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# Extend the ceasefire!



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Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis across the kingdom have turned up for the travelling peace concert, *Sundar Shanta Nepal*, and songs of peace and national unity have got the most enthusiastic applause.

At the performance in Ghorahi, Dang on Wednesday, the audience spontaneously rose up to dance to the tune of Amrit Gurung's 'Rato ra chandra surya' (pictured). The concert has travelled to Birtamod, Hetauda, Dang and Dhangadi and will move on to Palpa, Charikot and Bhaktapur Darbar Square for the grande finale on 30 October. The message from audiences everywhere has been: "Extend the ceasefire."

Meanwhile, back in Kathmandu the political impasse continues with the seven party alliance announcing a boycott of municipal elections and parliamentary polls slated before April 2007. The promulgation of a controversial media ordinance outlining, among other things, stiff fines for news critical of the king and royal family and a ban on news on FM has led many to doubt the sincerity of the poll call.


The new clampdown has been greeted with outrage and defiance within Nepal and lawyers on Tuesday filed a public interest litigation at the Supreme Court against the ordinance. In an unprecedented move, UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura deplored the ordinance, saying: "At a time when the planning of democratic elections has been announced in Nepal, legislation that justifies censorship and curtails the ability of media professionals to do their job can only appear to be incompatible with a free and open electoral process."



**Q. How would you characterise the situation in Nepal one month after the ceasefire?**

Total votes: 5,123

- Better 49.6 %
- Worse 13.5 %
- The same 31.0 %
- Don't know 5.9 %



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## FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Throughout this dark decade of conflict, one thing that has never ceased to astonish us is the capacity of Nepalis to bear hardship, to adapt and survive. Even when shocking events overtook us, when the future looked hopeless, when the bloodletting got too much to bear, most Nepalis came through with their dignity and hope intact. It shows an innate resilience in the Nepali psyche.

Over the years in these pages we have brought the voices of ordinary Nepalis brutalised by conflict. Despite their desperation and despair we hear them speak with inner strength about their faith in the future. What a contrast it is to hear the cynicism and negativity of the power brokers in Kathmandu. In fact it is the privileged among us, those who have the least reason to be cynical, who are the most pessimistic and disparaging.

In the past two months we have seen how little it takes for this country to bounce back. A unilateral ceasefire was all that was needed to make trekkers return and bring jobs and cash back to the trails, for the internally displaced to rush home for Dasain, for smiles to return to the faces of farmers. Villagers in Kailali who used to lock themselves up in their homes by seven every evening are partying in harvest festivals late into the night (*see p 10*). And everywhere the people have the same advice to the warring sides: the Maoists should extend the ceasefire, and the army should reciprocate. The people know by now this war is a power struggle between the feudal right and fossilised left. And they have made it clear they want to have nothing to do with it.

By February it will be ten years since the Maoists started their "people's" war, so named, it seems, because nearly 14,000 people have died in it. Before September, an average of four Nepalis were being killed every day in the conflict. In the past two months, it has gone down to one a day. In the three weeks before Dasain, a total of 21 people were killed: 19 by the security forces and two by the Maoists. On the banks of Pokhara's Phewa Lake on Tuesday night peace activists floated candles in memory of the departed souls (*pictured*).

If the death toll fell by one-fourth with a unilateral ceasefire imagine if it was bilateral. An extended ceasefire would provide the atmosphere to sort out the mess February First got us into, and for the political parties to come up with something more than a kneejerk boycott of polls. That is our Tihar wish.



SHRINKHALA SHARMA

# Rock and hard place

Elections will be a referendum on the behaviour of the political parties

At a recent interaction on democracy and governance in Kathmandu, a senior leader of a major party conceded that people were not supporting the seven-party agitation because they fear that the parties, once restored to power, would lapse into the same misbehaviour that characterised their post-1990 stewardship.

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Bihari K Shrestha**



Upon being quizzed why her party did not come up with reform proposals that would convince the people that next time around her party would mend its ways, she replied that the issue would have to be taken up by all the parties acting together.

The seven parties which have by now squandered most of their popular support still seem to be keen only on wresting power through largely ineffectual street protests led by hired stone

pelters or by begging Indian politicians to put whatever pressure they can on their behalf. However, to their misfortune, the credibility of the Indian visitors was suddenly punctured right on arrival at the airport when they confessed to an inquisitive reporter that they were not keen on promoting democracy in autocratic Bhutan.

It suddenly became clear that it was not their ideological commitment to democracy that brought them to Kathmandu. Although the people would probably never know what deal was struck between them and the NC and UML leaders, for lay observers such moves only smack of the behaviour of Sikkim's politicians in the runup to 1974 when the country was annexed by the Indian Union.

Now that dates for elections to the municipalities have been announced and there is a deadline for general elections, the country and the parties are in for a new ball game altogether. Since the security forces seem to be in a

strong position to ensure order for the elections to be held, the parties are going to find themselves stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Should the so-called seven-party alliance stick to their pledge of boycott, and should there be

more than 50 percent turnout of voters in the elections, this would be a de facto referendum on the behaviour of the political parties meaning that the Nepali people no longer regard them as relevant institutions of democracy for the time being. They want stability, peace and development and a chance to get on with their lives. For the political party leaders who have kept their parties in their own paralysing grips to play cynical games such a development will be a disaster of unimaginable proportions.

Conversely, should they find their interest better served by contesting elections they may have to watch their historically fragile alliance unravel. When they do go to the people for votes, the parties will have to demonstrate to them that unlike in the past, they are now a reformed lot and are therefore worthy of their trust.

Here, the public admonition and sane advice tendered recently by the EU Troika mission to try "to restore the faith of the electorate in the political parties" would stand them in good stead. With all the excess baggage of corruption and broken promises still fresh in the mind of the electorate the only way out for the parties would be to scoop out their own corrupt cores and make visible structural reforms to prevent malgovernance in future.

Either way, forthcoming elections are going to be a referendum on the function and identity of the political parties themselves. ●

# The bell tolls for polls

The royal response to the rebel ceasefire was to announce elections

King Gyanendra has commanded that parliamentary polls be held by April 2007. The deadline decreed by diktat is 18 months away. Municipal elections are slated for February.

But these polls are fraught with uncertainties. Do they even make sense in the absence of a political consensus to resolve the Maoist insurgency? It's still

early to speculate but the royal announcement has brilliantly succeeded in confounding the reigning confusion.

For Nepal's donors, democracy means elections. It doesn't really matter who holds the elections, under what circumstances or for which purpose. They see polls in Afghanistan and a referendum in Iraq and think: why not Nepal?

Narayanhi strategists have accurately guessed the limits of formalism that bind the international community. It is telling them what they have been impatiently waiting to hear: the royal regime is serious about restoring democracy. But Kathmandu-based dips by now have learnt not to be taken in by the palace's promises.

After all, even the poll announcement came attached to a draconian press law.

In the absence of anything else, however, the international community may decide that any election is better than no election. The utter bewilderment of even seasoned diplomats in the wake of the poll announcement is palpable.

The Maoists have been desperately trying to salvage their public image that was badly tarnished by the Madi carnage in June. The unilateral ceasefire was a public relations masterstroke but what next? If they accept elections boycotted by the mainstream parties, they will sweep the polls but lose the political war and be blamed for the deaths of 12,500 Nepalis for a dubious cause. Should they join the boycott, they will have to cede the moral high ground to the parties. Either way, polls won't give them the soft landing they need.

The political parties are even more confused. The poll announcement, however uncertain, has made the demand for the restoration of parliament ring hollow. If the parties participate in polls called by the king when none of their demands have been recognised, let alone

addressed, they will lose face. But if they don't, and elections are held anyway, they will have to give up all hope of reviving the constitution.

The post-election regime will most assuredly hound them with even more vigour. Party leaders exuded confidence at their Dasain tea parties this week but they must be having sleepless nights. The fact that Nepal has ascended the ranks of the most corrupt on Transparency International's list in just one year makes the prospect of joining the royal government extremely tantalising to politicians with elastic morals who want to hop on the gravy train.

Civil society's silence shows that it doesn't know what to make of the call to polls. After all, these elections sidestep the fundamental question of the ongoing conflict: does our constitution envisage king in parliament or parliament in king?

Surprisingly, all that the king had to do to throw off his critics was to issue a harmless sounding statement of intent. Doubtless, the king still controls the collective destiny of 25 million Nepalis and there seems very little anyone can do about that for now.

Had the king been serious about free and fair elections, he would have rescinded the royal proclamation of 4 October 2002 that assumed extraordinary royal prerogatives. To restore the sanctity of the constitution, ordinances issued after the royal takeover would have been allowed to lapse. Extra-constitutional outfits like the RCCC and Regional and Zonal Administrators would have been scrapped and the rule of law restored.

Were the king sincere in clearing up the misunderstanding between constitutional forces, he would have nullified the nomination of hardcore monarchists in municipalities and DDCs. Most of all, if he believed in a parliamentary system he would have restored the previous parliament. But no, he went ahead and announced an election in which he will set the rules, play the game and decide the winner.

No king, let alone a constitutional one, can ever hope to have as unrestrained authority as King Gyanendra has exercised after October 2002. Now he wants to legitimise it all with elections. The fact that his poll call is so hotly debated is itself proof that the plan may be working. ●

**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**CK Lal**





## LETTERS

## NEPALIS IN LA

Manjushree Thapa's 'Being Nepali (in LA)' (#268) captures the pain of being sidelined in the US. It is very commendable that the Nepali community in LA has an organisation to help Nepalis in need. We really need that kind of solidarity in the US. The way Nepalis are ill-treated in Indian restaurants and grocery stores rings very true to me. As a struggling student my friends and I have all gone through that. We have had nowhere to turn. We have also seen DV migrants who come here leaving everything behind in Nepal only to go through a lot of hardship. I have seen people with PhDs working at gas stations. I hope Manjushree Thapa's report will make people realise that the US is not necessarily a land of milk and honey.

