Taking flight

King Gyanendra leaves on an extended tour as the Maoists and parties converge

ANALYSIS by KUNDA DIXIT

The three-way deadlock between the parties, the king and the rebels that has paralysed the country for years is now giving way to convergence between the Maoists and the parties. Cold-shouldered by the king, the parties have turned to the Maoists and are making progress coaxing them to join the political mainstream. Sources say the rebels have come around to accepting multiparty democracy if assimilation of the rebel rank and file can be guaranteed.

The recently concluded Maoist plenum conditionally approved this strategy despite strong misgivings from the foot soldiers about any compromises with the constitutional forces. This is why the Maoists are pressing for an outside mediator to oversee disarmament and ensure the army will not sabotage the deal.

The CPI-M partners in the Indian coalition government led by Prakash Karat have been actively lobbying Nepali parties and the Maoists for months and this effort seems to be paying off. US ambassador to Nepal, James Moriarty, got wind of this and issued a pointed warning on 4 November to the parties to stay away from the Maoists. He even underlined his message by briefing selected journalists that the Maoists can’t be trusted and a party-rebel alliance would undermine the king’s future role in ensuring stability.

There is now an open rift in the prevailing Indo-US policy on Nepal. A party-king pact favoured by Washington would isolate the Maoists and keep them fighting. A party-Maoist pact, would isolate the king and may keep the army on the battlefield. Either way, it could mean prolonged conflict unless strong pressure is brought to bear on the warring sides.

At the moment, it seems to be the rebels who are under pressure from Indian communists who have a vested interest in defusing Nepal’s Maoist problem through a multiparty solution because of the implications for India’s own radical Naxalites. The Iraq oil-for-food scandal that removed Indian Minister of External Affairs, Natwar Singh, this week has also weakened the palace’s clout in New Delhi since he was seen to be sympathetic to the February First royal takeover.

The question now is which option will bring the conflict to an end sooner and determine who will get the credit (and the reward) for restoring peace.

In the short-term the king has the most to lose if the party-rebel alliance goes ahead because it would undermine his ambition to be an active monarch. However, in the long-term it will buffle the king from being directly tarnished by day-to-day politics and may actually help it to regain its shine.

Amidst all this, the king leaves Friday on a three-week tour that includes the SAARC Summit in Dhaka, the UN’s IT jamboree in Tunis and an inspection of Nepali troops on UN peacekeeping duty in Africa. And everyone is left guessing about his next move.
Thinking the unthinkable
Nepal’s identity needs to be re-invented

B eck to Nepal after far too many months away and the first thing I notice is the other mess that is Kathmandu. Jaded Valley dwellers say the city has long been a chaotic mess but it’s no longer worse.

When I first started coming here in 1997, there was a mayor and ward committee and party politics to press for change. Now an amorphous CDO with no qualifications to run a city and anyway. Kantipur’s plight is viewed sympathetically in fewer and fewer newspapers these days although the country’s main media house is freedom’s standard-bearing right now.

Kathmandu’s international community is at least. What the hell is going on in Shangri La, they ask each other. Diplomats work feverishly to find solutions to a country’s dire plight. Some want to save the monarchy. Others think the dire situation is the country’s own fault. A few see a democratic republic with parties of left and right debating the issues in parliament. In the countryside, the revolution continues unchecked. Indeed, informed, military analysts are gloomy. They see Nepal’s people caught between an army that has only recently been disarmed and insurgents who follow an insane ideology that has killed hundreds of millions around the world. Even during democracy, the Royal Nepal Army officers would tell any foreigner who would listen that they only defended “king and country, in that order.” In four years time, a force that was largely ceremonial and no real military experience whatsoever has doubled in size and become a source of fear and grief for the nationalist community, the urban intelligentsia. Until recently, the Maoists targeted the same people.

The privileged elite party on. But the hands that clutched napkin-wrapped glasses tremble at the thought of how badly things are going. These comfortable folk with familiar surnames and far too much influence seem to have a profound compassion in favor of usurping what was left of democracy. They told themselves that a free press and human rights NGOs are all that stopped the RNA from crushing Maoism. The dismal record of the security forces belie that claim. History is repeating itself. Monarchies do not work. Period. It’s easy to despair, to give up, or fly. But losing hope would be wrong. Instead, I wonder if Nepal’s and their international friends don’t now need to think beyond long-held nostrums, to find new, deeper paths that is creative, flexible and humane. It’s time to start talking about many things to one another.

Omens from Mars

The flyby of the red planet could be a sign for superstitious leaders

STATE OF THE STATE

Dakshin Karki

The weak monsoon means harvests will be hit in the tarai. The price of rice in the country increased dramatically after deregulation in 1990, and for a white power cut was history. But because there has been an enormous power cut is history. But because there has been an enormous power cut and its power tariff, people have been having a hard time. The Kulekhani reservoir can’t generate enough power to meet the demands. The cost of the power is onerous and is a barometer of public dissatisfaction: its price per kilowatt hour rose by 30 percent (Rs 25 to Rs 40 up from Rs 14 six months ago.

The booming winter climate and winter power crisis and heating power price hike could be yet another

control their increasingly militant cadres. Then the regime’s hired hooligans will be no match against ideologically driven youngsters. As that confrontation spreads across towns Maoist control over the countryside will deepen further.

And the midst of all this, the chairman of the parliament has moved out of crisis and into months away and the first thing I notice is the other mess that is Kathmandu. Jaded Valley dwellers say the city has long been a chaotic mess but it’s no longer worse.

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OUT OF AFRICA

It is probably a common feature of countries wracked by turmoil and uncertainty to look for somewhere else in the world where things are worse. Perhaps this explains the habit of Nepali newspapers regularly juxtapose Nepal with some fictional African land of cannibal kings and semi-dressed savages. "Look!", we can say to ourselves, "things are bad in Nepal but at least we don’t wear bones in our hair."

Sadly, the Nepali Times is not immune to this unfortunate trend, whether it is a CK Lal ‘Thank God we aren’t a failed African state’ piece or Raj Skayam’s appalling racist cartoon in last week’s edition. What I find curious about this slim line of reasoning is that, on balance, things are going a lot better in Africa. Most African countries offer their populations functioning police and health services. In many of them, the levels of absolute poverty, government corruption, female illiteracy and maternal mortality (to name but a few) are dropping.

Interestingly, most African leaders are now democratically elected, including those kings Gayanendra will meet during his upcoming tour. Can Nepal say the same?

Brian Gilligan, Patan

BAN BANDAS

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Blind Rijal, email

CROCODILE TEARS

Re: Pramod Bhagat’s letter (#271) about my Guest Column (‘Rock and hard place’, #269). I was only arguing about the indispensable need for the political parties to cleanse themselves by removing their corrupt leaders before they can claim to be democratic institutions and face the upcoming elections. What these corrupt parties think is good for them is not necessarily good for the country, and grooming at New Delhi’s feet must not be seen as a substitute for popular support that the recent EU troika had deservedly advised them to regain.

