Weekly Internet Poll  # 283. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. .. .. Do you agree that having a constituent assembly election would solve the current crisis?

Weekly Internet Poll  # 282
Q. .. .. Should the municipal elections be put off?
Total votes: 6,089

While the Maoists are at the gates, threatening attacks on the capital, authorities decided to engage on a sweep of political party leaders and civil society activists instead. It’s a scene many had expected to see during the municipal elections. But with the polls still 20 days away, the government started rounding up pro-democracy activists ahead of a promised mammoth rally on Friday.

“Under no circumstances will we take back our rally program,” said CPN (UML) chief Madhav Kumar Nepal at the Press Chautari on Friday, adding that the detention of leaders early Thursday morning was the act of a “desperate and fearful regime”.

Immediately after the deadly Maoist attacks that left 12 policemen dead in the Kathmandu Valley on 14 January, the government introduced curfews and banned demonstrations within the Ring Road. The parties defied the bans. But in a scene reminiscent of February First last year, the government arrested more than 70 leaders and activists and cut mobile phones within the Valley on Thursday.

As for the government, Minister of State for Information and Communication Shrish Shumsher Rana told us: “We are prepared to safeguard the basic human rights of the people and we will not shirk from our duty.”

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While the arrests were taking place, landlines also went out. Security personnel had been mobilised to make the arrests from late Wednesday night and some of them, in plainclothes, could be seen around party leaders’ homes from early morning. Some leaders evaded arrest by sleeping away from their homes.

UML leader Amrit Bohara who escaped the dragnet, told us from a secret location: “With such a condemnable action the government has admitted defeat.”

The government has been using last week’s well-planned Maoist attacks as evidence that the rebels have infiltrated the valley disguised as political party cadre. Said Rana, “The rebel-party pact clearly states that both would target the government in their own ways and that is exactly happening now.”

Party leaders refute the possibility of any infiltration, saying it has never happened in the past. Meanwhile, Maoist chief Prachanda on Wednesday issued a statement saying the rebels would not infiltrate Friday’s rally nor use any kind of force to supplement street protests.

“There is no reason why we should believe the Maoists,” Rama retorted. Even our security forces stopped passenger buses coming into the valley from the west and the east.

The parties want the government to cancel municipal polls due on 8 February. “If the polls are called off, there could be an environment for an outlet for the present crisis,” said Nepali Congress leader Girija Prasad Koirala.

Both sides look set for a confrontation on Friday, with the Maoists waiting and watching in the wings.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The government doesn’t seem to know who its real enemy is

Back to February First

The government doesn’t seem to know who its real enemy is

W

Navin Singh Khadka

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Under no circumstances will we take back our rally program,” echoed NC leader Arjan Narsingh KC. “But if the situation turns violent, the government will have to take the responsibility.”

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The kindest explanation we can come up with is for the irresponsible brinkmanship being shown presently by the palace, parties and rebels is that it is all part of a bargaining strategy so they have an upper hand in any future negotiation. But that presupposes there will still be room for negotiation when things are pushed to such extremes. By openly provoking confrontation, all three sides are inviting an outcome that can only be absolutely anarchy. This in turn will make it much more difficult to find a way to do the necessary compromise. With their bloodthirsty behaviour the warring sides are behaving as if they aren’t satisfying with the present level of slaughter. How brave is it to massacres polling and in cold blood? So, could it be that the king is pushing for absolutism so that in a future negotiation he doesn’t have to settle for a ceremonial role (or no role at all) but bargain for a variety of kingdoms?

Could it be that the Maoists are asking for a republic so that whatever there are tanks they don’t have to give in to active monarchy and may agree to a figurehead king? Caught in the middle, the political parties have been pushed by the palace’s rigidly to agree on an interim government but this could be a trap and give the regime an excuse for a harsh crackdown in the coming days.

A monarch’s role is never to divide and rule but to bring various political forces together, not be one itself. It is now up to the king to show foresight to make a proactive announcement of devolution, put off municipal elections and bring the parties together in an interim government to oversee a return to representational politics.

There is still time, and it will not be a sign of weakness or a climb down for him to announce an adherence to the principle of parliamentary supremacy. It may be just what is needed to prevent the pressure cooker from blowing its lid off.

Rajan Khatri
Hamburg, Germany

TUNNEL VISION

Mr. Bihari Krishna Shrestha’s columns are becoming acutely one-dimensional. They do little for mutual rapprochement among the warring sides and more to incite anarchy. His writing lacks diplomatic flavour and the subtle nuances of international or domestic relations, which can bind and add cohesiveness to a bleeding nation. This is not the way forward for an intellectual. Statements like but sadly, the very corrupt continue to rule the roost can sometimes speak for themselves and point towards less likely targets or towards those that are being defended. Words can boomerang. “February First was a temporary move”, what is the definition of ‘temporary’ in political discourse and in the Nepali scenario, which defines the notion of this so-called impervious move? Whenever we address issues of such importance, as good Samaritans, our discourse and our perceptions must be multi-dimensional. Blame games usually result from self-centered hypocrisy. If we continued to reflect upon what they did, the saga would stretch back to centuries of mismanagement and onerous infighting rather than a specific and concise timeframe that Mr. Shrestha relentlessly repeats. He fails to see the bigger picture.

There is a generation in this country that is stuck in the paradigm of a superficial reality, envisioning that political paralysis can be overcome through desperate means rather than an all encompassing vision capable of incorporating different players in the social or political spectrum. It is almost true when they say Nepal is a land of opportunists.

Shiven Thapa, Kathmandu

THE LITTLE BUDDHA

Thanks to Keiti D Leslie for his excellent write up (Nepal Pan, ‘The Little Buddha of Bara’, #262) on the meditating boy. We have been hearing so much about Ram Bahadur Bomjon going without food and water for almost eight months that it surprises me that no one has voiced any concern about the dying state of this young, under-age Nepali boy nor has there been any discussion on ways to salvage him.