**Bhumika Ghimire, Indiana, USA**

## SHINING PATHISTS

CK Lal in his State of the State column ('A Peruvian parallel', #268) talks about the parallels between the policies of Nepal's government towards Maoist revolutionaries and those of the Peruvian government towards the Shining Path has overlooked a confluence between these two movements. There is a persistent Lalitpurian legend that the Shining Pathists and the Prachanda Pathists have contacted each other through the network of Nepalis in Peru, who are trying to get to Japan for economic reasons. Apparently, a way of accomplishing this is to go to Peru, where there has for a long been a sizeable Japanese community, which can even produce presidents. There, they acquire a Peruvian passport showing the bearer to be a second or third generation Japanese Peruvian. Japan welcomes such people, gives them visas, even citizenship sometimes. Many Nepalis can pass for being of mixed Japanese extraction in Peru. There is also more than poetic justice to this trade-off. If Japanese dressed like Nepalis can have darshan of Pashupati (as long as they don't open their mouths), then why can't Nepalis posing as Japanese have darshan of Mount Fuji and the all-pervading Yen?

**F Williams, Kimdole**

## VISAS

If any foreign embassy in Nepal treats Nepali people rudely ('Letter to His Excellency Bloomfield', #268), it has no right to be situated on Nepali soil.

**Anu Pradhan, email**

● I would like to console Khagendra Sangraula and people like him for their ordeals at the British Embassy. I just came across a passage in the famous book, *Fire of Bengal*, written by Rozsa Hajnocy, wife of the Islamic scholar of eminence, Dr Gyula Germanus. The Hungarian professor was invited by Rabindranath Tagore to teach Viswa-Bharati at Shantiniketan—the educational centre that blended the best of the west and east in rural Bengal. His wife writes in her book: 'The quiet flow of life was suddenly disturbed by an unexpected event. Some disagreeable news of the poet Rabindranath Tagore had reached us.

When he tried to enter the USA from Canada, the American immigration authorities on the border treated him with great disrespect. They kept him waiting and pestered him with the usual questions directed at coloured immigrants. One of the immigration officers handed him a form to fill containing questions which were offensive to the Nobel Prize-winning poet, who was traveling to America to lecture at the invitation of several American universities. He was asked, "Can you read and write?" Tagore's feelings were deeply hurt and he called off the tour and did not go to America.'

This was written in the 1920s so Sangraula's predicament is nothing new. In fact, it reminds me that Australian aborigines protested the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of Captain Cook because for them it was the 40,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of living in Australia.

**Gauri N Rimal, Putali Sadak**

## HINDOSTANI

I agree with what Kanak Mani Dixit writes in his Southasia Beat column ('Urdu, Hindi, Hindostani', #268) and wish that we could call the language by its name 'Hindustani' or if you prefer spell it as 'Hindostani'. However, the legacy of partition and bitter Indo-Pak,

write what he did? Iqbal is the perfect metaphor for the India-Pakistan dilemma: such beautiful poetry lauding India or undivided India and then migrating to Pakistan after partition.

**Jyoti Malhotra, New Delhi**

## DAUGHTER'S PROPERTY

I have had my share of frustrations working in the gender field with so-called liberal men of the NGO/INGO profession. But nothing beats the level of humiliation I experienced as a woman in a recent incident with the Officer of the Land Revenue Department in Chabahil.

My parents with the best of intentions decided to share their property equally among their children. My father kept reminding us about the magnanimity of his gesture. I didn't care much for his words as I thought it was only fair to allow daughters to inherit parental property. But when it came to making it all legal, the officer of the Land Revenue Department called my sister and I to his desk and started interrogating us. "Is it fair for you sisters to claim parental property when your brother is still living? Don't you think you should be increasing the wealth of your *ghar* rather than decreasing the wealth of your *maiti*?" In

minibus did not come as a surprise to me. It was an accident waiting to happen given the way VIP convoys careen through our narrow streets. I have often encountered ministerial cars negotiating their way through heavy traffic assisted by sirens from their backup vehicles. Sirens should only be used in emergency situations by ambulances and the fire brigade and not by ministers commuting to work and back. Most of them blatantly ignore basic traffic rules: running red lights, driving on the wrong side of the lane, speeding. Recently, I had stopped at a red light at the Maitighar junction and a minister's convoy drove up behind my car. They turned the siren on, telling me to move my car. Having nowhere to go and refusing to cross the red light for fear of being pulled over by traffic police, I stayed put. To my utter disbelief, the minister's car went on the opposite lane and then drove over the footpath and back onto the lane. I wonder what was so urgent that the minister couldn't wait for the light to turn green. As the highest ranking officials nominated to ensure law and good governance in the country, is it too much to ask from these ministers to follow the rules of the road?

**Rabi Karmacharya, Patan**

## SURPRISE

I couldn't help noticing the uncanny prescience with which you seem to be anticipating the king's move when you said in your editorial ('Don't', #268) 'The Friday before Dasain has traditionally been the preferred occasion to spring nasty surprises on the people...' While the real Big Surprise may still be in the works, the media ordinance was obviously designed to silence whistleblowers like you. I just wish the powers that be are heeding your advice, 'don't do what we think you are thinking of doing' but given their track record it doesn't seem likely.

**S Kumar, Sanepa**

## HUMAN TOUCH

Congratulations to Kasra Naji ("We want to go home", #268) for bringing a human touch to the story of Maoist abduction of students in Surkhet. So far all we have seen in the Nepali media are statistics of 500, 300, 200 children taken away by Maoists and made to walk for days. Naji has brought us face to face with girls like Ganga, Shoba and Khum and in doing so made real the fear, intimidation and trauma that thousands of children throughout Nepal have been made to suffer even during the ceasefire. Thanks for printing the article.

**Lin Sedlar, email**

## LETTERS

*Nepali Times* welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

Hindu-Muslim relationships is that people are becoming neutral in everything. Nobody refers to the Indian subcontinent as the Indian subcontinent, they are so politically correct that they call it the South Asian subcontinent. Hindi songs and Hindustani classical music are now called "subcontinental" music or, much worse, South Asian music. I hope that someday all this will go away and be replaced by shared cultures, values and languages

**N S Parameswaran, Chennai**

● Nice piece by Kanak Mani Dixit. Please note that Sir Syed noted that the two communities have so much in common that they produced a new language called Urdu. Apparently, even he could not get himself to use the term 'Hindostani'. One can say that Urdu is 'Hindostani' in Persian script.

**J Jandayal, email**

● Exactly my thoughts. Otherwise why would Iqbal who wrote '*saare jahan se accha, hindostan*' (with emphasis on 'o') *hamaara*'

the office, heads turned, some men whispered and women gasped. My parents finally intervened and pointed to a document where my brother, a successful economist in the States, had willingly consented to the sharing. The officer was still not satisfied. My mother tried to explain that as parents they believed in equality between sons and daughters.

But even if my sister is able to claim her right to property she will not be able to sell it unless her husband and in-laws give their full consent. As for me, I haven't been able to figure out why that government clerk had to take the matter, which was none of his business, so personally? It is only thanks to people like my father and brother that gender equality has hope in this country. Also women like my mother who stood up to that opinionated, chauvinist pig.

**Sabina, email**

## VIP MOTORCADES

The Dasain road accident in which the Tourism Minister's car was crushed under a

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# A winter of electric discontent

## Why the proposed 10 percent electricity price hike will not solve the problem

Nepali electricity consumers are about to receive a double blow: a hike in tariff and power cuts.

The last tariff adjustment was in September 2001 and, with creditors scrutinising the financial viability of the national utility, a new hike is overdue. In addition, power demand this winter is all set to outstrip supply. (See also: Editorial, 'Power vacuum', #267)

**ANALYSIS**  
**Dipak Gyawali**



The national grid has 613MW of

installed supply available of which only about 526MW is reliable hydro and the rest thermal. The peak demand in December 2004 was 557MW, just within reliable range which will have increased by seven percent this winter while generation capacity is stagnant.

Nepal's only seasonal storage power is the 92MW from two Kulekhanis, whose reservoir is disastrously low, 11 metres below post-monsoon levels. Poor rains and inept load management allowed energy to spill in other run-of-river plants instead of storing it in Kulekhani.

The only major power project under construction, the 70MW Middle Marsyangdi, is mired in managerial, financial and institutional controversy. When, and if, it is finally completed in 2008 it will handle about two years of load growth. Marsyangdi's 'genetic' institutional defect lies in an open-ended contract with no cap on construction cost so no donor

can be found to step in to fill the gap. Some are thinking the unthinkable: are Nepali consumers better off if this project, as currently structured, is scrapped?

There is about 40MW of power under Nepali private construction with fairly reasonable power purchase agreements but they are under various stages of incompleteness. While poor financing arrangements are a problem with some, many have shown due diligence but are hampered by an official environment that is neither supportive of their entrepreneurship nor sensitive to the national supply crisis in the offing.

Nepali entrepreneurs, technical manpower and bankers are quite capable of adding up to 25 MW per year but they need a more enabling environment. Chilime shares are over-subscribed, Piluwa is on schedule despite Maoist bombing, a privatised BPC is aggressively scouting new prospects and theft-free community electricity are all successful examples of alternative ways. Even when these success stories are staring us in the face, history is repeating itself and is indicative of a national learning disability.