The recent visit by the Indian politicians would not have been a problem had they not told a reporter at the airport that Bhutan never had democracy and therefore does not need it. And it must not be overlooked that they simply brushed aside NG leader GP Koirala’s plea to help solve the Maoist problem while the rebel leaders have always enjoyed safe haven in their own country. With our politicians in quest of power at any cost, the Indian politicians were obviously on a mission only to shed crocodile tears in Kathmandu.

Bhakti Krishna Shrestha, Kathmandu

CHAND

Continuations, Mr Lokendra Bahadur Chand, you got your son back. Sadly, the same can’t be said about the hundreds of Nepali parents who have had their children abducted or disappeared and have no one to turn to them and in no way of knowing where they are or, if they are even alive. Although you fared far better than other parents, hopefully it will propel you into action to make sure other Nepali parent has to go through what you did.

P Joshi, Kathmandu

BABBA SAN

I really appreciated Kunda Dixit’s Under My Hat piece (‘Driving other nuts’, #271). One of my cousins was pulled over by the revered Kathmandu traffic vigilante Babba San a couple of days before his departure for not putting on his seat belt. When my cousin apologised, Babba San he took out a chocolate bar richly imbued with nuts (that’s right Kunda) and lectured him on the perils of driving without the belt. Mr Babba will be missed as much for his kindness as for his diligence. He brought a sense of relief to our nutty driving habits. Babba San also loved children, often teaching them how to be moving the country, and that includes the #270). Hell one spends eternity in. Purgatory one visits until one has worked Much to my delight, Kunda Dixit’s concern that FM this paragraph especially to the poor and socially support such an act which caused such even get an Id greeting thanks to the need to move.

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Nepal exports lokta worth $4 million a year overseas but Nepalis aren't buying it

Ironically, while foreigners needed no reminder of the value of this durable product made from the inner bark of a Himalayan shrub known as lokta, that didn't seem to be the case with Nepalis. Over the past few years, lokta's uses have branched out way beyond writing paper and envelopes. The group Creative Women's Craft has made clothes out of it, Kathmandu-Nepal exports it to Japan, where currency the yen, World Friendship Association combines lokta with cotton, and silk to produce cloth. Lokta paper is exported to Japan. There are even international makes Japanese fans and greeting cards, notebooks and even paintings.

Handmade Paper and its Products at the Yak and Yeti Hotel.

While lokta products are more in demand than the paper itself, the home market is still disappointing. Various organisations like Sana Hantakala specialise in promoting lokta products but as Shop Manager Ramila Shakyu says, “The lack of tourism hasn’t affected exports of lokta but the amount that we sell locally has seen a drastic decline.”

Lokta paper dates back centuries. Earliest accounts from the eighth century record Nepali traders in Tibet manufacturing and selling it to Buddhist monks who used it to write their scriptures. However, when the trade with Tibet diminished, the craftsmen scattered around the country. Since then, lokta has established itself as one of Nepal’s leading exports. According to German aid group GTZ, the export market of lokta paper and products is currently worth about $4 million dollars annually.

Lokta is promoted under the Handicrafts of Nepal (HAN) and its sub-group, the Nepal Handicraft Paper Association (HANDPASS). In 2003/2004 the handmade paper sector was ranked fourth among exports of handicraft products and it’s estimated that 500 Nepali organisations and firms produce lokta. Most are satisfied with the export market, but are worried that Nepalis are not buying Nepali paper. “This wasn’t organized not only to bring buyers and sellers together but also to promote Nepali paper in Nepal. Our exports are great but we just haven’t been able to market our product within our own country,” says Kimi Dangol of Lotus Paper Craft.

Raghunath Shrestha of Bhaktapur Craft Paper has a slightly different view. “We need to promote Nepali paper and its use in government offices again. I think Nepali doesn’t buy the paper not only because it is expensive but also because they like the smooth, slick cheap Indian paper.” Shrestha sells Rs 250,000 worth of paper a month, 80 percent of which goes to Switzerland, 15 percent to other countries and only five percent is sold in Nepal. “Even out of that five percent I think the expats in Kathmandu are the ones who buy it,” says Shrestha.

The lokta industry is about more than just an export commodity. Many organisations and companies provide employment to women and local farmers as well. Dongol estimates that almost 80 percent of the people working in lokta are women. Anjani Tamang of Creative Women’s Craft says, “I decided to open an organisation where a lot of women with skill but no income could support themselves.”

The colourful displays and inventive creations showcased by the 26 organisations at the exhibition were inspiring. Lokta is the future and it’s about time Nepalis realised its potential and started buying Nepali. 

Flowery business

Seeta Gurung of The Himalayan Cottage Industry has found a novel way to make products out of lokta– mixing them with flowers. The petals embedded in the lokta paper are crafted into photo frames, calendars, greeting cards, notebooks and even paintings.

“When people hear flowers, they assume it’s dry flowers,” says Seeta, “but I use fresh flowers.”

She gets her inspiration from her own backyard and started making flowery papers as a hobby. But after her creations became a hit at a recent exhibition, Seeta hasn’t been able to keep up with orders.

Because she needs higher quality paper than is available in the market, Seeta goes lokta shopping herself, carefully choosing each sheet. While she has her hands full meeting local demand, Seeta wouldn’t mind exporting her products.

Importers are worried about durability and Seeta says her products have withstood the test of time. “I am still experimenting with the durability but some of my paintings are three to four years old and the flowers have still retained their colours and look fresh.”

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Women and children suffer most in conflict

At the time, ‘Nepal’ was used to refer to a few bajars in the heart of present-day Kathmandu. Forty years ago, college graduates were so scarce that some found it a matter of public pride to write ‘BA’ or ‘MA’ on their resumes. Thirty years ago, unless you knew a senior government officer well, getting a passport to go abroad took years. And 10 years ago, if you were a resident of Bhaktapur, Dang or Darchula, all you received clearly on your transistor radio was state- sanctioned Kathmandu-centric news and music from the towns of Nepal in Singh Darbar.

Indeed for much of the past 50 years, Nepal has existed as a brahmi capitalist: no matter what was going on inside, few on the outside saw what was brewing. This opacity allowed the then rulers to maintain a pleasant fiction of ‘poor’ but happy and harmonious society, and to continue to stoke the embers of narrow patriotic through various ‘soil-appropriate’ remedies, which benefited only the thin slice of the country’s ‘elite’ population.