What should be the responsible body to look into the fate of the civil and rational society, particularly when the person in question happens to be a minor? I ask: are we to be blinded just like the Maoists or the government to the present political gridlock? Could it be that the Maoists are asking for a republic so that any discussion on ways to salvage him.

Shree Shrestha
Madison, WI, USA
advantages for the honest side it may actually be optimal to be honest.

If both sides agree on what would happen if they continued to fight, they should cut their losses and sign a truce immediately. Further, if each side recognizes the optimality in being honest about its capabilities, then it may be possible to come to a consensus on what the disagreement payoffs would be (ie, what the consequences would be if they continued to fight).

Coming to such a consensus should be the first stage of negotiations. In the second stage, the parties would have to agree on what present arrangements would equal the disagreement payoffs of the future.

The desire of the political parties, on the other hand, is that democracy will be preserved and reinstated. There is obviously a trade-off between minimising deaths and keeping the status quo (since the government can minimise the costs of the war by giving up now but given the Maoist agenda (which is unlikely to preserve democracy) and this trade-off is probably very high given that presently the government under the king is seeking not necessarily to preserve democracy in general but to preserve the monarchy, while the Maoists are fighting primarily for the establishment of a republic of some kind.

Nevertheless, it is likely that there are some intermediate arrangements that are possible and acceptable to all three sides, although finding them may require a more creative approach from scholars and a purposeful dialogue between the government and Maoists. ●

Avidit Acharya is studying mathematics and economics at Yale University in the United States.

Hyper reality on the tv screen

In an age of audiovisual images, television sets the national agenda. What’s shown on tv is hyperreality. If it did not happen on the actual box, it did not happen.

These days tv news begins and ends with extensive coverage of royal escapades in the eastern region and the encounters between the monarch and his subjects are carefully orchestrated photoops.

The king in his olive greens is often shown mixing freely with the impoverished Nepalis clutching at straws. King’s interactions with the masses are constantly monitored by watchful guards confounding him in every multi-layered security ring.

The planned spontaneity makes for moving scenes. Figures in these acts appear to have come alive out of history books. The urban intelligentsia considers the visage of the supreme commander-in-chief in every frame supremely horrifying. But for the broad-denied, such meticulously staged circuses are temporary diversions from the drudgery of their daily life.

The way the chairman has been doling out assurances about various projects, it’s almost impossible for a resource-starved government to follow through any of them any time soon. However, whether promises made by the king can or will be kept or not is beside the point. The purpose of periodic royal trips to countryside has always been to create a distant familiarity, the kind of bond that exists between a deity and his devotees. Towards that end, King Gyanendra has brilliantly succeeded in renewing a real tradition that goes back to the hunting trips of Ramas to tani every winter and regular foysons King Mahendra and King Birendra undertook throughout their years of absolutism.

Let there be no confusion, even though the chairman of council of ministers is not in the capital, he holds sole control over all the organs of the state. Kamal Thapa, aspiring to be His Majesty’s Most Loyal Political Servant, flew out to Itahari headquarters of Eastern Command before issuing prohibitory orders against political protests and imposing nighttime curfew over almost all the heavily populated areas of the country. Earlier, the chairman himself had led an operation into the capital for a day to clear the Budget by Ordinance issued by his government.

Roopy spot, the well-meaning technocrat with trading background, has been defending the budget to the best of his considerable ability, but there is little doubt that the financial ordinance is no less of a triumph than the royal plans to control every aspect of the economy. Dared to fly is written all over this half-yearly budget.

The financial plan of the government is fundamentally flawed: it disregards the principle of no taxation without representation and attempts to completely uproot the economic bases that successive important governments since the People’s Movement of 1990 had sought to build. Gone is the commitment to planned economy. The royal regime favours laissez faire, the economic model of choice for the adherents of social Darwinism all over the world. With customs duty waived, reduced, or brought to minimum, welcome to the brave new world of Nepali economy where high-spending consumers will be the new lords of the realm.

Child labour is to be regulated rather than prohibited. Foreign investment will be sought from Saudi Arabia. The government in its infinite wisdom has decided that like water, labour surplus will find its way to the low-lying areas of wage-earner shortage. In any case, when trade is to be the mainstay of economy, everyone is expected to become a shopkeeper. The shutters along Indo-Nepal border are expected to do brisk business to alleviate the shortage of Indian currency at the centre.

Promotion of ‘import-export’ with all its connotations is the primary focus of recently promulgated financial ordinance.

Shock and awe, propaganda, repression, and control politics, and a funnel road for overseas trade—doesn’t the combination look distantly familiar? In case you have missed the message, it’s a revised and updated edition of LOOT (suspect supporters, oppose neutralists, ostracize critics, and tyrannize the opposition) of political economy perfected through practice during the Panchayat. Righfly it has been said about orthodox societies that the more things change, the more they remain the same. But if only Nepali society were as simple as the strategies of Namashivaiti think it is.

A majority of Nepalis may still be powerless, but we know the temporariness of tyranny too well to be terrorised by it for long. It has been said of the fascist mindset that they tend to overestimate the extent of ‘influence over outcomes’ that is realistically possible to attain. In its bid to control everything, the palace seems to be slowly understanding the temporariness of tyranny too well to be terrorised by it for long.

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Donors’ dilemma

On and off violence is interrupting the foreign aid flow

Despite international criticism, against the February First move, humanitarian aid has remained intact.

Nevin Singh Khadka in London

Almost one year after the royal takeover, Nepal’s foreign donors are sending mixed signals about their future engagement in the country. That was evident at a recent donors’ meeting at the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) headquarters here.

Some of those who participated had already slashed their assistance while others were reviewing the situation on the ground. Few have chosen to increase their aid.