The proposed across-the-board 10 percent tariff increase is an illustration of such a disability. New power plants, especially ones with seasonal storage, have long gestation periods but there are other immediate measures that can be taken without foreign aid. The restructuring of electricity tariff in May 2003 is an example.

Failure to focus on storage projects after the commissioning of Kulekhani-1 in 1982

resulted in a 'flood-drought syndrome' in the national grid. As things stand, while we will have a shortage of peak power (in MW), there is an excess of energy (GWh) in the system. In 2004 the national system had 2,643 GWh of available energy, but the NEA could sell only 1,964 GWh, essentially spilling close to a third of the system's availability. The situation was much worse in 2003.

Recognising that this spill was the equivalent of almost Rs 5 billion annually, the NEA board made an effort to realise some of it as revenue. It passed a tariff structure that would provide cheap seasonal as well as daily off-peak tariff that would boost sale of the spill energy. For instance, by providing off-peak (10PM-5AM) rates of about Rs 2 per unit for irrigation pumping and electric vehicles and similar rates to domestic consumers and other measures, it estimated adding almost Rs 2 billion annually to its revenue without penalising other consumers with higher tariff.

On the other hand, given low river flow during the dry season in run-of-river plants, there was a need to limit consumption, hence higher dry season tariff. 'Price as police' was better than the bureaucratic fiat of load shedding or conservation jingles in media. These measures were also intended to provide a price signal to Nepali (and foreign) investors to install more expensive storage plants by giving them much better rates for daily and seasonal peak electricity. They would also boost energy industries and

encourage them to supply alternatives such as photovoltaics.

Unfortunately, the Tariff Fixation Committee (TFC) failed to appreciate NEA's proposal. If they had only looked at the Khumbu Bijuli Company in Namche, they would have seen how such a tariff structure has doubled KBC's load factor earning it significantly more revenue while saving trees in the Sagarmatha National Park and giving tourism a boost.

The TFC's objections to time-of-day and seasonal restructuring of tariff is based on its inability to distinguish between peak time power shortage and off-peak energy surplus and the fact that in the electricity business demand not met is revenue lost forever.

The TFC also fell victim to media propaganda that the poorest would not benefit from the proposed reduced rates. This charge still doesn't make any sense: to benefit from surplus energy (by replacing LPG cooking gas, for instance) you first have to consume it. Those who pay only Rs 80 a month burning merely four light bulbs don't even use LPG that they can replace.

The net result has been an estimated Rs 6 billion of lost revenue to the NEA (and the country) since 2003. Now a simplistic flat 10 percent increase in tariff is said to be in the offing, which may provide some increased revenue to the NEA but will not do the many other things that a tariff should do to the utility, the overall national electrical industry or the economy. ●

Dipak Gyawali, Pragya at RONAST, chaired the NEA as Minister of Water Resources in 2002-2003.

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### Bad news on media freedom

International group Reporters Without Borders has ranked Nepal #160 among the world's countries in its fourth Press Freedom Index. That puts us right below China (#159) and slightly ahead of Turkmenistan (#165) and North Korea, which finished last (#167). King Gyanendra "is trying to wipe out 15 years of democratic achievement by the independent press with censorship and arrests", while "the Maoist rebels killed, kidnapped and threatened journalists, especially pro-government ones, who criticised them", said the group.

### Aid appeal hushed

The UN's international appeal for \$65 million for Nepal's humanitarian needs has gone low-profile after the government reportedly urged the UN to cancel planned press conferences in Geneva and New York because it did not want to be seen as a 'failed state'. As reported in *Nepali Times* ('Aid appeal', #268) the money would finance 60 projects in five areas, including human rights protection and refugee support. But the plan, part of the UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) has been criticised by government officials and some NGOs, particularly because it could siphon money from long-term development needs. Despite the government's reluctance, the appeal remains on the UN website (<http://www.un.org.np/cap.php>) and according to an observer the world body expects donor nations to start making pledges.

### Instability spurs corruption

Thanks to the firing of the multiparty government and restrictions on the media, among other reasons, Nepal has fallen 27 positions on the corruption perception index (CPI) published by Transparency International. According to the CPI 2005 released Tuesday, Nepal now stands 117<sup>th</sup> out of 159 countries surveyed. Last year, Nepal was 90<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries. On a scale of 1 (most corrupt) to 10 (most clean), Nepal scored 2.5 this year and 2.8 in 2004. "The poor performance of Nepal can be attributed in large extent to the continuing political instability in the country," the TI report said. "The royal takeover in February this year, the sacking of the elected government in October 2002 and the bloody civil war have all weakened the country's governance systems and the public's trust in them. Despite constitutional protection of freedom of expression, in practice, the ability of the media to report on corruption is curtailed and other democratic freedoms are severely threatened." Bangladesh and Chad are lowest on the list while Pakistan and Sri Lanka stand in 144<sup>th</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> positions. Iceland was the 'cleanest' country with a CPI score of 9.7.

### Wai Wai in Cal

The Nepali instant noodle brand Wai Wai which had already taken the Indian northeast by storm is now being launched for Tihar in Calcutta. Wai Wai is the leader in the instant noodles market after it started exporting to India 10 years ago where it has an annual turnover of Rs 500 million. R K Gupta, vice president of the Chaudhary Group (Foods) India Ltd says: "We are trying to strengthen our position in Calcutta, it will be our launch pad for the eastern region because of its connectivity and infrastructure." Wai Wai is trying to push the brand as a value-added instant noodle that can even be had directly from the pack. "Though noodles are very popular in Calcutta, the ready-to-eat brown category is virtually absent. We want to target that virgin segment," says Gupta.

# Thailand's surge

From bookstores to rapid transit, there are lessons for Nepal everywhere



When the first set of swanky Daewoo Ceilo sedan taxis were spotted on Kathmandu roads, Bangkok was seeing its inaugural batch of air-conditioned taxi sedans. More than 10 years later, while the Thai capital graduated to 7 series BMWs parked graciously at the airports, we slipped to rattling

ECONOMIC SENSE  
Artha Beed



Marutis. (Let us not even talk about the ready-to-scrap-vintages called airport limousines). We do not need to explain again how the national carriers of Nepal and Thailand started at the same time and how their flight paths have diverged since then. (Economic Sense #38)

Like India, Thailand today has a feeling of charged energy, a can-do attitude. The biggest change noted by this Beed is that more and more young Thais are taking reading seriously. This explains the mushrooming of bookstores on the streets, the expansion of existing store chains and the growing circulation of

newspapers and magazines. Global publishers are churning out more titles weekly in Thai. This surely should be a big lesson for reading-averse hearsay-dependent Nepalis. While we have caught on to partying and fashion, reading which could open up new vistas for our youth, has been neglected. The Thais have got it right.

Thailand has also spent heavily on infrastructure such as mass transit, making it a competitive production hub. Global companies want to be based there because supply chain costs are lower. Condominiums are mushrooming as the government has permitted non-Thais to own property. Here is another lesson for Nepal: allowing foreigners to buy property in designated areas would not only provide us with an expatriate population that would consume locally but also lots of job and investment opportunities for Nepalis.

We should always remember that only quality will deliver in the long run. Thais have started asking for better products at competitive prices. Global retail

chains like Tesco and Carrefour are already there and US-based chains like Toys 'R' Us will open soon. Local Thai food and retail chains have also emerged. The stock exchange has a business development wing that seeks local businesses that might their shares, focusing on unlocking the potential of closely held private companies and giving the public a chance to participate in the country's growth.

Of course, the fact that Thailand is not a full-fledged democracy means its potential cannot be unleashed to the fullest. Thais understand that economic growth is dependent on economic freedom itself dependent on political freedom but they are unsure how to bell the cat. Therefore, pet projects like OTOP (One Tambon One Product) still go ahead for political reasons not economic ones. The bad news about OTOP for our business and political leaders who believed it was a wonderful thing to emulate is that it has been hyped but unsuccessful. Another lesson to learn: let us emulate good practices only. ●



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# New cabinet next week

Rajdhani, 20 October

राजधानी



MIN BAJRACHARYA

A high-level source has revealed that there will be a major reshuffle next week in the council of ministers chaired by His Majesty. King Gyanendra is said to be dissatisfied with the performance of the council in implementing the 21-point agenda he had given them on appointment. There is also a feeling that some ministers have not been able to forcefully counter criticism of His Majesty by the main political parties and to win the confidence of the public. "His Majesty would like the forthcoming municipal elections to reflect his desire for it to be pro-people but there seems to be a shortage of people in the council who can adequately communicate His Majesty's wishes," the source said. He added that the two vice-chairmen, Tulsi Giri and Kirtinidhi Bista, and seven cabinet rank ministers would be retained. The new faces would be "competent and with public credibility" and be picked from the RPP, Nepali Congress, communist parties or of independent backgrounds. The total number of ministers would not exceed 24 and they would form the core of a new alternative nationalist democratic political force to be set up in the next two-and-a-half years. The source told *Rajdhani* that many of the current ministers came from non-political backgrounds and had failed to be effective, and added: "Don't even think that His Majesty will give up heading the government. Given the crisis in the country there is no way the splintered parties can handle it. His Majesty's wish is just to conduct elections to a new parliament and hand over the government to the people's representatives."