The overheated stew finally bubbled over in 1990. Soon, with the country’s ‘elite’ population.


to everyone inside and outside of the aquarium—is what those in power fail to grasp. They send thousands of Nepalis going abroad to study, work, travel, and don’t-listen-to-foreigners, only to see the rest of the world get an inflamed view of Nepal. Such tactics have grown up for much of the past 50 years.

E-TICKETS ON THAI: Thai Airways is launching a new service in Nepal on 1 November, 2005 making it the first airline to do so here. As a part of its cost-cutting the airline will also implement E-ticketing with its travel agents from November, 2005 making it the first airline to launch electronic ticketing in Nepal on 1

Nepal has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with an estimated 4,500 women dying yearly of pregnancy-related causes. Health care delivery has become even more challenging for NGOs and UN agencies like UNFPA during the current conflict, says Sultan Aziz, director of the Asia-Pacific Division of UNFPA, who was in Kathmandu recently.

Exploring Langtang

While tourism opportunities in the Langtang region as a safe tourism destination and will include activities such as an Ekadashi fair, sale and exhibition of various local products, cultural programs, hot spring baths, trekking, home-stays with local families, lodging at a traditional Tamang community lodge, horse riding, archery, tours of an underground hydro-power station and of the Himalayan Nature Centre. The festival is being held as tourist arrivals continue to grow. The number of visitors arriving in Nepal by air increased 15 percent in October over the same month last year, according to the NTB.

Brass cauldron and glass aquarium

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashtuosh Tiwar

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Letter to His Majesty

Himod Pahad in Ghatana ra Bichar, 9 November

Your Majesty, as an citizen of this country I am writing to bring to your notice that your voice is not just a personal one but that of all patriotic and democratic citizens of Nepal. According to our Hindu tradition, the monarch is considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. That is why the land of Nepal is our motherland and the monarch our father and why he is regarded as the caretaker of the people. The Narayanthi murders on 1 June 2001 ended the lives of the entire family of your majesty's brother and forever vanished the superstitious belief that the king is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The wound inflicted by this sad incident will pain the nation for many ages. Your Majesty, if the monarchy had remained with the Nepali people this episode that put a black mark on the proud history of the Royal Palace would have never occurred. However, the late King Birendra has now left to us the future of the Nepali people and the responsibility of taking the nation forward. At a time when conflict is tearing the nation apart its is up to you to protect the constitution dedicated to the people by the late king as well as the image of your royal family. Your first responsibility therefore is to provide the country a safe alternative to the flaws of the conflict.

Your Majesty, the people are a great force. A nation without its people and a monarch without his subjects are meaningless. These are the same people who faced death to start an armed rebellion to place your grandfather King Tribhuvan on the throne and honoured him as the Father of the Nation, bringing an end to an era when your forefathers were surrounded by armed security forces. Is this not a contrast to the rule of law? It is not the Supreme Court that has lost but the announcement made by Your Majesty on 1 February in which you promised good government.

It is wrong to use the army as a security cordon for the palace and the royal family. To conduct your unofficial royal visits by making the army surround villages and towns is an indication of how unsafe you feel amongst your own people. You must to end this distrust between a father and his children. You must break free from the crite of corrupt politicians like Dr Tulsi Giri, who till a few months back declared that all he had as property was 10 lacs of gold and yet was able to pay back millions in debt within two months, Dan Bahadur Shahi, who ordered armed police to surround the court, and the enemy of press freedom and censor of PM stations, Tanaka Chakal. If you want good government you must make those on the black list of the Nepal Rasta Bank pay their debts even if they are royal relatives. What is more, if you really desire to earn popularity you must consider the resources of your late brother's family could be diverted to national development. You only have to stay within the spirit of the constitution and pay your income taxes. Your kindness and patriotism will transform the present dispas and rage that the Nepali people feel for the monarchy into something more positive. A monarch's responsibility does not end with merely wearing the crown. For democratic norms and values are safeguarded and the peoples' rights secured, the political parties will be the bridge between the monarchy and the people. The roads will no longer turn into battlefields and the people will be forever grateful. The time has come to have the good to the nation and the people. If these methods continue and more of the peoples' rights are taken away, a fate similar to revolutionat France awaits us all.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Indian track

Gokulpatria, 7 November

Indian railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav has called the 1 February royal takeover a selfish act by the king for the nation and the people. Yadav also made it clear that the Indian government has already joined hands with the royal regime. The chairman of the Rastra Janata Dal made the remarks while attending an election meeting in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh on 5 November. He said that his party has always supported constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy and stressed that law and order should be the first priority en route to real and sustainable democracy. Yadav revealed that the Indian government had allocated more than Rs 500 million for the preparation of a blueprint of the Kosi High Dam. “Once the high dam is built, people of Nepal and India will no more suffer from flooding and farmers from both countries will be able to draw the required quantity of water,” he told the mass meeting. Yadav also said the Indian government planned to install a transmission line near Kosi barrage, an investment of Rs 600 million. He said that terrorist activities had hampered development works in both countries. “If the Mausics are really struggling for the cause of the people, they should give up violence and take part in elections,” said Yadav. The Indian minister urged Nepal's agitating political parties to hold talks with the prime minister.

Commuters

NepalBhasha, 6 November

The man who has been pleading with New Delhi's power brokers to get him reinstated in power here, CPN (UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, has strongly condemned China's recent decision to provide Nepal with arms and ammunition. Nepal has always been critical of China for what he calls its lack of support for the 1990 movement. Beijing has not reacted to the remarks but they have exposed the real face of leftist leaders like Nepal and revealed how communism works in Nepal. While China has stepped forward to help its small neighbour fight terrorism, communist parties like the CPN (UML) have condemned the assistance, Madhav Kumar Nepal's position he will go to any extent to please India, the country that the communists have always criticized and harassed. The real irony is that a certain section of Nepalis still believe Madhav to be their leader despite his pro-India stance. Isn't it high time these people know the real identity of their leaders? Madhav's latest visit to New Delhi has proven one more thing—the expansionists in India are more comfortable with communists than with those

dressed up as democrats. They know that those so-called communists can better serve their vested interests.

Invasion!

Ghatana Ra Bichaar, 9 November

In what appears to be a case of manipulation, a reputable publication in India has published a report claiming that the Royal Nepali Army has occupied thousands of square kilometres of Indian land. Published as if it were an eyewitness account, the report was featured on the front page of Punjab Kesari. It said the Nepali army was advancing into Indian territory, taking over several patrol points of the Indian Special Security Bureaus (SSB) including Balungo, Parbati, Bhehrat and Susta. The story went on to report that the Nepali government had sent fighter planes to the area and that clashes had left many Nepali soldiers and SSB troops. It reported Nepali spy planes in the Indian sky, taking off from bases at places like Susta. The report was said to be filed by an undercover reporter of Punjab Kesari who had interviewed more than 20,000 Nepali soldiers in the “Nepal-occupied Indian lands” distributing Nepali citizenship to locals. The story said the SSB had sent an SGS to the Home Ministry in New Delhi, which had already written to the Ministry of External Affairs. The report is so unconvincing that even the most uninformed media realizes that there is no truth in it. But the question is: why was it published at all?