The changing scenario has been the main concern for them all. “We are concerned if there will be a conducive political environment for donors to do their work properly and it applies to the government, king and also to the Maoists,” says Stephen McClelland, head of the Asia Directorate at DFID headquarters.

“The interference in the development activity, whether from the Maoists or the security forces, makes it very difficult for the donors to do their job,” he added.

Such apprehensions could be the main reason for the significant drop in aid this year, at least judging by the first half of fiscal year 2005-2006. Of the more than Rs 32 billion allocated to development, more than Rs 32 billion was expected to be drawn from a mix of foreign loans and grants.

But after six months, just slightly over Rs one billion has arrived as foreign assistance. Despite the various challenges and troubles discussed in the London meeting, the donors had one common stand: they were not walking away from Nepal. “That all of them decided to remain engaged was an important message,” says McClelland.

That was when the Maoists’ unilateral ceasefire was still in place. Now the trace is no more and the rebels have even started targeting Kathmandu Valley.

While the renewed full-scale conflict and violence has donors worried about how to implement projects, the government has a strong belief that next month’s municipal elections are good news for development. “It has been difficult to spend the development budget because there is no local government. That is why we have been stressing local polls,” recently appointed State Minister for Finance Roop Jyoti told us.

His immediate predecessor, Madhusudan Shumshere Rana, believes the donors made a turnaround after King Gyanendra announced the polls last year. “Before, they had many issues to cite reservations about but once we announced the elections they have shifted their position and have become quite positive.

But most representatives of the donor community who we spoke to didn’t agree. One of them told us privately. “The Election Commission has received not a single penny from anyone. That shows that the donor community supports the election or not.”

The conflict has prevented many donors from monitoring their works on the ground, especially bilateral donors who are directly implementing their projects in rural areas. That is why the reason why the donors have made it a point to highlight their Basic Operating Guidelines time and again, in which their employees’ safety is given top priority. “If our staff’s safety is compromised, then we will act accordingly,” said McClelland referring to the underlying review in DFID’s engagement in the country. (see “It’s definitely a missed opportunity for Nepal”, p.5).

The risk in sending staff on monitoring missions is what is keeping much of the donors’ money unused. “In fact, this problem is getting more severe because most of the bilateral donors have not been able to send their staff to the field due to the conflict situation,” says National Planning Commission Vice Chairman Shankar Sharma.

While the worsening situation has led to a decline in foreign assistance from most bilateral donors, officials say that aid from many multilateral agencies has increased. One example is the Asian Development Bank. “Not only has the bank released the assistance it had put on hold but it has also entered into new negotiations,” a senior NPC official told us.

“The multilateral can afford to talk about politics and they can take a political stand to decide about their assistance but we cannot,” explains an official of a multilateral agency told us.

The multilateral and the bilateral donors are now discussing differences about their operations today but both must face the uncertainty that renewed violence has once again posed.

Caught in between again

Villagers in Kapilbastu see security only across the border

I t was ceasefire that brought Ram Ranjit Yadav home to his family in Gangola village of Rupendehi after five long years. Now he’s feeling again because of threats from Maoist rebels. His fellow villager Bhuja Chaudhary is joining Yadav on the path to India.

Kunwar agreed to rebel demands to resign from the police force but that didn’t satisfy the Maoists, who insisted that he join their military wing. Yadav knows that their threat cannot be taken lightly after he saw his friend and ex-cop Tribeni Tharu killed in cold blood.

“Why is it again the unarmed civilians who have to be victimised,” asks Asta Bhuja Chaudhary, former ward chairman who has to be victimised,” asks Asta who have been the worst victims, he added.

Many villages have already started crossing the border to India. Local NGO workers from Maiti Nepal, which tracks the movement of sex traffickers and their victims in the border area of Bhairawa, have noticed that the flow of Nepali villagers towards India has more than doubled after the ceasefire ended.

“We were forced to quit our schools and are now going to India for our own safety,” said a group of young boys who had reached Butwal before moving to India.

“The Maoists tell us to join their military and the security force intimidate us to give information about the rebels,” said Deb Kumar Magar.

But while the forces have extended curfew hours and increased their operations, there is still no sign of the Maoists reducing their military activities. In fact after the ceasefire, the Maoists established a new Fourth Military Division, which has already been moved to the Gorkha region.

According to Rukum Division Commander Ganesh Pun, a special task force has been assigned to target the screened areas. It has already attacked custom officials at the key border area of Bilahiya, where two police officers were killed and two more seriously injured.
FDI highs

Despite the widening political rift and business instability, the latest government report says that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) commitment to Nepal recorded a robust 250 percent growth during the first six months of the current year. “The amount soared because the number of FDI projects registered with the Department of Industry itself doubled during the period,” said a senior government official. According to statistics, 67 projects were approved compared to only 31 at the same time last year. India and the US were Nepal’s most important FDI partners.

United Finance AGM

United Finance Limited increased its operating profit by 100 percent and its net profit by 188 percent in the past year, according to its just finished 11th AGM. The company also welcomed Jagdish Prasad Konoda as new director from M/S Rahul Infrastructure. Company Chairman Basanta Kumar Chaudhary presented the annual report, adding, “the target of United Finance Limited is to provide customised service to suit the needs of individual clients.”

TourControl

Data Analysis and Software Solutions (DASS) has unveiled TourControl, a software application tailored to the specific needs of tour operators and travel agencies. The application caters to a range of functions, from air ticketing, excursions and hotels to trekking and pre-formatted itinerary. It gives tour operators a smooth and efficient operation for planning a tour from beginning to end.