## Heavenly tips

Gorkhapatra, 17 October

गोरखापत्र

According to Dr Madhab Bhattarai of the Nepal Rajkiya Panchanga Nirnayak Samiti, it is unusual for there to be two eclipses in one month and to have them within 15 days of each other is an extraordinary event that happens only once in many years. He emphasised that during this period it would be in people's best interests to refrain from negative activities and to indulge in religious ones. On the day of the lunar eclipse, people should not eat and should remain pure from dawn. Those born under the astrological signs of Taurus, Gemini, Libra and Capricorn would benefit from observing the eclipse.

## Police plans

Inspector General of Police Shyambhakta Thapa in Gorkhapatra, 17 October

गोरखापत्र

The law and order situation in the country is quite satisfactory compared to the past and there are indications that it will improve further in days to come. The improvement is the result of our successful offensives against terrorism. There may have been some isolated disturbances but in the long run we are moving towards restoring peace permanently. Terrorism has complicated the law and order situation, including crime control and investigation. That is why we have joined with other security agencies to maintain law and order. It has already been three years since we implemented a four-year strategic plan to strengthen the police force. It lays out clear-cut tasks that police

headquarters, the departments and other agencies must complete. The aim of this strategic planning is to institutionalise the organisation and to keep it free from the whims of a single person. Under this process, we have established an inspection cell at headquarters and have activated different units to check human rights violations and the abuse of authority by any personnel. We have also formed a task force to prepare a 20-year vision for our organisation. The concept of unified command has certainly worked. But the fact remains that we still have inadequate resources to perform our duties fully. We don't even have enough manpower to handle the growing population, urbanisation and the complexity of today's crimes. Compared to other SAARC countries, we still lag behind when it comes to manpower.

## Felicitating Fiji

Gorkhapatra, 10 October 2005

गोरखापत्र

On the occasion of the national day of Fiji, His Majesty the King sent a message to the president of Fiji Rat Josepha Eloilovat, wishing the best for his personal health and happiness as well as the development and prosperity of the people of Fiji.

## Global democracy

Nepali Congress General Secretary Ramchandra Poudel in *Deshantar*, 2 October

देशान्तर

We can never guarantee that we will not compromise with any quarter as long as we are doing politics. Circumstances can compel us to make minor compromises. Even the Maoists, who claim to be more radical than us, have discussed a symbolic, ceremonial or Cambodia-like king. Other communist parties that chant republican slogans have somehow adjusted to the institution of the monarchy. But all these compromises will be short-lived. The longterm policy and ideal of the Nepali Congress is the people's democracy. We have clearly stated this in our constitution—nationalism, democracy and socialism. I don't see any possibility of foreign intervention due to conflicts between the internal forces in our country. We believe rather that the more intensive the movement becomes, the less likely foreign intervention will be. The irony in our country is that those who are influential deliberately invite foreign interventions for their vested interests. It was the king's move that invited foreign intervention. But the People's Movement will keep such interference at bay. If a foreign power joins hands with Nepal for democracy that cannot be termed as intervention. Gone are the times when others could say nothing while feudal kings committed all kinds of atrocities. Today we have the United Nations and many international organisations working for democracy and human rights. The king talks about globalisation so he should understand that

politics is not an exception to globalisation. It is folly to say that democracy has different kinds of models. Even a layman understands that democracy is built upon an essential cornerstone—the supreme authority of the people. It is the supremacy of the people that has been sidelined now and whatever system has been introduced does not fall within the democratic model.

## Freezing news

Gorkhapatra, 11 October

गोरखापत्र

The Ministry of Information and Communication has declared that only the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) is authorised to buy news from international agencies. According to RSS Law 2019, clause 32, subclause 2, other agencies must first get explicit permission from HMG before buying such news, said a Ministry news release. The amendment to the Media Laws through Ordinance 2062 states that individuals and companies using frequency modulation (FM) broadcasts are notified that 'information' has been redefined to include only health, education, sports, population, environment, weather, road transport and development-oriented programs. The ministry has requested all concerned to stay within the law when determining the content of broadcasts. No broadcaster is allowed to simultaneously re-broadcast programs in another place without permission.

The ministry has also announced that the Press and Publication Act 2048 has been amended to ban any items of news that promote terrorism and to restrict publications that contain content that goes against national interest. The Press Council Act 2049 has also been amended to discourage 'yellow journalism' and to make journalists follow a code of conduct.

## Managed media

Editorial in Gorkhapatra, 15 October

गोरखापत्र

The new media ordinance is not a hindrance to disseminating news that maintains loyalty to the nation, nationality and throne, for the betterment of the country and the people, in a disciplined manner. No doubt the media should not just sing the praises of the government but also criticise its weaknesses. The new ordinance will help make the media trustworthy and disciplined keeping in mind that protesting for the sake of protesting, not appreciating good work and defaming the nation, nationality and throne while protesting is unacceptable to the Nepali people. It is natural that the government gives preference to news that is good for the nation. This is practiced in the most developed and democratic nations. This is the responsibility of every national government and the new ordinance should be welcomed and respected by all.



"Local and general elections by 2007...puff... puff..."  
Pot: Democracy

संसारपत्र Nepal Samacharpatra, 16 October

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The royal takeover in February this year, the sacking of the elected government in October 2002 and the bloody civil war have all weakened the country's governance systems and public trust in them...the ability of the media to report on corruption is curtailed and other democratic freedoms are severely threatened.”

- Transparency International 2005 Corruption Perception Index commenting on the situation in Nepal



## Sly

Nepal Samacharpatra, 15 October

समाचारपत्र

On the eve of Dasain the government slyly passed an ordinance amending some media laws. There wasn't even enough time to discuss it properly and Dasain was upon us—which was probably the intention. That same day the Election Commission declared that municipal elections will be held on 8 February. Then there was another breaking news: His Majesty in his Dasain address instructed the Election Commission to hold general elections in April 2007. All these announcements mean the country will now go into election mode. If the polls are free and fair, it will open the door for the constitution to be activated and the government to be run by the people's representatives. But the way the government is going about gagging the press, it doesn't give us much confidence. In fact, it shows that authorities are not trying to be open but are bent on clamping down. If the media makes mistakes, there should be punitive action. There is no doubt about that. The press must be accountable, responsible and disciplined—no two opinions about that either. If the media indulges in unnecessary defamation or libel it should either prove it or be ready to face the consequences. Britain, the US and India, which have mature media, have similar provisions. Increasing fines for journalists or placing restrictions on reports about terrorist activities are not unusual. But these measures were announced when there was no elected parliament, before Dasain, without public debate and without homework. This raises suspicions about the government's true intention. The government must now try to allay these suspicions by convincing the media that its intentions are honourable.

## Uncivilised

Editorial in Kantipur, 17 October

कान्तिपुर

Ever since 1 February the government has gone out of its way to characterise the independent media as practising "yellow" or "irresponsible" journalism. It has used its own state-owned media for this slander campaign. It is not unusual for a regime that snatched away the constitution to be afraid of the light and to push the nation towards darkness. But by taking away the people's right to information the regime has isolated and weakened itself even more. It has a guilty conscience, which is why it labels the pro-democracy movement as "anti-national" and "terrorist" and characterises actions of friends of Nepali democracy abroad as "interference". A state media that is used to ostracising those who speak for the people's rights will itself be ostracised by civilised people. A free press has a vital role in a system of government run by the people's representatives. It is natural for those who disregard people power to try to control the press because an independent media strengthens the people's struggle. State media never tires of repeating the canard that "FM radios are not allowed to broadcast news anywhere in the world". Only the most rigid dictatorships misuse state media for propaganda and it is a direct abuse of state power. Officials of this regime are given to lashing out at public meetings against the independent media. They are intent on throttling the free press, demoralising professional journalists with threats, intimidation, locking up newspapers in the districts, launching an economic embargo on papers by stopping government notices, banning news on FM and ignoring the Supreme Court's rulings on the media. When their efforts to get the media to do as they say are unsuccessful, they turn the state media loose to label independent journalism "yellow". The media ordinance is just the latest example of the regime's extreme cowardice.

Nepali media has been forging ahead professionally and institutionally after earning the rights enshrined in the 1990 constitution, which itself was the result of the People's Movement. The present regime's crackdowns give the media more energy to resist. The media is responsible towards its readers, listeners and viewers. They will judge us because freedom of press is also their right under the 1990 constitution.

## Foreign masters

Editorial in Gorkhapatra, 16 October 2005

गोरखापत्र

At present, self-proclaimed spokespersons for the free press and those wishing to spread anarchy by misusing the right to publish and to make a laughing stock of a pluralistic media are giving lopsided arguments that the media ordinance is an attempt to control the free press. By sticking to this view they are exaggerating the feedback from foreign nations to a law deemed necessary by an independent country, against political, social and diplomatic norms. They do not seem to realise that this is not the duty of any self-reliant patriotic Nepali. Those who welcome such anti-national interference should see how the larger and supposedly liberal countries of the world enact strict laws to control terrorism, violence and anti-national behaviour.



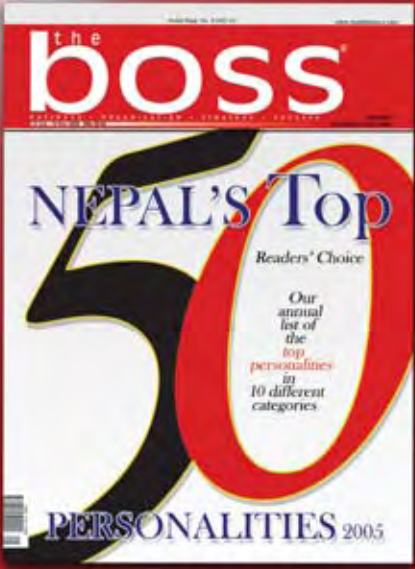
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Nepal's Leading Business and Management Magazine



The best advice I have ever received is from the book **God Father:** "Know your friends and well-wishers well But know your enemies and adversaries better"




- **Binod Kumar Chaudhary**




My life changed after I joined the police force.