Democracy dawns

Editorial in Rajbhashi, 11 November

The king's message on the occasion of Constitution Day is especially significant given the different comments circulating about the effectiveness of the constitution. The king has given high importance to the people's opinion that the 15-year-old constitution is still relevant and stresses the need for a commitment to reform the democratic system. In line with that commitment, the king has already announced local elections within three months and general elections in the next year. Nepal's constitution is unique in that it allows a leader attack from several fronts, including from the creators of the constitution who themselves are becoming government. In this context, the only patron of the constitution, King Gyanendra, has been a prime candidate in elections in order to fully implement the constitution. The parties have been violating the provisions of the constitution, which they themselves had once prepared. During their tenure, the country's policies were dictated by vested interests. This created a conspiracy to overshadow nationalist forces. Developments after the royal takeover have shown that the patrimony of the king has led to the dawn of a democratic era in Nepal once again.
Maoist activities during the ceasefire have been inconsistent. While the rebels meet political parties at interaction programs in Jhapa and Sunsari, in Ilam they have called for a blockade and are not letting foodstuffs be sold in the markets. Maoists there have ordered locals to remain in their villages and to not indulge in any kind of business. In addition, the rebels have distributed pamphlets in Jhapa’s Surunga market calling for tenders for tax collection of the hat bajar. In east Nepal, Maoists still collect funds from villagers in public meetings. The abduction of teachers and students has not stopped. In fact, in an effort to increase their activities in public meetings, demonstrations and training programs, the abductions have increased.

The security forces say they have increased operations but when one visits villages, soldiers and police are nowhere to be seen. They can sometimes be spotted patrolling hilly areas but usually they remain close to district headquarters and market areas. In Argakhachi, the army is confined to safe Sandikharka. They haven’t dared to enter Maoist affected villages after 12 personnel were killed and 26 injured in a security operation in June. On the other hand, unarmed Maoists were killed by forces near Limbuckh in Morang on 14 October. A few days later, two more were killed in Dumrize, Tapsejung and three more arrested. A week later, another person was gunned down by security forces in Panchthar.

Gopal Prasad Panthi, former president of Nepali Congress (D) went home during Dasain this year for the first time in eight years. But his visit was only possible when he declared he was quitting politics forever. In Argakhachi, you can smell fear on the streets. Many political party leaders have fled the district while those who remain have agreed to live by Maoist rules. When UML leaders visit their local peers they are threatened. Even now, during the ceasefire, all the Mechi level offices in Jhapa, such as zonal administration, police and transportation offices, are planning to move near the army barracks in Charati due to the deteriorating security conditions.

The schools that closed under Maoist threats before the ceasefire remain shut. The All Nepal Student Union (revolutionary) has said the schools that were handed over to the community have not returned the administration to the government. They padlocked the 12 schools in Morang again last week. Sick and tired of closed schools, students of a boarding school in Jhapa held a news conference to demand the immediate reopening of their schools (pictured).

The padlocked homes of 33 workers of different parties in Argakhachi have not been opened. Local party leaders and activists whose movements had been restricted by the rebels are still not allowed to travel and the ‘visa system’ has not been lifted. Since the ceasefire was declared, 15,000 people have been kidnapped in Panchthar and west Nepal. The Maoists abducted teachers, students and general citizens from five VDCs and forced them to attend their program in Jitpure Market, Jitpur.

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Women warriors

Female rebels in eastern Nepal are using the ceasefire for training

Comrade Chunauti and Sujiata are also sisters. Their only brother joined the Royal Nepali Army and never returned home, so the girls also chose to take up arms. Chunauti is a section commander while younger sister Sujiata is a political worker with the self-styled Kirat National Liberation Front.

The proportion of women in the Maoist ranks in eastern Nepal appears to be higher than in the west. “There is growing influence of female members of the Kirat community in the war,” says Ashmita, district secretary of Khotang, “there is no discrimination against women in these areas which is why women are permitted.”

In the Salleri, the Maoist 6th brigade is regarded as one of the Maoists’ strongest units, more than half of the militants are women, most from Limbu, Tamang and Sherpa communities. “Women make very good assault commanders, they are more confident and tough,” says political commissar Dipesh of the 16th battalion.

But no matter how tough they appear to be, most of the young women we talked to said they were homesick. That could be one reason why they are granted home leave. Nima was allowed to travel to Bhojpur from Sindhuli to meet her sister Rima, who works in a different battalion. “I miss my family, but the party has allowed us visits,” says Nima who carries her firearm even while visiting home.

How about sex and marriage? “Although Marxism does not prohibit anyone from falling in love, we believe in sex only after marriage,” says Chunauti, who recently got married to a fellow-fighter from her company. Maoist commanders have asked rank and file to be very cautious about relationships and not to marry outside the force. “It’s best to find someone who shares similar ideals and thoughts. Your head has to lead your choice for love, sex and marriage,” says Chunauti’s unmarried sister Sujiata, adding that she is still looking for a good match for her.

Despite the rules, personal problems have led some to abandon the movement. The district secretary of Khotang, Comrade Hiranya, recently deserted after being involved with district leader Comrade Bharika. The chief of the district people’s government from Okhaldhunga, Lanka Rai, also deserted the party and ran away with his subordinate, Comrade Resma. “They were involved in an illicit relationship and have disgraced the party,” says Comrade Asha, Janakpur coordinator of the

Comrade Sunita, 18, is a reporter who often accompanies the militants with her tape recorder, camera, notebook and pen. Here she is (left) taking into her cordless phone in front of a chaitya that is emblazoned with Maoist graffiti. A correspondent for the Maoist ‘Radio People’s Republic’ and Jamshed newspaper, she also has to participate in daily military training.

“We live and eat with the guerrillas and also report major battles. That’s why this training is necessary for our own protection,” explains Sunita. Like her, many other young women work for the rebels’ information units. “The party has given special direction to involve more women in production and communication, in both the organisation and the frontline,” says Comrade Srijana, Bhojpur district secretary.
Maoist-affiliated women’s organisation.

Three years ago, the Maoists central women’s department started surveying women guerrillas to analyse what kind of personal problems could come up. Female fighters answered questions about sexual discrimination by male peers and about difficulties related to pregnancy, contraceptives and other problems. But the survey was never finished. “Some of the forms reached the hands of the enemy, so it was discontinued,” Comrade Asha told us.

