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 sunya’ (pictured). The concert has travelled to Birtamod, Hetauda, Dang and Chitwan and will move on to Pauda, Charikot and Bhaktapur Durbar Square for the final date 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.”

No one knows Asia Pacific like we do.
Elections will be a referendum on the behaviour of the political parties

Rock and hard place

The bell tolls for polls

The royal response to the rebel ceasefire was to announce elections

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

The post-election regime will most assuredly hound them with even more vigour. Party leaders conceded confidence at their Danish tea parties that they would continue to be hounded 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 the opportunists and beholden leadership that 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 a parliamentary system? It will have to give up all hope of reviving the constitution.

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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)

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 Kulekhani, whose reservoir is disastrously low. 11 meters 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, construction, the 70MW Middle Marsyangdi, is mired in managerial, construction, financial and institutional controversy. When, and if, it is finally completed in 2008 it will handle about two years of load for NEA.

The commissioning of Kulekhani-1 in 1982 resulted in a ‘food-drought syndrome’ in the national grid. As things stand, while we will have a shortage of peak power (MW), there is an excess of energy (GWh) in the system. In 2004 the national system had 2,643GWh of available energy, but the NEA could sell only 1,904GWh, 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 6 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 (6PM-5AM) rates of about Rs 2 per unit for irrigation pumping and electric vehicles and similar rates to domestic consumers and other users, 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 fistic of load shedding or conservation jingles in media. These measures were also intended to provide a price signal to NEA (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 Khubi Bijali 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 but they can replace it. 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, Praga at RONAST, chaired the NEA as Minister of Water Resources in 2002-2003.

Dipak Gyawali who served 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 it 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 Nepal 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 117th out of 159 countries surveyed. Last year, Nepal was 90th out of 146 countries. On a scale of 1 (most clean) to 10 (most corrupt), 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 144th and 82nd positions. Nepal is the ‘cleanest’ country with a CPI score of 9.7.

Thailand’s surge

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

W when the first set of swanky Daewoo Cellos 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 trafficking.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Muratich. (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 #58)

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 unfolding-averse hurnsay-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 Thais.

We should always remember that only quality will deliver in the long run. Thain 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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#269

21 - 27 OCTOBER 2005
Heavenly tips
Gorkhapatra, 17 October

According to Dr Madhab Bhattachari of the Nepal Rajya Panchanga Nirnayak Samiti, it is unusual for there to be two eclipses in one month and to have them within 13 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 Shyambhak Thapa in Gorkhapatra, 17 October

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 offensive against terrorists. There may have been some isolated disturbances but in the long run we are moving towards a restorative power 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 hardships 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 will 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

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

Global democracy
National Planning Council General Secretary Ramchandra Pandel in Deshantar, 2 October

We can never guarantee that we will not compromise with any quarter as long as we are doing politics. Of course, in certain circumstances we can compel us to make minor compromises. Even the Maoists, who have been involved 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 monarch. But all these compromises will be short-lived. The long-term policy and ideal of the Nepali Congress is the people’s democracy. We have reiterated 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 that rather than divisive the movement becomes, the less likely foreign intervention will be. The irony in our country is that those who are involved deliberately invite foreign interventions for their vested interests. It was the king’s monarch 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 days when others could say nothing while feuds 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 and that even a king understands that democracy is built upon an essential condition—democratic authority of the people. It is the supremacy of the people that has been sidelined now and what has been introduced does not fall within the democratic model.

Freezing news
Gorkhapatra, 11 October

The Ministry of Information and Communication has declared that only the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) is authorized to buy news from international agencies. According to RSS Law 2019, clause 2, other agencies must first get explicit permission from HMG before buying such news, said a ministry news release. A 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 news on 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 price of FM broadcasts. No broadcaster is allowed to simultaneously re-broadcast programs in another place within the valley.

The ministry has also announced that the Press and Publication Act 2040 has been amended to include items of news that promote terrorism and to restrict publications that contain content that goes against the national interest. The Press Council Act 2049 has also been amended to discourage 'yellow journalism' and to regulate journalists follow a code of conduct.