- **SP Bimala Thapa Sharma**



Never give in - Instead of cursing the darkness, why not light a candle?

- **Ani Choying Drolma**



I work hard enough to get a good night's sleep every night. But you know, there is a saying here: if the people are happy, the King is happy.

- **His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev**




Success does not mean status or money; it is rather the ability to enjoy one's work.

- **Yubraj Chimire**

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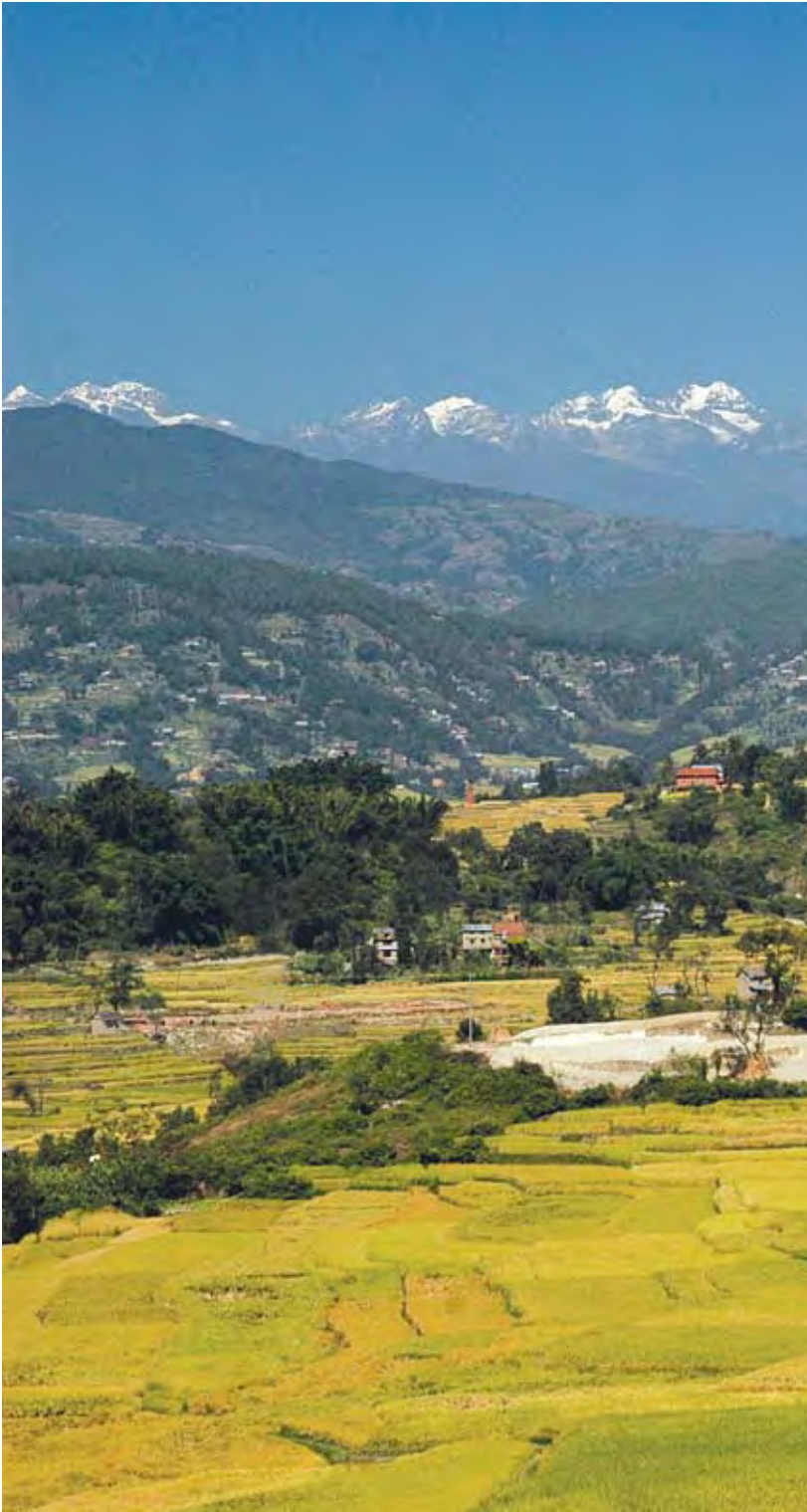
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# Kathmandu’s drift into suburbia

The capital’s residents are moving to up-market housing colonies on the Valley’s outskirts

MALLIKA ARYAL



There used to be a time when Kathmandu residents who wanted to move out of the inner city area built their dream houses brick-by-brick. They ran around finding the right plot, haggled over the price, bought the raw materials themselves, spent months getting a building permit, found an architect and threw out his plan to replace it with their own design. Then they got a contractor, got fleeced by him on cement and steel rods. And when the house

was finally complete, they ran around from pillar to post for phones, water, drainage. No more. For less than the cost of building a bungalow yourself and for a lot fewer hassles, one can go to Sunakothi and get oneself a Valley Homes unit (*above*). It is pre-designed with water, electricity, phones and drainage all taken care of. There are wide roads, lots of parking space, a grocery store, a swimming pool, an ATM machine, a gym, a banquet hall and even a movie theatre. What more could you want?

“My husband and I both work full time, building a house by ourselves in Kathmandu was never in our plans,” says Charu Pradhan, a resident of Sunrise Homes in Balkumari. Planned colonies are convenient for all, especially young professionals who work five days a week and those who are on the road or live abroad. Sunakothi, Bagdol, Kalanki, Dhapasi and Sitapaila, once considered Kathmandu’s sleepy backwaters, are now the names one hears being dropped at

parties. And now, real estate wallahs are going up market with ‘gated communities’ like Valley Homes in Suthankothi which has launched luxury bungalows. “People understand today that building houses requires special skills and they want to leave the construction to the experts,” says Shakar Giri, managing director of Royal Homes at Dhapasi heights. “Usually when an individual is building a house, unanticipated costs increase and out goes quality.” Planned housing promises

affordable homes at all price ranges with no compromises in quality. It makes perfect economic sense because the real estate developers save a ton of money buying construction materials in bulk and that is where the profit margins come from. Each planned community is unique. Royal Homes is geared towards middle class families and five of the 22 homes are complete and already sold. IR Tamang, executive chairman of Civil Homes, says real estate is a booming market for



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PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

## Nowhere to go but up

As the Valley runs out of land, developers predict the future of housing in Kathmandu is in new self-contained high-rise apartment blocks. "Apartments will be the way to go because space is going to be a rarity and there is nowhere to go but up," says Sidhant Raj Pandey of the up-market Ace Apartments at Naxal.

Of 56 Ace units, 45 have already been sold. The complex caters to upper middle class families and is very selective about who they sell to. "Neighbours have to get along," Pandey explains.

Apartment living gives people the luxury of being at the city centre while having well-appointed housing. It saves the hassles of commuting, the units come with all the utilities and there is better security.

Indreni Apartments is building 48 units in Bhatbhateni, an area that it considers a prime location. "Our uniqueness is in our location, we are very close to the city centre," says Deepak Man Sherchan, executive director.

Ansal's complex of more than 140 apartments in Bagdol was sold out six months after opening. The firm has built another one in Harisiddhi, where nearly all of the 125 apartments are booked, mostly by Kathmandu's inner-city residents. "The business in apartments is gradually growing and will take off in the next few years," predicts Sandeep Bikram Rana of Ansal Chaudhary Developers, which pioneered the concept six years ago.

investment. Most Nepalis want to live in the valley now for security reasons, which is driving up property prices and increasing demand.

"In the last three years, the real estate business has really prospered and helped generate businesses and jobs for many Nepalis," Tamang says. Earlier, young professionals who wanted a house in Kathmandu would have had to save for 15-20 years to build their own dream houses. Now, not only is the construction taken care of, there is also

affordable financing from banks.

Standard Chartered, Kumari, Everest, Laxmi, Himalayan and Bank of Kathmandu all provide home financing packages. Home Loan Schemes can be paid back in monthly instalments lasting five to 15 years with 7.5 to 9 percent interest.

Valley Homes offers 115 luxury homes and is planning its construction in phases. Of the 28 houses in the first phase about 60 percent have been sold. Valley Homes promises the best view of the mountains around

Kathmandu, open spaces and lots of greenery.

Siddharth Gopalan, architect for Valley Homes, admits that designing individual houses for clients was difficult. But these designs are based on surveys conducted with potential buyers on what they want in their ideal home. "We have kept the responses in mind while designing the houses but so much depends on the individual tastes of the actual buyers," he adds.

Suraj Joshi of Valley Homes

says since the government has been unable to take the initiative in urban planning, private companies have had to step in. Civil Home's Tamang thinks the government should be involved in regulating new communities. "There is a role for the government in zoning and planning so that the city can be managed effectively," he says.

Seven years ago Ashtaman Maharjan bought a large tract of land in Bagdol and built a colony of houses. Almost five years ago Civil Homes took a

similar risk and ventured into the planned housing business.

Tamang of Civil Homes says, "There were risks involved but the idea has caught on."