The women fighters spoke in revolutionary jargon, but articulated clearly that they joined the movement to “liberate Nepali women”. Many of women may not know the intricacies of the political debate in Kathmandu, but they appear convinced that by carrying a gun instead of a doko they will unshackle Nepali women. Says Asha: “The road to liberation is difficult, but we will reach it one day.”

BAND OF THE BRIGADE OF GURKHAS - SOUNDING RETREAT

This very professional military Band who have come from the UK will perform while marching. It is an opportunity not to be missed. This charity show is in aid of the Gurkha Memorial Museum Nepal which is based in Pokhara near British Camp, Pokhara.

The event will be held on Saturday, 19th November 2005 from 1 to 5.30 pm at Mahendra Adarsha Vidyashram, Higher Secondary School, From Satdo Bato roundabout 50m towards Godabari Road.

Tickets can be purchased from British Gurkhas Kathmandu, Jawalakhel gate or on the day at the gate.

For more details contact 4372822 or majyam@mos.com.np

There are also stalls where you can try Momo, play Tombola, see Sepak Takraw game display, buy 2006 Pocket Diary in Nepali and English dates, buy Nepal cloth and many more. There are also several attractive Raffle Prices including Kat-Pokri air ticket donated by Cheerful Holiday.

NC Rs 100 Entry Ticket includes one FREE Tissue Towan & Raffle Price. (Children under 3 feet height Free. School groups half price.)

Sponsored by British Gurkhas Kathmandu.
“Slavery with a capital S”

Nepali girls forced into prostitution in India are trafficked and held by Nepalis themselves

MARTY LOGAN

L

ast for money is the root cause for Nepali girls being forced to become sex slaves in brothels in Mumbai and Kolkata, according to a report just released by INP Terre des homes.

Brothel owners, managers and traffickers are mostly Nepali and can recoup the “purchase price” of new arrivals in up to seven months, meaning the money the girls earn by turning 10-12 tricks a day in their years of bondage that follow is pure profit. “To me the most significant thing we found is that the trafficker is a small player. There is a very lucrative system down there in Bombay and Kolkata for the brothel owners,” said John Frederick, research director of the study, at its release in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

“Client demand could be filled by girls 18 or older but the brothel owners’ demand (for younger girls) is immense, it is a brothel owners’ demand (for many girls 18 or older but the only incidents we found were slavery, with a capital S).”

The girls are between 14-16 when trafficked and on average spend three to five years in bondage but that can last as long as 10 years and ends at the whim of the brothel owner. This is the most perilous time for sex workers because they have no control over their lives or bodies. For instance, they are often forced to have sex without condoms and if they test positive for HIV are immediately thrown out of the brothel.

Once their enslavement ends (for most women between the ages of 18 and 22) the majority of sex workers exercise their freedom by entering into a new arrangement with the brothel owner, either renting a room where they live and work or paying to use a room to continue being sex workers or living elsewhere.

By then many have developed a “mother-daughter” relationship with the Nepali owner or manager, someone with whom they share a language and culture amidst foreign people.

The UN’s International Labour Organisation estimates that 30,000 Nepalis work in India’s brothels. Most of those studied in the two Indian cities have passed through slavery to become “fre agents,” according to Frederick. Many of them told researchers they would like to return to Nepal but knew they would be shunned by their families and communities.

Surprisingly, they also feared being encroached by Nepali NGOs and put into what they consider institutional “hell holes”.

Frederick cautioned that a heavy-handed approach, such as the one taken by Mumbai police, is the wrong way. “People after years of being terrified, 15 years of HIV/AIDS prevention work has been destroyed. If we build up those brothels we’re going to damage these women and damage their kids.”

Instead, the solution starts with encouraging self-regulation in the brothels. In Kolkata, the Durbar Mahila Samanvaya Committee (DMSC) started in the 1990s with an HIV preventionprogram and now includes savings and credit projects, childcare, healthcare and self-regulation committees that screen each new sex worker to ensure she is not under 15 or a trafficking victim.

That work has reduced the number of sex slaves in Kolkata’s brothels—but “there is no evidence that trafficking of Nepalese has diminished in India as a whole” concludes the report.

That will require further work in other cities.

Chronicler of Nepal’s sorrow

Kishore Nepal’s collage of Nepal’s 10 year war

For those who missed episodes of the Nepalese war popular Mal Abhimat television show (and those who don’t have the bandwidth to watch its streaming video through the internet), the roving reporter has just put highlights in his English book, Under the Shadow of Violence.

In the past four years, Kishore Nepal has toured 70 of Nepal’s 75 districts, listening to ordinary Nepal’s: their fears and hopes, their desires and disappointments and their everyday stories. Many of these sometimes haunting and sometimes uplifting tales of suffering and survival have been broadcast in Mal Abhimat on Nepali Television.

The program is the Nepali nation talking to itself, the individual sagas of Nepalis whose lives are a world away from Kathmandu’s beauty pages and fancy parties.

Last year, Nepal transcribed his interviews in a travelogue titled, Abhijanrupako Abaj. Under the Shadow of Violence is the rough translation of that Nepali book, some of the episodes have already appeared in these pages in the past three years.

Both books and the tv series are a testimony to the hard work that this tireless journalist has put in to chronicle Nepal’s sorrow. Despite freedoms guaranteed by the constitution, Nepali journalists have for the most part taken the easy way out: with arm chair analysis, lazy reporting that rarely goes in-depth and a reluctance to look beyond Kamalpur Valley at the real Nepal.

Happily there are still journalists around like Kishore Nepal. In his films, Nepal shows the reality and drive that would make reporters in their twenties envious. He has walked thousands of kilometers, sometimes up to 16 hours a day and often across war-ravaged districts collecting the oral testimony of Nepalis.

Under the Shadow of Violence may have stilted English but the gravity of the message it carries is so important that it almost doesn’t matter. In fact, the awkward translations give the prose an urgency and raw edge that would have been lost with slicker English. The author is the medium who brings us face-to-face with ordinary farmers, school children, policemen, young Maoist recruits and civil servants in far-flung district capitals.

“The Maoists threaten the women by saying they will kidnap or murder their children or burn their houses down if they are not fed… the security forces rarely go to the village but when they do local people are caught in the crossfire,” Maya Kunwar tells Nepal in Doti. As usual, it is the women and children who suffer most in this war and it is the poorest among them who pay the price, not the rich and powerful who wage it.

Belauti Khanal in Kawasoti tells Nepal: “The Maoists come and tell us to cook for them, we can’t say no for fear of them killing our children or husbands. Next day the security forces harass us. It is very difficult to convince them that we had no choice but to feed the Maoists. Their behaviour is often worse than the Maoists.”