Managed media
Editorial in Gorkhapatra, 15 October

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 it from interfering for the sake of protesting, not appreciating good work and degrading the nation, nationality and throne while protesting is unacceptable to the Nepali people. It is national 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.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK
‘Local and general elections by 2007...puff... puff...’
Pol-Democracy

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—if 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.

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 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.

Sly
Nepal Samacharpatria, 15 October

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 lodestone 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.
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...
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.

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.

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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.

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

**RELIEF AND RESPIRE IN KAILALI**

T he fields are golden, much of the rice has already been harvested. Here in the far-western plains of Nepal it is difficult to believe we are in the country's future.

A 20-minute bicycle ride south of the highway, a school, closed for Dasain, has been opened but strongly criticised by the Maoists. They say there is not enough food, that officials in Kathmandu use terminology “so-called ceasefire” that officials in Kathmandu use.

“The situation is improving remarkably, not because of the ceasefire but because of our effectiveness as well,” he says, “people are enjoying the ceasefire. But our security status is the same: the Maoists have declared the same. It is giving the people a breathing space. We don't have any problems at all.”

Shrestha and Dhurba Basnet are police chief, DIG Ramesh Kumar Shrestha, has just finished a round of badminton. He acknowledges things have relaxed. He does not use the term ceasefire, “we are talking to the Maoists,” he says.

“The royal regime's security forces have not been drawing. We have not been informed about this. I can't say anything more.”

Kailali is, however, breathing more easily. In Tikapur's Great Garden, a huge ornamental park incongruously laid out on the banks of the Karnali, Tharu dancers rehearse their routines for a new music video. To the west, boys spend their day bathing in the sprawling Ghodaghodi Lake, Tharu villagers put on a Dasain show, comedians doing it all the more—killing and kidnapping people. In the past we would retaliate but as the ceasefire, it is giving the people a breathing space. We don't have any problems at all.”

There are, of course, signs of past violence everywhere. At Chaumala stands a bombarded-out police post, the burnt hela backdrop was the scene of the heinous unsolved killings of APF family members in July.

Dhangadhi is a city of bicycle-rickshaws. Rarely a car plies the streets, perhaps because the rich have fled to Kathmandu. Its mayor was shot dead and it has suffered more insecurity than possibly any other large town in Nepal. Last February, 2,000 Maoists stormed its prison, freeing over 150 prisoners including 70 Maoists. Seven guards were killed.

“Before the ceasefire you heard blasts everyday. It was a kind of routine,” says local restaurateur Surendra Khanal, “but since September people are happy. We don’t have any problems at all.”

The Far Western regional police chief, DIG Ramesh Kumar Shrestha, has just finished a round of badminton. He acknowledges things have relaxed. He does not use the term ceasefire, “we are talking to the Maoists,” he says. He says they are still extorting money from businesspeople in Dhangadhi, and expresses doubts about their overall intentions, saying they may be using the ceasefire to stock up on weapons and ammunition.

Whatever the politics of the ceasefire, it is giving 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 by a group of women in Tikapur’s morning laughter echoing through the moonlit night.

**COOLING OFF PERIOD:**

Boys enjoy a dip in Ghodaghodi Lake near Tikapur in Kailali on Saturday.
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 ‘terrorist activities’. The survey of radio listenership indicated that the broadcast of news, communications 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 February First royal takeover was widely criticised, this is the first time a public opinion poll has shown how unpopular it was. Half the respondents said they either stopped listening to 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 government’s perspective. A majority of those surveyed listened to entertainment programs on FM but most said the program they listened to most vividly 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, consciousness, frequency of news broadcasts. A third of the respondents said they still listen to Radio Nepal (a majority of them living in urban 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 don’t broadcast bulletins. Asked about the ban on news after 3 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.

FM Radio as a Source of News: To be a Constructed Imagination or is it Really Popular?