Kathmandu's suburbia is the private sector's response to public demand. And it is the future, says Joshi of Valley Homes, adding: "Planned housing is more than a trend and it is not a bubble that will burst soon." Proof of that is that real estate developers can't build houses fast enough—they are snapped up even before they are finished. ●

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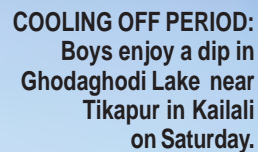
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## In far western Nepal, villagers enjoy the ceasefire as long as it lasts

Whatever the politics of the ceasefire, it is giving the people a respite. Late at night, in one far-flung village, Tharu villagers put on a Dasain show, comedians alternating with dancers gyrating to Bollywood hits. It is being revived for the first time in six years. The revelry lasts till three in the morning, laughter echoing through the moonlit night. ●



CHARLES HAVILAND

At a heavily fortified highway barracks, a couple of soldiers climb on to the Dhangadhi-bound bus, give a cursory glance at the passengers and wave the vehicle on. There are no searches, no disembarking.



The third Himalaya Film Festival in Amstelveen, the Netherlands, will include about 60 films and documentaries and highlight some of the dramatic changes taking place in this mountain range that sprawls 2,700 km across India, Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. To be held from 4-6 November, the festival will open with a concert by Nepali band Nepathya and will also include lectures by filmmakers and other experts. Works by Nepali filmmakers Di Bhusan Pathak, Kiran Krishna Shrestha, Tsering Rhitar Sherpa, Dinesh Deokota, Subina Shrestha and Dhurba Basnet are on the program. ● [www.himalayafilmfestival.nl/eng/index.php](http://www.himalayafilmfestival.nl/eng/index.php)



# We heard it on the radio

## Kathmandu Valley residents have come to rely overwhelmingly on FM stations for news

A survey of urban and rural residents of the Kathmandu Valley has shown that people have come to depend overwhelmingly on FM radio for news and dismiss the government's claim that radio news helps 'terrorists'.

The survey of radio listenership indicated that the broadcast of news, discussions and current affairs programs on FM has transformed the way Nepalis get news and this could have far-reaching consequences for newspapers and television.

Although the government's ban on news on FM after the Ferburary First royal takeover was widely criticised, this is the first time a public opinion poll has shown just how unpopular it was. Half the respondents said they either stopped listening to

was their preferred source of news. The proportion relying on FM for news was lower in the core urban areas where newspapers still predominate. A slightly higher proportion of women watched news on tv while more men listened to the news on FM. While television seemed to be an evening medium, listening to news on FM was a morning ritual for many.

A majority of those surveyed listened to entertainment programs on FM but most said the program they listened to most avidly was news although a majority in the below-30 age bracket said they listened to entertainment with more interest. Reasons for preferring news on FM was: clarity, conciseness, frequency of

news ban curtailed the people's right to information, and only five percent supported the government's claim that news on FM helped 'terrorist activities'. Even more surprisingly, nearly 80 percent of respondents said they supported the campaign by journalists to pressure the government to lift the ban on FM.

There are 56 FM stations all over Nepal 16 of them are operating in the Kathmandu Valley. Although government officials state incorrectly that no country in the world allows news on FM, its own Radio Nepal broadcasts news on 100FM and relays the BBC World Service in English on 103FM.

Even the democratically-elected government under Minister of Information and Communication Jaya Prakash



KIRAN PANDAY

radio or reduced the time they spent listening after FM stations stopped broadcasting news.

The survey results indicate that a majority of citizens don't just see the ban on FM news as something affecting journalists but also as a restriction on their right to information. The findings also show that the public take a dim view of the promulgation of the media control ordinance by the king on 7 October.

The survey was carried out in August for the Social Science Baha among a purposeful sampling of 300 respondents segregated by gender, profession and among residents of inner-city, suburban and rural areas of the Valley.

Although residents of Kathmandu Valley turned to television slightly more frequently than FM stations, more than half stated that FM

broadcasts. A third of the respondents said they still listen to Radio Nepal (a majority of them living in rural and suburban areas) and the reason was habit and also to find out the government's perspective.

The most popular FM station in the Valley was Kantipur, followed by HITS FM, HBC, KATH and Sagarmatha. This order could change for news since some of those stations don't broadcast bulletins.

Asked about the ban on news after 1 February, 31 percent of people above 45 said they stopped listening to FM stations after it went into effect. Half those below 45 said they listened to radio less. Forty-two percent of those younger than 30 said the ban on news made no difference to their listening habits.

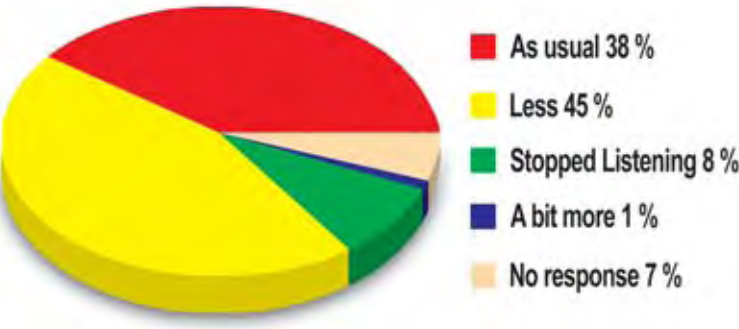
The most revealing finding was that an overwhelming 85 percent of those polled said the

Gupta had in 2001 tried to impose a ban on independent news on FM, but it was overturned in a landmark Supreme Court decision that allowed news and current affairs. The Supreme Court stepped in again on 11 August with an interim order to lift the ban on radio news after the royal takeover.

The media control ordinance signed by the king on the night of 7 October once again makes it illegal for FM stations to broadcast news, and defines information as content about weather, sports, traffic, environment and health. This has created an uproar in the media community and the FNJ has said it will once more take the matter up at the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, all news-oriented FM stations defied the ordinance right through Dasain and said they would continue to do so despite the stiff fines and jail terms. ●

*FM Radio as a Source for News: Is This a Constructed Imagination or Is It Really Popular?*  
September 2005

Survey conducted for Social Science Baha with Premdarshan Sapkota, Paribesh Pradhan, Kabita Pokhrel, Indu Adhikary, Prava Viswakarma, Rajan Karmacharya



MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Step back and wait

## All his life he has done just that

"One at a time, can't you hear?" the officer yells at a boy who almost follows his father to the counter. We are in the immigration queue at the Tribhuban International Airport. The boy steps back and smiles, slightly embarrassed for having broken such a simple rule.

"Is there anyone named Rajshree R L Singh?" a man calls out and a young woman steps out of the queue and sighs, "Finally!" She has already waited for five long minutes. Two ladies accompany her. "They're with me," she announces as they strut past the long queue and you watch them in silence.

Their aide quickly collects their passports and presents them to the immigration officer, who asks the boy to "hold on" as he stamps the ladies' passports. The boy holds on. His father moves aside and waits for his son. The officer hands over the passports to the

**NEPALI PAN**  
**Shradha Ghale**



aide and bids the ladies namaste. In a moment, Mr and Mrs Singh also appear on the scene and a boisterous family reunion takes place right

beside the immigration counter. No one complains because everyone knows that's just the way things are in Nepal.

They bypass all security hassles and reach home long before you step out of the airport. Outside it is drizzling. No one is there to pick you up because no one in your circle owns a vehicle with a special license plate or a permit that allows you to go past the military pillbox at the airport gate. Your luggage is heavy and you desperately wish someone was there to help. But none of your relatives would be allowed into the airport for security reasons.

There is a mysterious procedure to obtain a special permit. Most of your relatives don't know how to go about it. Much as they wish to welcome you, they do not want to stand on the road and brave the heat and rain. There is nothing else for you to do but get inside the ridiculously expensive and amazingly dilapidated airport taxi.

At least you have a choice. Those who cannot afford the taxi drag their luggage all the way to the Ring Road. It is now pouring. Some take out newspapers and handkerchiefs to cover their heads.

Outside the main gate, a group of people stand near the intersection and wait under umbrellas. There isn't even a bench for them to sit on. Some must have been waiting for hours because they are soaked. These are people with neither connections nor special permits. These are also people who must follow the rules at all times. In fact, you may say rules are created for people like them.

The cars with the permits and special connections glide past one after another, whereas they are not even allowed near the gate. "Back, back, further back," a security guard shoos away a Madhesi-looking man who wants to know if the Nepalganj flight is on schedule. The man has waited for an hour. His wife and child cannot get around town on their own. He needs to know what's going on. He wants to make a phone call but the nearest phone is way across the street. He must remain near the exit just in case his family arrives. The security guard seems like his only source of information on the muddy sidewalk. He doesn't know that the rude guard has no clue about flight schedules.

"Just wait, man, can't you wait?" the guard repeats in irritation. The man steps back and waits. He does not raise his voice because this is nothing new to him. All his life he has stepped back and waited. ●



# Worse to come

## Geophysics collides with geopolitics in Kashmir

PRAFUL BIDWAI

The 8 October earthquake that devastated Kashmir suddenly rendered the India-Pakistan border meaningless. Like its geophysical origins, its effects too cut across politically drawn boundaries. At the very least this warranted a cross-border response. Both topography and the destruction of road links logically dictated that Pakistan should have accessed ruined valleys through the Indian segment of Kashmir. The two governments could have cooperated to rescue people and rush relief.

But India and Pakistan failed to summon up a joint response. That was their second tragedy. The cause of the earthquake lay in plate tectonics. The cause of the second crisis was entirely manmade and political. Disaster management and relief has always been politicised in the subcontinent. This became glaringly obvious with the tsunami last December, when India was more anxious to project its power in the Indian Ocean by dispatching relief teams than to help its own citizens. The politics of disaster this time is taking place two years after the India-Pakistan peace process began. Which goes to show just how fragile it is.

