International Sports Complex in Sat Dhoslu. Early mornings its four courts are often filled with 30 and 40-somethings sweating for fun. At age 35, Andre Agassi played four back-to-back five-set matches. These are reminders to keep tennis in perspective. It is, after all, just a game.

“Squash is still in the infant stage in the fact that it’s not gone down to the grassroots... but at the same time we’ve had some good results, there’s been a slight improvement.”

Team Nepal finished third in the 2004 South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. Losing the way was the country’s top player, since 1993—Hira Bahadur Thapa. He started playing when the country’s only public court was as part of the Birendra International Sports Complex in Battisputali Squash Club. Hira was the country’s top player—He's cautiously optimistic about his future. “Squash is a sport that never gets old. I can be 50 years old and still be playing squash.”

“It was great to see an ageless legend

MARTY LOGAN

Kids to kickstart squash in Nepal

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**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

The concentration of PM10 particles (small enough to enter the human body and lodge in the lungs) along Kathmandu’s roadsides have gone down significantly compared to the previous week. Although during weekdays the PM10 level exceeded the national standard, inPokhara the average reading decreased by about 28 percent. The average PM10 level in Kathmandu decreased by about 36 percent compared to the previous week, leaving the air, overall, ok to breathe.

*Source: www.mijpa.gov.np*

**NEPALI WEATHER**

We will officially say goodbye to the monsoon on 22 September but not with fondness. This year’s rainy season is set to go down in history as the driest yet due to its late arrival and periodic droughts. Central Nepal from Kosi to Gandaki has suffered most from the lack of moisture. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows a series of disturbances emerging from the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and also over the Indian subcontinent. These clouds will dump late monsoon showers on Nepal throughout the weekend. Expect a break from the rains early next week.

**MAUSAM BEED**

**Gokarting**

Monsoon Madness

Overnight Stay

Spa

**GETAWAYS**

Annapurna Value Lunch

Special Combo

Boire and Manger

Burmese and Thai Menu at 1905, Kantipath.

Ciney and Par-e-jat

Daily Delite

International Buffet

The Chimney Restaurant

FOOD

BBQ Dinner with live jazz, Fridays, Shangri-La.

BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6-9.30 PM.

The Chimney Restaurant Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg.

The Good Time Blues Band at Rumi Doodle, 7PM, 701038.

Live Music at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Darbar Marg.

Music Night every Tuesday at Moksh, 7:30 PM onwards, no cover charge. 5526212.

Cadenza Live! Upstairs Jazz Bar Lajimpat, every Saturday and Wednesday, 8-10PM.

The City of Mumbai is smothered in fear generated by a few select families, like Shanti Narayan’s, which completely control the political system. The film focuses on a newcomer to the city, the courageous young, James, who works as a bouncer at a popular nightclub. Soon, James meets Nisha and love blossoms. But the story takes a twist when James finds himself at odds with another contender for Nisha’s feelings. James boats him up and only then realises that he is the younger brother of Shanti Narayan. Quickly James becomes hunted by the revenge-seeking Narayan family. What ensues is high-tension drama as the young man fights for his life to

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Fri  Sat  Sun  Mon  Tue
26-17  27-17 28-18  28-18 29-18
20-18  21-18 22-19  22-19 23-19
24-19  25-19 26-20  26-20 27-20
28-20  29-20 30-20  30-20 31-20

**GETAWAYS**

Three Days at Nagarkot, health oriented program

4-10 September 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.

Good 60

Unhealthy 121 to 350

Hazardous >425

Pakalisht

Patan H

Thamel

Kirtipur

Bhaktapur

Matsyagaun

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

KATHMANDU VALLEY

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

KATHMANDU VALLEY
Kiran Panday: Reporters protesting against police violence after one was seriously injured during the seven parties protests in Bag Bajar on Wednesday.

Jack Be Nimble: A protesting student from the seven party students’ alliance jumps over a burning effigy outside Mahendra Ratna Campus on Tuesday as an army truck drives by.

Shasaying: Photographers fight each other for the best shot as models walk the ramp during the Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week at the Yak and Yeti organised by IEC on Tuesday.

Traffic Marmalade: A seven-party pro-democracy protest in Ilhotahiti created this monstrous gridlock along Tundikhel on Monday.