And that is the recurring theme here, chapter after chapter. Helpless Nepal trapped in a war in which Nepalis are slaughtering fellow Nepalis. There are tales of disappearances, displacement and desperation. Widowed women, kidnapped children, demoralised teachers, and a countryside so brutalised by conflict it is unrecognisable.

The last section has a picture by Ravi Tuladhar of a suspension bridge blasted by the Maoists where villages have placed a precarious plank across the void. It is symbolic of the state of the county, a broken promise of progress and a people pulling along just to survive from day to day.

Kishore Nepal’s message and the message of almost everyone he has interviewed are the Nepali people reject the war and they want it resolved through negotiations. Support for the Maoists is mainly because of the threat of violence, and most ordinary people are even more afraid of the security forces. Even if this conflict is resolved, future wars will break out unless devolution disperses Kathmandu’s political and economic dominance.

This book, its Nepali version and the tv series should be mandatory for everyone responsible for prolonging this futile conflict.

Reviewed by Kunda Dixit

Under the Shadow of Violence
By Kishore Nepal
Pp.25, Kathmandu 2005
pp 156
The Gagan phenomenon

Political correctness and correct politics may be mutually exclusive options for second-generation leaders

It is unfortunate that Gagan Thapa’s media image often precedes him. This image unjustly characterises him as the fiery student leader as a radical when in fact he is a moderate. He is an opponent of absolute monarchy, of Maoist extremism and a critic of democratic mismanagement. As a proponent of peaceful activism, he is at a political gold-mine. Ascertaining his claims of generational representation is difficult, but his mastery of channeling discontent qualifies him as an accredited envoy of a significant population of young, eligible voters, disgruntled by the prospect of an uncertain future.

But Gagan Thapa’s stance is wrought with political minefields. The fact that his ideology doesn’t fully comply with the leanings of any single political group is more of a calculated risk and than a carefully planned hedge.

Gagan Thapa could be an asset to the palace since his annoyance is born of frustration with the NC party leadership, his annoyance is focused against the monarchy. Galvanising disgruntlement against the king is shrewd but one that is not free of cost. This is painfully evident when we see that Gagan Thapa’s political vision dates 236 years into Nepal’s history, but does not extend very far into Nepal’s future.

Gagan Thapa must also answer for past actions against the education system. Whether one “demands” or “requests” disruptions in education for political purpose is not relevant, both are morally wrong. The politicisation of higher education has consequences for the future that Gagan Thapa and other student leaders may ignore but the repercussions will be borne by future leaders.

From a party perspective, one of Gagan Thapa’s political dilemmas is inherent a “good guy” will remain. And with gradual turnout or predicting fraud are evidence of participation, not by an emerging leader-base would the political capital at participating elections, the frustrations borne by an emerging leader-base would be compounded. After all, electoral legitimacy is driven by evidence of participation, not by rhetoric. Hoping for low voter turnout or predicting fraud are not substitutes for not partaking in the process.

Second-generation leaders like Gagan Thapa are in a dilemma. Moves that would otherwise be politically sound may not sit well with the elite minority, and political correctness and correct politics may be mutually exclusive options. Regardless of whether he follows the NC party line or opt to follow his party’s participation in the elections, the fact that he is inherently a “good guy” will remain. And with gradual maturity the vision of an alternative future will draw support for Gagan Thapa and other young leaders like him.

(Guest Column by Dipa Shah)

Maoists because his leadership of street protests provide a platform for infiltration, even though he may wish them to be peaceful. He could be an asset to the UML because it is Gagan Thapa’s game plan that if truth is not free of cost. This is painfully evident when we see that Gagan Thapa’s political vision dates 236 years into Nepal’s history, but does not extend very far into Nepal’s future.

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(Guest Column by Dipa Shah)
South Asia's leaders meeting in Dhaka should learn from the region's freshwater dolphins

T he prime ministers, presidents and kings gathering at Dhaka this weekend must learn a bit from the region’s dolphins: the fresh water kind.

Dolphins are mammals and not fish and a geological and morphological phenomenon relating to freshwater dolphins might actually teach us something about conducting ourselves as humans.

The Gangetic Dolphin is called the susu and the Indus Dolphin is called the bhulan. Once abundant enough in these rivers to be included in environmental edicts promulgated by Emperor Ashok (he called them puputaka), today dolphins are gravely endangered species of our Southasian waters.

In India, the best place to see them today is from a boat off Patna at the point where the Gandak comes in from the north to meet the Ganga. Here, the creatures frolic. But elsewhere on both basins their habitat has been destroyed by barrages, canals, PCBs and DDT. Today, there are said to be no more than 2,000 of the stonc on the Ganga-Brahmaputra (extending up to Nepal and as far downstream as Bangladesh) and 500 on the Indus (all within Pakistan).

The grey-brown mammals average two metres in length as adults, have evolved blind due to the natural turbidity of the Southasian rivers, and prefer to swim on their sides, with their lower fins possibly used to trawl the muddy river bottoms. The species use sonar to travel and to track prey (small fish and prawns).

Till the 1970s, these two pointed snout creatures had been considered the same species, though inhabiting different river basins, one emptying into the Bay of Bengal and the other the Arabian Sea (thus the two species are today separated by thousands of kilometres). The world’s other two species of freshwater dolphins are found in the Yangtse and Amazon.

After the 1970s, the distinction between the two species, primarily in the shape of the skull, made scientists separate them into two sub-species known as Platanista gangetica and Platanista minor. Since the late 1990s, once again scientific opinion is drifting towards regarding them as one and the same species of the genus acetacean.

So here we have a species that clearly evolved in the one and the same Tethys Sea, somewhat before geological forces created the Himalaya-Hindukush, and even as the silting created the Indus and Ganga plains and the rivers which began to flow on them. In this fresh water evolved the Southasian dolphin, which represents together with whales and porpoises the mammals that decided to return to water (rather than the fish which had always remained there).

At some point, there must have been a geological cataclysm which separated the water courses of Southasia, so that the Ganga flowed southeast-ward and the Indus went south-westward. This might have been the moment when the two species got separated by habitat, which isolation helped them evolve separately.

But it has not been such a long separation that they have diverged in any noticeable way. If the two species were to be put on the same muddy river course on either side of the Line of Control, they would probably say hello as they passed each other in the dark.

We, thus, have species of creation divided by geological time and yet we are confused about what to call them. Are they the same species? Are they separate species? The answer is that they are both! Together, these two dolphin species make up the Southasian Freshwater Dolphin. And separately they are the susu and the bhulan.

The same should hold true for the people within the different nationalities of Southasia. Rather than regard our identities more rigid and separate, we must try to consider ourselves as having multiple identities. The fact is that the Westphalian tradition did not prepare us for this concept of grey zones where identities meet, whereas our past did cater to this uniqueness of Southasia. Only the acceptance of multiple identities is feasible for the multi-layered demography that makes us proud to be Southasians. Let us learn from the dolphins, even at the SAARC Summit.