The two governments swear by Kashmir yet they failed to respond to appeals by Kashmiri leaders from both sides of the Line of Control for joint rescue

and relief. This won't endear either government to the Kashmiris. Pakistan has cited "domestic sensitivities" for refusing India's prompt offer of aid and joint relief. Islamabad fears accepting Indian aid would be seen as a sign of weakness. This replicates India's own repeated recent rejection of aid offers during the Gujarat earthquake and the tsunami. Pakistan even spurned a loan of light helicopters to airlift people trapped in remote villages. Evidently, false notions of "national pride" matter more to these governments than saving the lives of their citizens.

India generously offered relief material to Pakistan. But it has refused to share seismic data for fear that it could be used to detect the precise location of any future nuclear experiments (including non-explosive tests called hydro nuclear tests). In reality, such locations are known to the entire international science establishment through thousands of seismographs placed all over the globe.

The real reason for India's refusal lies in its nuclear ambitions and its opposition to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The CTBT remains a dead letter because powerful states, including the US, have refused to ratify it. But some verification arrangements agreed under it have become operational in another guise. For instance, there is a network of 128 high-quality seismic stations maintained by the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology in Washington, a consortium created by universities. India has refused to



join IRIS even though it would give it real-time access to seismic data. Although this would still not allow earthquake prediction, it could substantially cut the response time to earthquakes and save lives.

Such indifference towards human life is part of a larger bureaucratic culture of apathy, which results in appalling levels of disaster unpreparedness and mismanagement of relief. Earthquakes are a normal feature of India's geological make-up. More than half of the country's

land area falls within seismically active zones. A particularly worrisome area in the Himalaya has witnessed four gigantic earthquakes in the past century, each of a magnitude of 8.5 or greater.

This is the great faultline where the Indian plate collides with the Eurasian plate generating enormous strain to build up along 2,400 km of mountains. The energy accumulated in the rocks is suddenly released in catastrophic earthquakes every few hundred years. And yet, India is building the Tehri Dam smack on this great faultline, near the very location where geophysicists forecast another monster earthquake of intensity 8.5 in the next 50 to 100 years. This would release more than 30 times the energy delivered by the Muzaffarabad event, probably breaching the dam, downstream of which some 300 million people live. This is an invitation to a calamity of biblical proportions.

India and Pakistan's failure is evident on a less catastrophic scale too. They have done little by way of designing earthquake-resistant structures, evolving a building code and enforcing it at least in the most vulnerable areas. Some Indian cities now insist that new buildings comply with some earthquake-resistant features. But these are inadequate according to seismologists and architects. Besides, builders often cheat on these and obtain false certificates. Old buildings are meant to be retrofitted with modifications to make them earthquake-proof. But these are based on obsolete and unsound principles.

Official apathy is thus leaving millions of people vulnerable to the next great earthquake, which is due any day in the seismic gap between Dehradun and Kathmandu. ●

Praful Bidwai is a senior Indian journalist and author of *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament*.

# Lessons of Kashmir for Kathmandu

## My home is still standing but my soul is buried in the rubble

When I heard of the 8 October earthquake I went to my hometown of Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir to see and evacuate my family. I also wanted to assess the loss to Muzaffarabad, its people and infrastructure. I reached the town on foot a few days after the disaster only to find a place

**EYE WITNESS**  
**Farooq Ahmad**



where only the ghosts roamed. Most of the streets were filled with debris with the dead underneath. All government buildings, except the Secretariat, the Legislative Assembly, the Supreme Court and the High Court buildings, were in ruins.

Schools, the university and all the colleges were heaps of rubble. Most people working in these institutions had been

killed by the collapse of buildings. I had a camera but did not have the heart to take a single picture nor to stay longer as is expected in our culture.

Viewing television footage of the tragedy doesn't even begin to give the true scale of the catastrophe and the loss of human lives, property, the bereavement and the shock of those who miraculously survived.

I lost 23 relatives from our extended family. Friends, teachers, doctors, neighbours and entire communities were destroyed. It was amazing to see that the house which I had built in 1986 was still standing and that was why my elderly father, my brother and his family all survived. This might be a miracle but I see it from another perspective: the quality of structure, design and materials used. Here is a message for all



mountain people: rethink and reinvent the designs of your homes, roads, bridges and all infrastructure.

I request everyone to disseminate this message throughout the region. Mountain areas are naturally prone to disasters and we must be especially mindful of the design of school buildings. Most of the schools in the earthquake area have been destroyed and

mortality among children was highest as they were trapped in collapsing classrooms.

The lack of open spaces contributed to the high death toll and large numbers died from being hit by falling debris. The victims are now questioning the technical and professional abilities of their town planners and structural engineers. They are asking their government to look into building codes and strengthen them in line with acceptable earthquake-proof guidelines. They are also questioning why most of the government buildings fell, killing and injuring their occupants.

For us mountain people it is time to learn a lesson from Kashmir's tragedy. Let's work together and insist on framing and implementing a code of conduct sensitive to disasters for local, provincial and national

building authorities so that future generations will not be killed by their own houses.

I am thankful to the sympathy and financial aid shown by the Nepali people and His Majesty's Government. I thank the staff at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu for their support.

These gestures of solidarity lighten my burden at a time when I mourn the deaths of many friends, relatives, laboratory staff and other colleagues. They provide me personal inspiration to restart the difficult task of helping rebuild my town and my neighbourhood, to leave behind the misery I witnessed and to begin moving forward into the future. ●

Farooq Ahmad, PhD, is a sustainable agriculture expert at ICIMOD in Kathmandu.

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# Call me coach

Coaches are most effective when they lead by example

“Son, I want you to be a doctor or an engineer, or a pilot.” Sound familiar? Did you feel the pressure to study science and math while growing up in Nepal? Was there really a choice? Although I experienced some of it, I am thankful my parents allowed me to explore other interests and let me choose my own path. My search eventually took me to a profession called coaching.

In 1988, I came to Luther College in the United States to pursue a double degree in international relations and public communication. When I graduated in 1992, I wanted to work for

GAME POINT  
Sujay Lama



the United Nations. I took a year off to work as a tennis coach in South Carolina with the famous tennis teacher Dennis Van Der Meer. Soon, I had fallen head

over heels in love with tennis and made coaching my career.

Very early on, I realised I had a knack for motivating and inspiring students. What I lacked in knowledge of the finer points of tennis, I made up for with positive energy, enthusiasm and passion. To hone my technical and tactical skills, I obtained professional certification from the two largest tennis teaching organisations (PTR and USPTA). And for the last 13 years I have worked very hard to improve as a coach. I learn something new every day and that is exciting.

Success with the junior players gave me the opportunity to work with professional players. My time on the WTA tour with professional athletes such as Amanda Coetzer (South Africa) and Naoko Sawamatsu (Japan) was great for my growth as a coach. Working with players from all over the world gave me a sense that my college degree after all did not go to waste. I discovered being a coach at the collegiate level was my true passion.

A coach is essentially a teacher and the best teacher is one who knows his subject, is passionate about it, is well prepared and makes learning fun for students. They are also role models and have a tremendous impact on students. Coaches are most effective when they lead by example. To teach



discipline, I must be disciplined. To teach loyalty, I must be loyal. To teach ethics, I must be ethical. As a coach, you play many roles. Sometimes you have to be tough and demanding and other times you are there to give a hug or just listen.

One of the best parts of my job is the opportunity to work with players over a period of four years. I can help them in all phases of their game and track their progress. Having developmental plans for each of my students and setting short and long term goals is very important.

My students not only need to know their destination but understand that the emphasis must be on the process itself. Positive feedback and the belief you have in them through the good and bad times is vital for your students' development. Effective coaching means holding your students accountable for their actions and being consistent in your dealings with them. The greatest thing about coaching is seeing your students succeed on and off the court.

“Son, I want you to be a doctor, or engineer, or a coach.” ●

Sujay Lama will be conducting a tennis clinic for Nepali children in Kathmandu in December. lama@uiuc.edu



KUNDA DIXIT

# Just for fun

Indian golfers are coming to Kathmandu in droves with their families for holidays

A group of 26 Indian tourists were in Kathmandu this week. But they hadn't come to gamble in the casinos, on honeymoons or to shop.

No, they were here for three days of golfing at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort in what could signify a new trend in tourism. Indeed, the only thing that unites this disparate group of Indians from Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata is their passion for golf.

Ankur Prakash, a four handicap golfer, had heard about Gokarna and came here in August on a reconnaissance mission. What he saw made him so excited he phoned his friends in Delhi from his hotel room and immediately started organising this trip.

“None of us are pros, we just enjoy the game and with Nepal's scenery and Gokarna's amazing setting I knew everyone was going to enjoy it,” Ankur told us waving from the Number One hole at the view of the Himalaya and the thick jungles of the nature sanctuary.

The others agreed

wholeheartedly. Zom Hranga, who runs a GSA for Malaysian Airlines in Kolkata, admits being a bit sceptical about coming to Nepal to play golf but said after a nine-hole practice this week he would come back. “It's an amazing course, the natural ambience is not like anything I have seen,” he said, “The course itself is narrow and very challenging, if you get into the rough it is difficult to extricate yourself.”

The tourists broke up into three groups of three players each and played a Stable Ford match. Often the ball would go off into the wild and players could be seen entering the forest to hit it back onto the fairway. “There was a lot of jungle walking and mountain climbing going on but it was fun,” joked Kaizer Roka, an Indian exporter of Nepali descent who says he found practicing his Nepali with the caddies almost as enjoyable as the game itself.