Beauties and Judges: The winners of the Vatika Miss Nepal 2005 with Miss Nepal Sugarika KC (seated) posting with the judges who voted her at BIC on Saturday.

A Groove For Shiva
17 September
Shangrila Hotel
Rs 300 cover charge

Bhutanese jazz pioneers, Cadenza, have built their latest album on a dance sound as they ride the wave of the music’s popularity among the younger generation.

Cadenza has come a long way from the days when jazz in Nepal meant old people playing lounge, says vocalist and drummer Navin Chettri. “In 2002, with the first jazz festival it was shifty... but jazz has become cool today. More and more Nepalis and young musicians are interested though they may not necessarily understand it.”

A Groove For Shiva sees this ex-garage band from Darjeeling mix Afro-beats, Nepali folk and funk into a hip-shaking offering. “Our earlier albums were more for listening and lounge-ish but this one is jazz with dancing,” says Navin. The music’s inspiration ranges from ordinary people to the gods, as in the title track ‘A groove for Shiva’, written around Shivaratri. “It’s been a while between albums. Our priority has not been to release an album so most of the songs were more like a ringing in our heads that evolved into tunes and then songs. A lot of the songs were created while we were just jamming. Jazz is about expressing yourself spontaneously, that’s what this album is all about,” adds Navin.

Cadenza is gearing up for the annual Jazzmandu festival in November and has been invited to participate in the Lionel Hampton Jazz festival in the US in February 2006. Cadenza has evolved greatly over the years not only because of its changing membership but as musicians.

Says Navin: “Different people bring new flavours to the band. As long as I am there I can make sure Cadenza has continuity.”

Aarti Basnyat
Cadenza’s dance
2005-09-15

Shagriila Hotel
Rs 300 cover charge

A Groove for Shiva
You shouldn’t believe everything you read in the antinationalist private media these days about government ministers being hopeless and inept. As usual the media is exaggerating.

In actual fact the ministers are all behind the scenes trying hard to be neither seen nor heard. This is a deliberate move on the part of our rulers, since that way the ministers can’t make any major mistakes.

If the chances of a decision being fatally flawed are very high, the strategy should be not to make any decisions at all if one can help it. That way nothing can go wrong because for anything to go wrong a decision has to be taken that is not right.

Which is why it is a bold and correct decision to be decisively indecisive because the decisions that are finally taken may turn out to be the wrong decisions and detrimental to the nationalist interest.

For example, some blundering fool may suddenly out of sheer boredom take the decision to be decisive which is sure to invite disaster because it most likely will be the wrong decision.

Ever since the royal seizure, therefore, it has been decided that under no circumstances is the cabinet to take any decisions about making decisions. It should leave all such decisions to the real decision-makers who alone have the right to be decisive.

So, the matter of our council of ministers (Motto: ‘Who Told You the Buck Stops Here?’) being hopeless and inept just doesn’t arise. It’s an idiot-proof system of governance because our movers and shakers don’t move at all and very rarely shake. And to make the system even more failsafe, the cabinet has made the collective decision to sit perfectly still and not utter a single word since it was recently discovered that there is a mole in the cabinet who is feeding sensitive information about major ministerial indecisions to the media.

We have been provided by the aforementioned mole with a copy of the decisions not taken and have decided in the pseudo-nationalist interest to publish and be damned. Here they are:

1. One million more preponed and postponed mobile phones will be added with cell service extended to all 75 districts. However, calls will keep getting cut off until a decision is taken at the highest level.

2. Patching potholes on the 100m section of road to the ministerial quarters at Harihar Bhavan has commenced under the World Bank Road Maintenance Development Project and is expected to be finished in two years. No decision has been made on repaving other roads.

3. The fate of the 15 minutes of Nepali instrumental numbers over the BBC World Service on 103 FM hangs in the balance as the special cabinet committee mandated to decide on the matter ended four months of inconclusive deliberations unable to decide on whether to broadcast Resham Phiriri or Rato Bhaley in that timeslot.

4. The government hasn’t decided whether it should be the one to decide to respond to the unilateral ceasefire, and if so what that decision should be. “The decision hasn’t been taken on who should decide,” clarified the government spokesman with hesitation.

5. According to our mole in heaven, even the Almighty hasn’t made up his and/or her mind about what to do with Nepal next. “God is weighing the options,” said a celestial spokesperson, “just because he is omnipresent it doesn’t mean he’s got it all figured out.”