NIB 19th AGM

Nepal Investment Bank Ltd (NIBL) held its 19th Annual General Meeting at Royal Nepal Academy on 6 January. Chairman and Chief Executive Director Pritibi Bahadur Pandey presented the directors report, balance sheet and profit and loss account for fiscal year 2004-05. NIBL was awarded the prestigious ‘Bank of the Year’ 2005 by London based Financial Times Group. The Banker, making it the first Nepali Bank to win the award two times in three years. NIBL also opened its 13th branch in Narayangadh in the past year.

NEW PRODUCTS

A STORM IN TOWN: Saakha & Co will next week launch the new San Storm convertible roadster. With a Renault ZF-MPI engine, 58.5 bhp and sleek looks, the San Storm is sure to be a favourite among the youth of Kathmandu.

Change is coming

Demography, geography and globalisation make it inevitable

Reading Nepali newspapers these days is a depressing exercise. Who wants to wake up each morning to learn about the killings, the arrests, the uprisings, the curfews and the political stalemate?

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

The media report as though a few Nepalis—the king, the political elite and the Maoists—have the power to change the fate of 25 million Nepalis. But what if there are forces far stronger than any of these comprised of more than 1 million people in and around Nepal? What if the effects brought by these forces will critically change Nepal from the country it is now to what it had been muddling along since 1769? Regardless of who governs it, the forces that are going to change Nepal in the next 20 years are demography, geography and globalisation.

Demography: Nepal, the oldest country in South Asia, has a population with a median age of a mere 20 years. That figure is slightly higher than that for military-run Pakistan and the single-party-run Maldives. On one hand, a young median age presents an opportunity. With good governance that represents people’s aspirations, millions of young Nepalis can easily be inoculated against diseases and sent to school to pick up knowledge and skills to be productive citizens later on. Similarly, through incentive-driven policies for infrastructure development and improvement in service delivery, millions more can be lifted out of poverty within our lifetime. But in the face of continuingly draining political fashions that favours one group of people over many, the same young people—like their counterparts in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s—could well grow up to form cohorts that, through their sheer number, throw out any oppressive regime that slams a door on their dreams for a better future. For Nepal, it’s not history but demography that is destiny.

Geography: The biggest story of our generation is going to be the unfolding of China and India as prosperously self-confident giants on the world stage. In just 13 years, the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) of the EU is a thing of the past. These neighbours were mere footnotes that wielded little global influence. In 1991, cash-strapped India had no choice but to shrug off decades of socialist policies to make room for the fuses of economic reforms, the pace of which is only going to go faster in coming years. Likewise, at the great wall of nº 57 in 1992, communist leader Deng Xiaoping visited southern China and blessed bolder market reforms. In just 10 years, Chinese economic-growth rates have been so astonishingly high that today even the developed world has their own strategy to benefit from China’s economy. But it was not one since 1986, we remain unable to come up with any coherent, much less credible, plan to take advantage of what’s spinning on either side of us.

Globalisation: In Panchyat days, Radio Nepal would tell us that the world loved us and we believed it. These days, Nepalis get their news from so many sources that they are able to check the truth of what they see, hear and experience without anybody’s telling them what’s what. Meantime, with a stronger remittance economy, lower information-gathering costs and the further fall of barriers to international markets, global Nepalis and friends of Nepal have emerged with a louder voice about how we would or should not be governed. All these are slowly transforming Nepal from being in a state of trance over its history to a state of spasms about its future possibilities. That is why these unstoppable changes should not be taken seriously by all. After all, as Charles Darwin put it, it’s not the strongest of the species that survives, nor is it the most intelligent but the one most responsive to change.

It’s definitely a missed opportunity for Nepal

Why is Nepal not listed among those core countries? Based on poverty criteria, Nepal should have been one of those 25 countries, but it was not chosen in part because of poor governance and the armed conflict. Instead of being able to attract additional resources (from Canada) Nepal’s long-term funding is now at risk. Each time money is tied up, it becomes more difficult for new programs to come online in countries like Nepal, not included in the key policy commitments.

So, governance was the main reason Nepal didn’t make the list. Yes. The two main criteria were—poverty and governance. Certainly based on poverty, Nepal would make the list. But other poor countries are better able to absorb assistance. Does that mean Canada’s funding to Nepal is at risk? Canada intends to continue support that delivers direct benefits to vulnerable populations as long as these three elements are in place: 1. the conflict does respect the Basic Operating Guidelines (BOGs) (on the rights and responsibilities of development agencies and their staff), 2. the security of our staff and partners is not compromised, 3. we can demonstrate to ourselves and to the people of Canada that we are still able to obtain good results in helping Nepal’s poor. The public endorsements of the BOGs by the Government of Nepal (last July) and by the inspectors (last December) were critically important milestones.

But when current projects end, will more funding be available? I don’t have the answer to that question. We weren’t able to start new bilateral programs last year. And after the 1 February, all assistance to the central government was frozen, though it wasn’t much. We’re working on a new interim strategy. Till now we have decided to maintain a presence. We believe our assistance is still making a positive difference, notably working directly with poor women, dalits and janajatis. Canada wants to remain engaged. Canada doesn’t want to abandon Nepal.

How much is Canada’s contribution this year? In 2005, our funding to Nepal was between $8 million and $9 million. This year it should be about the same but I don’t know because Canadian contributions to the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy)—a new UN-designed pool of money destined to the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict—are not yet finalised.

How will that CAP money be spent? There will be assistance to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR, OCHA and possibly other agencies. What is clear is that we support the analysis and rationale behind the CAP. One of the key aims of Canadian efforts here has been to support the UN’s response to the various dimensions of the crisis affecting the people of Nepal.