Kim Atwal, a cousin of famous Indian professional golfer Arjun Atwal, was ecstatic after completing 18 holes in four-and-

a-half hours. Also a four handicap, Atwal says, “This is an amazing course, very challenging and with lots of ups and downs so you get a great workout.”

The group meets informally for golfing in India and every year holds the fiercely-contested Mango Cup between teams from Noida and Delhi at the ITC Golf Club in Gurgaon. Such is the lure of the game that some of the wives have also taken it up.

But in Gokarna, the women and children were either at the Le Meridien spa or sightseeing at nearby Boudha. “We are golf widows,” explained Ruma Roka, “but we are merry widows. These men will be boys.”

For advertising executive Sabal Singh Sikhawat from Mumbai, the trip was a great way to combine a holiday with family and friends with a game that each of them loves. “Golf is not a power game, it's a great leveler,” he explained, “You play according to your ability and more than anything it is the camaraderie and the setting.” ●

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**The Adventures of HEROJIGette**  
HELLO. NAMASSTHAY!  
by jigg gaton

Our Heroji, excited about his Phoolpati invitation, realizes his translation was wrong, and arrives expecting a pool party -- severely under-dressed.

He's pretty murkha, yes?

**KE GARNE? WHATEVER.**  
But be a Heroji & dress appropriately

"A woman's dress should be like a barbed-wire fence: serving its purpose without obstructing the view."  
~ Sophia Loren (Italian film Actress, b.1934)

The Adventures of HeroJigette are brought to you by the Federation of Women Cartoonists.NP, a new civil group established to insure equality in the field.

The Adventures of HeroJig can also be seen at [www.extreme-nepal.com](http://www.extreme-nepal.com)

#88 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

## ABOUT TOWN

### EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Silent Doorways, Dark Windows & Soulful Streets**, photos by Herbert Grammatikapolous at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 23 October.
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999
- ❖ **Arts from Tibet, Dolpo and the Himalayas** by Pasang at Baber Mahal Revisited

### FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Why is the new generation not interested in political leadership?** Discussion at Martin Chautari, 23 October, 3PM. 4256239
- ❖ **Death and Impermanence**, one day course led by Anila Tenzin Namtrol from Kopan Monastery at HBMC, 22 October. 4414843
- ❖ **Women in Concert** 23 October, 7.30 PM, Hotel Shangri-La.
- ❖ **United Nations Day** 24 October.
- ❖ **Disarmament Week** 24-30 October.
- ❖ **Hey DJ**, party at Hotel Yak & Yeti featuring DJ Mukul from London, 28 October, 8PM onwards, Rs 699. 4410798
- ❖ **The British School Football Tournament** at Dasrath Stadium, 30 October. trophy@tbs.edu.np
- ❖ **Plight of Widows in Nepal** by Lily Thapa, 23 November, 9.30 AM Shankar Hotel.



### MUSIC

- ❖ **Singhini Research Centre** performs traditional Newari music and dances, 26 October at 6PM.
- ❖ **Project Peace 2005**, third Thamel Street Dance Music Festival, with British DJ Mukul and various other local DJs, 29 October, 2PM onwards.
- ❖ **Sundar Shanta Nepal** travelling peace concert, 15-30 October.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Ladies Night** Wednesdays, one free cocktail to the ladies at Jatra.
- ❖ **Musician Night** every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM onwards. 5526212
- ❖ **Cadenza Live!** Upstairs Jazz Bar Lazimpat, every Saturday and Wednesday.
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

### FOOD

- ❖ **Signature Pasta and Italian Wine** 20-31 October, 6.30-9.30 at Yak & Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Kebab and Biryani Festival**, Cuisine from the house of Mughals at Hyatt Regency 5-20 November, 6.30 PM onwards. 4491234
- ❖ **Sushi and Saki Promotion** at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with live jazz, Fridays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521810
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **BBQ by the Swimming Pool** at Le Meridien, Rs 888
- ❖ **Daily Delite** lunch at Shambala Café, Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat. 4412999
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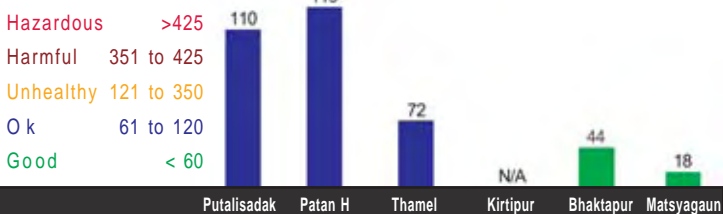
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## KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

The Dasain holidays did wonders to clear up Kathmandu's air. With significant reduction in traffic on the streets, even along normally busy streets such as Putalisadak and Patan Hospital, the average concentration of PM10 particles (harmful matter less than 10 microns in diameter that lodge in the human body) last week was within the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic metre. However, this week with vehicles back on the street, the pollution level is bound to go up once again.

9-15 October 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.  
Source: [www.mope.gov.np](http://www.mope.gov.np)



## NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The high pressure prevailing over the Tibetan plateau sucked in dry cool air from the northwest over Dasain giving us the spectacular weather and views, but it moved on to be replaced with this Bay of Bengal depression that is fighting a tug-of-war against the westerlies. Central and eastern Nepal will continue to receive moderate to heavy showers into the weekend in the midhills and the season's first snowfall down to 4,000 m. Some breakaway clouds have moved south over Nepal from last Wednesday. Even when the sun comes back early next week, expect maximum temperatures to go down to 24 and minimums in the single digits. The Kathmandu Valley will see characteristic winter fog that will take till mid-morning to burn off.

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# New decrees from the ordnance factory

Being an organ of the state and thanks to the new ordnance given to us in media, our editorial today will delve into how there can be no two opinions about the ground reality that things are really looking up in the past eight months. And since we have no choice in the matter you can be sure we will leave out no detail however slight as we go about enumerating these accomplishments. And, yes, it's the money talking: Rs 500,000 fine in unmarked Rs 1,000 bills or two years in jail, whichever comes first.

None of us had any inkling about it but it appears that the country had been taking great leaps forward. It was such a top secret that no one had a clue. America may be the land of opportunities,

but we are a land of opportunists. Whenever our leaders see an opportunity they grab it. And thank heavens for that, otherwise we'd still be

living in an age when FM radio stations actually broadcast news. That is why as Nepalis we shouldn't be asking what more the government can do to us, but how we can give it back to the government.

Given the plethora of accomplishments in the government's pandora's box, we are in the horns of dilemma. Where do we start enumerating them? But someone has to open the can of worms, and being the new official mouthpiece that task has fallen upon us.

So, let's begin with this week's main achievement which is the good news that Nepal has established diplomatic relations with Turkmenistan. About time. I know there is always a question that springs to the minds of most Nepalis when they see a news item like that, and the question is: "Where on earth is Turkmenistan?" The simple answer is that the government hasn't told us, so we can't tell you. It's a closely guarded secret.


As a part of the government's diplomatic offensive (Official motto: "Let's be as offensive as possible to interfering diplomats") Nepal has also signed a Non-aggression Pact with the Kingdom of Tonga which significantly reduces the chances of full-scale war breaking out between the two kingdoms. This will allay fears in many patriotic minds about threats to our national security from the Tongans so that we, as Nepalis, can rest even easier than we have been resting so far in the days to come. (Editor's note: To find out where the Kingdom of Tonga is, go to [www.earth.google.com/](http://www.earth.google.com/)).

As the official mouth organ we must also for the record make a note of the Nepali Congress striking off any reference to constitutional monarchy from its party preamble and replacing it with an absolute ruling dynasty in its own Central Committee.

The other national accomplishment this week was that Nepal has climbed in the global corruption rankings of Transparency International from number 90 to 117. Now, some of you may think that is bad news. But we believe it all depends on whether you are counting from the bottom or from the top. And since we have traditionally taken a bottoms-up approach on these matters in this country, this is great news. Nepal is now officially recognised as a place to do shady arms deals and this can only help alleviate poverty in certain echelons of society.

Amidst all these shining achievements the only dark spot is the fact that Tribhuvan Interchangeable Airport has still not been relocated to Pokhara in a blatant disregard of recent royal directives. Let this be a warning that department heads will face disciplinary action if the airport is not moved to Pokhara forthwith. Do we have to use heavy ordnance or what? ●






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- Damauli**  
Date : 26 Oct 2005, Wednesday  
Time : 1pm  
Venue : B.P. Ban Batika  
Local organisers and Ticket Contact: Federation of Nepalese Journalists-Tanahu, Rotaract Club-Damauli, Vyasa Nagar Jaycees, Satyawati Sec. School, Barahi Sec. School-Farakchaur.
- Charikot-Dolakha**  
Date : 28 Oct 2005, Friday  
Time : 1pm  
Venue : Kalinchowk Sec. School Ground  
Local organisers and Ticket Contact: Federation of Nepalese Journalists-Dolakha, Kalinchowk Sec. School, Pashupati Kanya Sec. School, Kutidanda Sec. School - Makiabari, Devi Sec. School - Bochi, Sarva Sec. School - Jilu, Bhim Sec. School - Dolakha, Mahendrodwaya Sec. School - Mati.
- Bhaktapur**  
Date : 30 Oct 2005, Sunday  
Time : 2pm  
Venue : Bhaktapur Durbar Square  
Local organisers and Ticket Contact: Khawapa Nasa Khals, Shree Padma Higher Sec. School, Shree Changu Narayan Higher Sec. School

Entrance Rs. 10/-  
Ticket contact Local Organisers

Organised by:

Managed by:

- Gates open at 11 am
- Bags and sharp objects not permitted in the venue