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit

Rato Bangala School
Excellence in Learning

Vacancy

Rato Bangala School seeks teachers for Geography: A Level
Accounts: A Level
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Applicants must have fluency in English, an ability to relate to children and a willingness to learn.

Subject teachers should be well versed in current developments in their subject areas and be comfortable with theory and practice. They must also be able to handle the challenging A Levels curriculum.

Interested candidates are requested to collect application forms from the school office. Applications must be in by December 9, 2005.

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Stand for success
A good posture is vital to improving your game

Do you have the right golfing posture? Maybe. But how often do you check to see if you have been standing correctly?

Most weekend golfers I have come across ignore the significance of a good posture. This leads to a sloppy stance, which becomes a major hurdle to improvement and results in their performance spiralling downwards until they eventually require some serious repair work.

In every sport, sound basics are a must before beginners can make steady progress. In golf, once new players graduate from the practice range they get too focused on scoring and pay little attention to the basics. Gradually they lose those much-needed fundamentals.

A proper posture is the key to producing a good swing plane, along with a fluid body turn, power and most of all, balance. Creating sound swing speed without a proper posture is a distant dream. Similarly, your swing will never travel the right path if you do not stand correctly.

How to build good posture?

Step 1: Stand upright. Hold a club across your body, along the tops of your legs, with your palms facing your legs.

Step 2: Push outwards gently with your arm. You will feel the club shaft push your hips out behind you. As you feel this, bend your chest forward to counterbalance. Hold your chin up off your chest. As your rear moves out, add a gentle flex to your knees.

Step 3: Maintain your body in this new position. Take a club, form your grip and drop your arms in front of you until the club head rests below your chin. Your weight should be on the balls of your feet.

Building a correct posture is vital if your goal is to constantly improve your game therefore when you visit the practice range from now on, follow the above drill and repeat it after every five balls. You will find yourself turning better, hitting stronger and more balanced on the follow through. And your swing will start to look great in those first photos from the tee!

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.

Tee Break
Deepak Acharya

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Developing your posture this way might seem too technical but it is in fact a very natural sporting position. If you play tennis, you’ll almost certainly come to it naturally when waiting to receive a serve–back swing and at an angle, knees flexed, weight on the balls of your feet. If you at all struggle with the club shaft routine explained above, try imagining that you are waiting for a tennis serve.

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Normally it needs a new layer once a month.

After the necessary practice, the hospital staff arranged the ‘First Lahan Open International Tennis Tournament’ in 1997.

‘Since Boris Becker couldn’t attend, I was the winner,’ says Albert Henning, a doctor who works at a hospital here.

Henning first built a concave practice wall in the hospital premises and when some of his colleagues showed interest he decided to make the tennis court. However, red clay needed a lot of water so the doctors hit upon the idea of surfacing the court with clay and cowdung paste, which did the trick.

Cowdung paste mixed with clay and water is used in traditional Nepali houses to cover verandas and doorsteps. Besides giving houses a soft clean look, it is supposed to be antiseptic. The technology was there, it was just a question of using it on a tennis court.

The advantages of a cowdung court are that the ingredients for the surface are locally available and it is an income generator for local women, who need to resurface it once a month. They are experts because they smear cowdung paste at home all the time. Unlike a red clay court the surface does not need watering, it is softer than a hard court and thus causes less strain on ankles and knees—and on tennis balls so that they last longer.

‘During monsoon when the grass is growing quickly on the court, you get a feeling of Wimbledon’, jokes Henning. Its maintenance depends on use.
The Adventures of Herodot can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com.

After fighting to help California become the 31st state of the Union, Zoro has to keep the promise he made to his wife Elene-To give up his secret identity and live a normal life as Alejandro de la Vega. When he hesitates, it threatens to tear them apart. Now, the same forces that conspired to keep California from becoming a part of the United States are plotting to urbanize Arizona, a threat that has been 500 years in the making, a threat that could change the course of history forever. And only Zoro can stop it.

Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

According to an air-quality monitoring station, the pollution level in the Kathmandu Valley rose steadily last week. In the first three days, the average concentration of PM 10 (harmful particles small enough to lodge in the lungs) was within the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic metre but in the days that followed it reached unhealthy levels. The increase was especially high along busy roadways. Compared to previous weeks, the PM 10 concentration in all stations has increased. The reason for the sudden hike in pollution is not clear.

20 November - 4 November 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.
Source: www.mope.gov.np

Nepali Weather

by MAUSAM BEED

The persistent presence of the high pressure system over North India and the Himalayan foothills is especially significant this week. Credit for the recent sunny days goes to this phenomenon, which is also pulling in dry and cold air from the Tibetan plateau bringing down temperatures in Kathmandu. This satellite image taken on Tuesday morning indicates that the system is being nudged by a westerly front that is already over Kashmir. This may bring in some high clouds but otherwise the Valley will remain clear. Humidity levels have gone down to 40 percent.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Kathmandu Weather

Putalisadak Patan H Thamel Kirtipur Bhaktapur Matsyagaun

24-7 24-7 24-6 23-7 23-8

Source: www.mope.gov.np

Winter Wear & Casual Wear Footwear & Backpacks Mountaineering & Accessories & Combos

SHERPA ADVENTURE OUTLET LTD.
Lazo, Marg, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal
(Dispatch Xerothran Bank)
Tel: 977-1-4414501
Email: sso@mac.com.np

Kathmandu Valley

Food

Kekal & Biryani Festival cuisine from the house of Mughals at Hyatt Regency 5-20 November, 6.30 PM. 4491234

Tapas & Margaritas at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 10-22 Nov, Rs. 699, 4428999

Thanksgiving Dinner with free Irish Coffee at Moksh, 24.25.26 November. 470043

The Sidewalk BBQ with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, 6.30-10 PM, Rs 10-22 Nov, Rs. 699, 4428999

Ciney & Par-e-jat every Friday 7PM at Dakwara's.

Sushi and Saki Promotion at Hyatt Regency, 4491234

Thanksgiving Dinner at Summi Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM, 5521810

The Chimney Restaurant Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4246999

Sanam Bhoj at Godavari Village Resort, Saturdays, 5560075

Jazzy Gourmet fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999

Autumn Chill out Moments at 1905 Kantipath, delightful entrées and lounge grooves by DJT, 4235272

Getaways

Deluxe Mountain Pokhara Lodge, call for reservations, 4361500

Overnight Stay Package at Godavari Village Resort, 5560075

Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage stive@escapeNepal.com

Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

Exciting Holiday Packages with Le Meridien, Kathmandu. 4451212

Special Dipawali Holidays package tour in Malaysia. 2012345

Go-karting Rs 200 for 4 laps, 4361500

Festivals and Events

Tiger Karts Racing Cup at Tiger Karts Racing Track, 12 November, 4361500

REIKI at HBFDC 15 and 16 November, 9AM-4PM, 4141843

Ride & Rage bikers ride up to the Last Resort and party. 25-26 November.