Canada has been providing development assistance to Nepal for 40 years and today focuses on supporting local NGOs, particularly those working in communities in primary health and rural livelihoods. But Jean-Marc Mangin, Canada’s first secretary (development), told Nepali Times that future aid has become more precarious since Nepal was left off a new list of nations on which Canada will focus its development efforts.
Rats and plough

Jana Aastha, 18 January

Kamal Thapa, who was labelled a rat by RPP leader Lokendra Bahadur Chaudhary, is on the verge of being beaten by other rats. The palace rats are waiting to see if the Election Commission grants Thapa a RPP recognition and the plough as an election symbol. They will only support him if he receives both—if he fails, their support will go elsewhere. Provisions to include other nationalist leaders in the Thapa-led RPP have been made by including a permanent committee in the party’s constitution. But Thapa himself is not aware of who will come to his faction, whose division was planned entirely by Tuti Giri. Provisions have been made to include the party’s former chairman, past and present prime ministers and elder leaders in the permanent committee. But neither the former chairman, nor prime ministers, are with Thapa. Surya Bahadur Thapa has already formed the Janashakti Party, while Lokendra B Chaudhary does not even want to hear Thapa’s name. Even though there are two leaders, Rabindra Sharma and Padma S Lawoti, capable of being included in the permanent committee, its possible that Lawoti will break away and form another party. Thapa might have plans to put the likes of Giri, Kiratindri Bista and Manchirm Singh in the committee, however they are said to be waiting to see if the party does form and get official recognition. It was Giri who made the plan to remove Thapa and Lawoti has not been entirely successful. Thapa will have to bear the brunt of this. It is estimated that if the RPP does not get official recognition and the party has to change its name, those who followed Thapa will once more slide towards Rana. After Rana filed a case in the court, even before the Election Commission decided to grant Thapa the plough symbol and recognition, many who followed Thapa started to accuse Giri of weakening their position. If the palace had taken Rana, it could also have got the support of India as it has relatives in the ruling Congress party of India as well as in the main opposition BNP.

Ram or ruin

NGD’s Pradeep Gan in Kantipur, 8 January

Since the country cannot shoulder the burden of a prolonged civil war and because all Nepalis are for peace, the Nepali Congress Democrat has adopted a middle of the road approach and that is constituent assembly. NGD was the first political party to make it clear that a constituent assembly was the only solution to the present impasse. The Maoists had come for peace talks during the premiership of Siv Vahabur Desha. During the preliminary talks before the formal dialogue, they had hinted that they could abandon their demand for a communist republic, which they actually did. At present, they have been reiterating their commitment to a constituent assembly as an immediate way out of the political deadlock. In view of the need for peace and a constituent assembly, the seven parties including the NC, have made an agreement. It is true that the king is not ready for a constituent assembly. But, a democratic party cannot make decisions on the basis of the king’s stubbornness, arrogance and whim. That is because the party survives and grows among people, not within the privileges of the royal palace. It is clear that the country can have peace and stability only through a constituent assembly. In this context, there is one particular point that needs to be raised with the king. NGD tried its best to be flexible and work with the king. But the partnership became unsuccessful because the king’s coterie and his advisers have projected him as a Hindu king. The vice chairman and the attorney general appointed by the king have gone to the extent to say that the Hindu king does not need to follow the constitution. Certainly there may not have been a written constitution during the reign of Ram. But the Ramayana is a clear guide that proves that King Ram was quite sensitive even about small exceptions. The constituent assembly is the next important test for the king and the monarchy. Our party does not wish to say anything about it but the people are becoming quite vocal. They have been chanting slogans and they are becoming audible to the king and the crown prince. Under such circumstances, what should an ideal Hindu king do? The situation has provided the king with an opportunity to prove himself unblemished. The king should not turn elsewhere for help. If the king passes the litmus test, the monarchy will be even more acceptable and respectable. On the other hand, if the constituent assembly decides against him and the monarchy, the king should step aside.

What republic?

Nepal Congress Vice Chairman Sushil Koirala in Janabhavana, 16 January

Nepal Congress has not demanded a republic. The party has not yet embarked on the journey towards that goal. Nor has the seven-party alliance pronounced the word. Have a look at the understanding made among the parties, there is no mention of a republican set up in it. Some parties’ leaders have been speaking in support of a republic, it is their individual right. The 12-point understanding with the Maoists also does not mention a republican set up. The new generation of our party has been raising their voices for republicanism because they have suffered while demanding democracy. Every time they have got the street in support of democracy, they have been beaten and their rights have been violated. They are frustrated and therefore they are talking about a republican agenda. But the Nepali Congress as a party has been demanding the reinstatement of the House of Representatives and for peace and reconciliation with the king. The party has not given up that demand. It’s not just the Nepali Congress—the seven-party alliance too has not abandoned the agendas of having the House reinstated. We still believe that would be the way out of the present political crisis. We have already relayed this message to the state and the king. But our voice remains unheard. The king has chosen to go his own way. But, the Maoists listened to us. That is why they decided unilateral ceasefire and extended it for one month. Because the Maoists were receptive to us, we could enter into the 12-point understanding with the seven-party alliance. When the Maoists approached to propose working together, we made it clear to them that there cannot be such a partnership unless they give up violence and terrorism. We want to solve this problem peacefully. If the House of Representatives is reinstated, the political environment will change completely and the crisis will end.