Survey conducted for Social Science Baha with Premdechen Sapkota, Pradhan Pratikshya, Akash Pratikshya, Indu Adhikari, Prava Vaeiakarma, Rajan Karmacharya

Survey conducted for Social Science Baha with Premdechen Sapkota, Pradhan Pratikshya, Akash Pratikshya, Indu Adhikari, Prava Vaeiakarma, Rajan Karmacharya
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 Muzzafarabad in Azad Kashmir to see and evacuate my family. I also wanted to assess the loss to Muzzafarabad, its peoples and infrastructure. I reached the town on foot a few days after the disaster only to find a place 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 long as is expected in our culture. Viewing television footage of the tragedy didn’t begin to give the true scale of the catastrophe and the loss of human lives, property, the livelihood 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 the house which I had built.

I am thankful to the Nepali people and the government for their sympathy and financial aid shown by the Nepali people and the government. I thank the staff at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu for their support. These gestures of solidarity lightened 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. I am very much myन े and to begin moving forward into the future. I do the unbelievable in financing...
Sujay Lama will be conducting a tennis clinic for Nepali children in Kathmandu. Lama@uiuc.edu

"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 pursue a double degree in international relations and public communication. When I graduated in 1992, I wanted to work for professional agencies in Nepal but the lure of the game was strong. Working with players from all over the world gave me a sense that I had 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 I had

Effective coaching means holding your students accountable for good and bad times is vital for your students’ development. Positive feedback and the belief you have in them through the process 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 also need to have a sense of purpose. The best way to achieve that is to provide them with clear guidance and encourage them to reach their full potential.

One of the best parts of my job is the opportunity to work with professional athletes. 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 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 organizations (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.

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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 ethics, I must be ethical. As a coach, you play many roles. Sometimes you have to be tough that demand 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 organizations (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.

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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. Anuraj 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.

“No one is on tour, we just enjoy the game and with Nepal’s scenery and Gokarna’s amazing setting I knew everyone was going to enjoy it,” Anuraj 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. "Om Hinga, 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 was 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 Stableford 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 Kaiser Roka, an Indian exporter of Nepali descent who says he found practicing his Nepali with the caddies almost as enjoyable as the game itself.

Kam 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 TTC 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 Sashil Singh Sikhwat 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.”
The Danes holiday did wonders to clear up Kathmandu’s air. With significant reduction in traffic on the streets, even along normally busy streets such as Pullahari 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

For show timings call 4442220, www.jainepal.com
New decrees from the ordinance factory

By Kunda Dixit

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 kick off 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 alloy 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/).

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 not yet 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?

Women in Concert Part III

Come not only for the Music, but also for the Cause in support of Sewa Kendra

Featuring: Anisha, Ami, Arpna, Poon, Priy, Sahana, Sapana, Shristi Vithals, Pratibha, accompanied by: Shresth Walkers

Tansen-Palpa
Date: 24 Oct 2005, Monday
Time: 7.30 pm
Local organizers and Ticket Contact:
Dhaneswar Pandey, Federation of Himalayan Youth Clubs, Janakpur
Kaji Regmi, Bhusal Budh, Palpa

Damasoti
Date: 25 Oct 2005, Wednesday
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: 50th Anniv. Hall, Damasoti
Local organizers and Ticket Contact:
Dhaneswar Pandey, Federation of Himalayan Youth Clubs, Janakpur
Kaji Regmi, Bhusal Budh, Palpa

Rokhpa
Date: 27 Oct 2005, Friday
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: 50th Anniv. Hall, Damasoti
Local organizers and Ticket Contact:
Dhaneswar Pandey, Federation of Himalayan Youth Clubs, Janakpur
Kaji Regmi, Bhusal Budh, Palpa

Nagarkot- Kathmandu
Date: 30 Oct 2005, Sunday
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: Dorje Dorjé Park, Nagarkot
Local organizers and Ticket Contact:
Pradip Rana, Bhusal Budh, Palpa

Ticket price: Rs. 10-

Organized by:

Managed by:

Today in Dhangadi

Come, join us

Shubhakar

Date: 30 Oct 2005, Sunday
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: Durbar Square, Dhangadi
Local organizers and Ticket Contact:
Amrit Manjhi, Bhusal Budh, Palpa

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Sudarshan Nepal

Organised by: Nepali Congress, Chandragup and Durbar square in Tansen, Palpa