Mean Streets with De Niro and Scorsece film festival at Lajimpat Garden Café. 9 – 30 November. 4428949

Music and Performances

Supper Club at the best of Jazzmandu at Shangri-La, 11 November.

Jazzmandu All Star Fever at Summit Hotel, 12 November.

Jazzmandu Peace Parade at Lajimpat, 1-PM.

Ritu Shrawan - 5 a musical performance by Sukarma at Gurukul, 13 November. 5:15 PM. 4466956

Traditional Newa Music Concert by Tanani Bajan Khala from Nepal's famous Musicians of Gurukul. 15 November and 1 December. Rs 1000 per person, 7PM-10PM. 4479488

Jatra Friday nights, live music at Dwarika's. 4256622

Unplugged sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622

Live Music at Juntal Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711

Wonderful Wednesdays music at the bar, Dakwara's. 4479488

Ladies Night Wednesdays, free cocktails to the ladies at Jatra.

Musicians Night every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM. 5525212

Cadena Live! at Upstair, every Saturday and Wednesday.

Live Jazz by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4235272

For more information on the above events, please call 4442220 or visit www.jainepal.com
LET ME TALK: NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala deep in conversation with UML leader Bamdev Gautam and Pashupati Sambhur Rana of RPP at an event organised by Ganesh Man Singh Adhyayan Pratishthan on Wednesday.

KIRAN PANDAY

CHA, CHA, CHA: Couples take to the dance floor to show off their moves at Jazzmandu’s Red Hot Latin Jazz in the Yak & Yeti Hotel on Monday.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

CONSTITUTION CROWD: Pro-democracy activists gathered at Maitighar’s Shanti Mandala for a rally organised by Nagarik Samaj on Constitution Day on Wednesday.

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DECORATED RESCUEER: Prabin Bikram Rana receiving La Médaillle de la Valeur Civique (Gold Medal of Civic Value) from French Ambassador to Nepal Michel Jolivet. The medal was awarded to the first aid instructor by the French Federation of Rescue and First Aid.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

SOLAR DRIERS: Despite the short monsoon season, farmers in Bhaktapur got a golden harvest of rice which they were drying on the asphalt road this week.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Walk for peace

As you read this, a group of 35 people is setting off from Nambuddha on a peace walk that will end 25 days and cover more than 500 km later in Lumbini. The occasion is the completion and inaugural ceremony of the Vietnam temple at the birthplace of Buddha but the walkers’ goal is much larger: to help bring peace to this troubled land.

The first such walk was held in 2001 to mark the establishment of the Japanese Shanti Stupa in Lumbini. Beginning from Nambuddha, where the Buddha in an earlier life fed himself to a hungry tigress and her cubs, the participants will walk through Banepa, Patan, Bouddha, Swayambhu, Balambu, Naubise, Dureni, Richiktar, Kuntrar, Abuhaireni, Dumre, Damauli, Dulegauda, Pekhara, Phedikhola, Ranchhikola, Waing, Galyang Bhanjyang, Arya Bhanjyang, Tansen, Kerabari, Butwal, Bhirahawa before arriving in Lumbini. The 35 walkers will include monks, nuns and lamas from the three different sects of Buddhism—Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana—representatives of other faiths and common folk.

It is ironic that the land where the Buddha—who taught the world the middle path of peace—was born, is today being torn apart by violence. The main objective of this walk is to promote peace and harmony in society,” says 22-year-old Bikhhu Tapassi Dhamma who joined the Sangha at the age of 12 and was educated in the path of the dharma in Sri Lanka. He was the moving force behind the restoration of the Ashoka Charumati Stupa in Chabahil, built by Emperor Ashoka in the name of his daughter Charumati. Tapassi Dhamma is also assistant general secretary of the World Buddhist Sangha Youth, an association of young Buddhist monks worldwide.

So if you see the peace walk passing by, wave. Or better yet, join in.

Alok Tumbahangpey

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Now that Nepal will soon be gaining honorary membership of the Axis of Evil in recognition of our achievements in turning all the clocks in the country back by a century, it’s about time we brought ourselves up to speed on the strict Code of Conduct that governs the behaviour of such states.

If we are serious about being becoming a pariah nation and remaining one, we can’t pussyfoot around anymore. Membership of the Axis of Evil means that with absolute power comes absolute responsibility to adhere to some of the basic norms of naughtiness. No one is going to take us seriously if we are half-hearted about repression and just go around pretending to be bad.

There are countries that are far ahead of us in tyranny and have decades of experience in thumbing their noses at the international community and getting away with it. Some of them are hermetically sealed nations in our own vicinity, and we need to learn the tricks of the trade from them.

For example, it is no longer sufficient just to make a token gesture like moving our zonal headquarters from Nepalganj to Surkhet. Look at how far ahead Burma is: this week it shifted lock, stock and barrel its entire capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana to thwart an imminent foreign invasion. That is the kind of steadfastness, determination and foresight we need if we want to be card-carrying members of the League of Failed States. Let’s ask ourselves: are we determined to wreck this country or not?

If we are really serious about being taken seriously by the international community, therefore, we need to emulate North Korea and Iran and begin plutonium enrichment at the Radiology Department of the Ministry of Information Warfare at Khumaltar. That way no one can kick us around anymore.

Then there is the whole continent of Africa that we have ignored for far too long. It is the region with the most failed states in the world, and we have to figure out how they did it. The first step towards being a failed state, of course, is to set up a Nepal-Zimbabwe Friendship Society if there isn’t one already. Then we right ahead and establish full diplomatic relations with the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Insomnia and the Kingdom of Amnesia. Then we dispatch a fact-finding mission to Bujumbura to see how one can be a failed state in ten easy steps, and while we are at it earn bonus airmiles on Royal Nepal Airline Corporation. This will also give RNAC the necessary experience to establish direct air links between Timbuktu and Kathmandu in future so the national flag carrier doesn’t waste any more taxpayer money flying unprofitable sectors like Kathmandu-Hong Kong and Kathmandu-Delhi during the peak tourist season.

Being such an active member of the Axis of Evil will mean that we face the looming danger of being invaded. That is why if it were up to me (hint, hint) I’d immediately relocate all government offices from Kathmandu to Rasuwa with immediate effect.

From the Kingdom of Amnesia to the Republic of Insomnia

Kunda Dixit

UNDER MY HAT

www.nepalitimes.com

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