I became a rebel

Shyam Bhatti in Samay, 19 January

KALALI—Four years ago, Anati Chaudhary was a able teacher going from village to village in Kanpur hamper pricking the holy book. But everything changed when she started to get harnessed by the security force. It was then she heard the word about Maoist ideals, which impressed her so much that she left her five brothers, two sisters and parents to join the rebels and became area in-charge in Poudan. “I haven’t been able to think of my personal life, especially marriage, due to my political life,” says Anati, who hails from the Thami community. Due to their simple ways and restrained nature, the Thams have always been exploited by high caste Nepalis and eventually many ended up working as bonded labourers. They have now been liberated but still live in extreme difficulties. According to a government’s lack of concrete plans to reintegrate them into mainstream society, the Maoists dangled big dreams in front of them, easily luring many to join. Today, a large number of female Tharus dominate the Maoist positions. Still naïve, they say they had hinted that they could get promoted to senior positions. Still naïve, they say they had become vocal. They have been chanting slogans and they are becoming audible to the king and the crown prince. Under such circumstances, what should an ideal Hindu king do? The situation has provided the king with an opportunity to prove himself unblemished. The king should not turn elsewhere for help. If the king passes the litmus test, the monarchy will be even more acceptable and respectable. On the other hand, if the constituent assembly decides against him and the monarchy, the king should step aside.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

20 - 26 JANUARY 2006

And that is the end of the news, Your Majesty

We need schools, Your Majesty

I’m sick, Your Majesty

—Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukharjee on Kantipur, 14-28 January

Deuba. During the preliminary peace talks during the royal crisis, we have already relayed our view of the need for peace and a constituent assembly as an immediate way out of the political deadlock. In this context, there is one particular point that needs to be raised with the king. NGD tried its best to be flexible and work with the king. But the partnership became unsuccessful because the king’s coterie and his advisers have projected him as a Hindu king. The vice chairman and the attorney general appointed by the king have gone to the extent to say that the Hindu king does not need to follow the constitution. Certainly there may not have been a written constitution during the reign of Ram. But the Ramayana is a clear guide that proves that King Ram was quite sensitive even about small exceptions. The constituent assembly is the next important test for the king and the monarchy. Our party does not wish to say anything about it but the people are becoming quite vocal. They have been chanting slogans and they are becoming audible to the king and the crown prince. Under such circumstances, what should an ideal Hindu king do? The situation has provided the king with an opportunity to prove himself unblemished. The king should not turn elsewhere for help. If the king passes the litmus test, the monarchy will be even more acceptable and respectable. On the other hand, if the constituent assembly decides against him and the monarchy, the king should step aside.

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Artistic opposition

ACTRESS BIJAYI THAPA IN HIMAL KHACHAPURPA - 28 January

Your contemporaries are for municipal polls, why are you against them?

I believe the polls will worsen the conflict. Besides, being a citizen I am also an artist, I have a responsibility to create public awareness. Instead of holding talks, we must be heading toward a bloody situation. Even if elections are a democratic practice, if polls are held today, we will not get political consensus, it would mean inviting a bloodbath.

So, you won't vote if there are elections?

No I won't. I am not anti-king, rather I am a supporter. But, the government must understand who it is holding the elections for. If it is for the people but the people are not safe, then how can the government be justified? It is fine for it to wait for some time and hold the elections once it is in consensus.

What should the king do?
The king should clearly move in line with the people's desire. Those who have taken up arms are our brothers. Those unarmed ones who have been hit by bullets in their own homes are our sisters. Therefore, the solution lies in talks and not in conflict.

Why surrender?

Nepal, 22 January

A large number of Maoists have been surrendering to state authorities due to ideological differences in the party and punishment of their own cadres. Around 100 have already surrendered. Their number grew even more following differences between top Maoist leaders Pawan and Baburam Bhattarai. The government's policy of giving immunity and rewarding those who surrender also motivated many to give up their party. But the rebels still confined in the army barracks are containing immunity since the government deal is different.

Ultimately, it benefits the government if we all decide to surrender and aspire to lead better lives. But what do we get in return?

The government announced that rebels who surrendered would be given the opportunity to settle abroad. But the government has not even allowed them to move freely in the country. Such conditions will not allow them to be rewarded.

Citizen I am also an artist, I have a duty to my people to resist this government. Besides being a people's liberation army soldier, I have a responsibility to my friends who have been hit by bullets in their own homes. They have been surrendering to state authorities due to ideological differences, but not because they want to live in a free life anymore;" says Himal.

So, what should the king do?

The king should move in line with the people's desire. Those who have taken up arms are our brothers. Those unarmed ones who have been hit by bullets in their own homes are our sisters. Therefore, the solution lies in talks and not in conflict.

One aim

Major leader Baburam Bhattarai in Geneva

There is no direct relation between the end of the ceasefire and the 12-point understanding between us and the seven parties. When we signed the agreement, we had very much envisaged that fighting would escalate once the agreement was rejected. But we have made it a point to mention the understanding paper that we (Maoists and parties) would separately launch offensives against the autocratic monarchy. Moreover, the government made it clear that the role of the people's liberation army would be crucial if the king stood his ground to hold the municipal polls even within the army barracks. In this context, the end of the ceasefire would not negatively affect the 12-point understanding. It would rather be complementary to it. People agree that we need to have a mechanism to monitor if the understanding is being violated against the autocratic monarchy. Moreover, people are against the king's decision to hold the elections. We want to organize the people and if people talk about what they call atrocities by our cadres, then we won't reply. Because the reality is there, the officers told the members that they were making arrangements to send them to a foreign country. And those are unarmed people, I can't even live a free life anymore," says Himal.

In 1990, the Maoists were not ready to talk about a mechanism that the king has now announced.

"If there were to be an election, it would mean inviting a bloody situation. Even if elections are a democratic practice, if polls are held today, we will not get political consensus, it would mean inviting a bloodbath."
LIFE

As the fog slowly lifts in Patan Durbar Square, Mangalbajar wakes to piped temple bells and a serene chorus of bhajans.

Approaching from the west side of the square, one can hardly ignore the breathtaking beauty of the 15th-century Malla palace. Following the chants takes you to Krishna Mandir, where barefooted women with baskets full of flowers, butter lamps and other offerings scurry along to line up in front of the temple.

The pigeons fight to feed on grains scattered by a woman who appears unconcerned as they flock and flap around her. She barely looks up as the birds suddenly take flight together.

For a long time, the pigeon lady and I are the only ones sitting in front of the temple. It is still dark and all I can see are the silhouettes of Krishna Mandir and the butter lamplights. The flower lady brings baskets of yellow and marigold garlands and sits near the main path leading to the temple.

One by one the vegetable vendors pass by with spinach, cauliflower and carrot on their kharpans. They are not allowed in the square area, so they set up their temporary shops in front of the waterspout, where a couple of stalls have already started firing up kerosene stoves for tea.

Astha Laxmi Shakya, 50, has been selling flowers for 16 years in front of Krishna Mandir. “So much has changed,” says Shakya sipping her tea. “I see new faces everyday, most of my old customers are dead and gone and the square is not what it used to be.”

She sighs and explains that the young people who should be taking care of the square are leaving town in search of better opportunities.

It is almost 8AM, the bajar a little further down from the temple is bustling with people taking sips from steaming cups of tea, smoking their first morning cigarette and discussing politics. The cleaning ladies arrive, sweeping along the pathways. They work systematically—one cleans the left side while the other takes the right and they push the rubbish into little piles along the pathways.

The ladies create a cloud of dust as they move. From the dust emerge young teenagers carrying traditional instruments. They pass the street between the temple and the museum entrance beating their drums and bells—chyam chyam chyam chyam. The flower lady, vegetable sellers, tea stalls and the pigeon lady all pack up and leave for the day just as a truck arrives to collect the garbage.

Right behind the truck, children dressed in neat school uniforms follow. Their ties are nicely knotted and their trousers have the necessary creases. At the south side of the square a young man has set up a temporary sales stall.
newspaper shop attracting a curious crowd. Some people stop and buy a paper, stuff it in their bags and move on. Others try to take a quick peek at the headlines and then give up when they realize they will never push past the crowd.

Finally, the fog lifts completely and the shops along the busy roadside open. A music store blares Nepali pop. In the middle of the square, blue and red chairs are set up for a function to mark the anniversary of the 1934 earthquake. This is the ideal location for the event as part of the palace was reduced to ruins after the disaster and was later rebuilt.

People are dashing off to get to work; they push one another to try and climb aboard safa tempos. It warms up and the tourists come and go with their guides. They stop at the rooftop cafes for a quick bite or a cup of coffee, they shoo away the little boys who follow them hawking more souvenirs. Elderly men sit on the benches outside the museum, soaking up the sun eating peanuts and oranges and watching as the day goes by.

The red and blue chairs are packed up as the day’s function ends. By late afternoon, the schoolchildren who had to get to school in the morning wearing their neat uniforms are returning. With tired faces, dishevelled hair and loose ties, they hang out in the square, sipping tea from plastic cups.

The tea stall and vegetable sellers are also back. The tourists slowly disperse as the sun goes down. Women ride by on their scooters, taxis wait with their lights on and evening shoppers line up in front of the vegetable markets.

Suddenly it’s dark everywhere as load shedding begins. But it’s too early for the square to sleep so vegetable vendors, restaurants and bead and bangle sellers light tukis and stay open for business. Passers-by hurry home to their families and youngsters part ways.

The only place with electricity is the path between the Patan Museum and Krishna Mandir, which looks like a glowing caterpillar from atop a terrace. Looking down, the harmony of the different architectural styles strikes me: the museum’s pagoda style next to the mandir’s Shikhara look.

It is time to leave. From the west side of the square I am safe=the silhouettes of Krishna Mandir and the palace. It is dark and quiet but I can still hear the temple bells. For the last time I look at a place that has stood the test of time and see it breathing as if waiting for a new day, new and new stories.

**DAY DAWNS:** The morning vendor displays the day’s items (above). (left, top to bottom) Selling flowers to devotees. Durbar Square is still quite empty early in the morning. Locals rest outside Patan Museum after a hard day’s work. Durbar Square lights up as the day’s activities come to an end.
Chinese Ambassador Sun Heping and others look on as Sangita Thapa, proprietor of Siddhartha Art Gallery points out a painting of Zhou En-Lai namaste-ing a nepali girl by Awang Zaba.

**FORESIGHT... is the WORD**

Jamming with jazz giants

Cadenza has been a big name in Nepali music since their Jazz at Patan cd established a whole new sound for local music. Now the pioneers of local jazz improvisation are going global with a gig at the prestigious Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival.

Established in 1967, the festival at the University of Idaho is one of the biggest jazz events in the world. With past performers including giants such as Ella Fitzgerald, Bobby McFerrin and Sarah Vaughn, Cadenza know they have to pull out all the stops to shine in this concert.

"It's huge," says front man Navin Chettri, unable to hide the excitement in his voice, "almost the equivalent to the Olympics for jazz musicians."

"Till now, Cadenza is probably the first outfit from South Asia to play in the mainland and in Hong Kong. As Tibet becomes more consumer-oriented it is not surprising to find this trend reflected in contemporary art like Gade's work, which seems to question the get-rich-islorious concept. We asked Gade what he thought of Nepal. "I am very impressed by the preservation of the architectural heritage such as in Patan's Durbar Square," he replied.

Apart from the whimsical pop art of Gade, another artist of note is Awang Zaba, who is more versatile in his style. Although not a Pop artist, he does decorative modernistic canvases of ladies in Tibetan costumes meant for the tourist crowd but his Socialist Realism style in which he was obviously trained, is more noteworthy.

It is his canvas of a towering Zhou En-Lai looming over and namaste-ing a Nepali dancer in front of (and blocking) one of the Buddha eyes of a stupa that enigmatically greeted the visitors to the recent Siddhartha exhibition. The artist says he painted it especially for Nepal audiences, although some observers might see it as ominously foreboding. Interestingly, the Siddhartha exhibition was part of the 50th Golden Jubilee of Nepal Chinese Diplomatic Relations and was inaugurated by the Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Sun Heping. Few people know the contemporary art of Tibet but the Siddhartha exhibition and Jim Aplington’s Lotus Gallery in Thamel will help bring it more exposure.

**REVIEW**

**DANIEL B HABER**

American cultural icons such as Mickey Mouse, Big Mac hamburgers and dollar signs are not the subjects that one would expect from painters from Tibet. But that is exactly what viewers saw at the contemporary paintings from Tibet exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery last week.

True, there were the usual Buddhas and Buddha eyes, stupas, yaks, Om mani padme hums and girls in (and out of) ethnic dresses (some even showing bare bosoms). Much current Tibetan art depicts these stereotypical elements mostly in flat, monochromatic symbols on rough paper like oversized palm leaf manuscripts. Here, in a series of triptychs titled 'New Holy Book' the artist in mock seriousness spoofs the new icons of contemporary Tibet as part of the greater Chinese of the globalisation era.

The first panel depicts a typical Buddha head set in grids for thangka painters and is juxtaposed with a head of Mickey Mouse, a bowl of rice crossed by a pair of chopsticks (Chinese diet), a bag of tsampa (roasted barley, the Tibetan staple) and a Golden Mac hamburger in the middle and in case you missed the symbolism, a golden double-arched ‘M’ over the burger.

The second panel depicts three food icons, a bowl of rice crossed by a pair of chopsticks (Chinese diet), a bag of tsampa (roasted barley, the Tibetan staple) and a Big Mac hamburger in the middle and in case you missed the symbolism, a golden double-arched ‘M’ over the burger.

The third panel depicts mahling symbols, disembodied high-heeled legs of chorus girls and a bottle of whiskey in between. During the Dalai Lama’s reign in Tibet, mahling, considered a decadent waste of time, was outlawed in Tibet.

The ‘New Holy Book’ also includes a canvas that is a page out of someone’s weekly planner, with entries such as ‘Love at First Sight’, ‘First Kiss’, ‘Party’. Also depicted are icons such as dollar signs, mobile phones, playing cards and cigarettes.

Many Tibet watchers (not only those in Dharamsala who see the developments in contemporary Tibet as cultural genocide) are concerned with the erosion of traditional Tibetan culture, particularly the Buddhism that was once its core. While political and social criticism may not be entertained in the TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) as in the rest of China, pop artists like Gade can freely point to how mammom and Mickey Mouse have replaced traditional Buddhist symbols and values.

Visitors to Lhasa, especially those coming from Nepal, are usually struck by how developed and ‘Chinese’ the Tibetan capital appears. There is no dearth of restaurants, but one would be hard-pressed to go anywhere for a dharma talk. Ironically, while Buddhism is discouraged in Tibet itself, there is increasing interest in dharma in the mainland and in Hong Kong.

As Tibet becomes more consumer-oriented it is not surprising to find this trend reflected in contemporary art like Gade’s work, which seems to question the get-rich-is-lorious concept. We asked Gade what he thought of Nepal. “I am very impressed by the preservation of the architectural heritage such as in Patan’s Durbar Square,” he replied.

Aside from the whimsical pop art of Gade, another artist of note is Awang Zaba, who is more versatile in his style. Although not a Pop artist, he does decorative modernistic canvases of ladies in Tibetan costumes meant for the tourist crowd but his Socialist Realism style in which he was obviously trained, is more noteworthy.

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I wear to let our wives and daughters District President, "they refused (Rai), formerly the Dagadzon burning and demolishing homes. Says Khadua Bahadur Ringalung confiscating citizenship cards and closing southern schools, carry out wide-scale evictions, the country’s south and began to terrorists were wrecking havoc in farmer families left Bhutani land. Psychosis to ensure that the in search of land, the Druk dominated state by ethnic Nepalis were evicted by the government of around 100,000 refugees, who has housed Lhotshampa refugees in seven refugee camps in Nepal that cleansliness. But this is one of being an almost obsessive feature of Nepal, its only distinct feature changing—"let us go back to our and living conditions deteriorated from Bhutan for the past 15 years. While their numbers have grown to drop their children off". The seven camps house many of those kicked out were Many of those kicked out were from Bhutan for the past 15 years. While their numbers have grown and living conditions deterriorated over the years, their plea hasn’t changed—“let us go back to our houses, our lands and our dignity".

The seven camps house around 100,000 refugees, who were evicted by the government of Bhutan’s King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Fearing demographic italics—let us go back to our houses, our lands and our dignity".

The seven camps house around 100,000 refugees, who were evicted by the government of Bhutan’s King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Fearing demographic inundation of his Nagphong-dominated state by ethnic Nepalis who had been arriving for decades in search of land, the Druk government created a mass fear psychosis to ensure that the farmer families left Bhutani land. It alleged that anti-national terrorists were wrecking havoc in the country’s south and began to carry out wide-sacle evictions, closing southern schools, confiscating citizenship cards and burning and demolishing homes. Says Khasha Bahadur Ringalsingh, formerly the Dagadzhim District President, "they refused to let our wives and daughters wear stichas and pots and said they wouldn’t even let us bury our dead, in order to chase us out of the country". Many of those kicked out were also made to sign voluntary migration forms at gunpoint as they left Bhutan. When these migrants entered India, they were steered through the Duars region to Nepal. Samumaya Karki Chhetri, mother of three, remembers her flight. “As we ran from our houses we thought that we would definitely be killed. We had nothing and we thought that life was over but then we came here and soon we found the camps.”

The hopelessness of the newly-arrived refugees has turned into despair within the Bhutani camps recently as news from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which partly funds and administers the camps, circulates among residents—schools are to be cut back to class five and briquettes will replace kerosene for fuel.

These are only the latest in a litany of developments that have made life harder for the refugees, most of who were once innocent farmers content with their simple lives. Such day-to-day struggles and the failure of the Nepal and Bhutani governments to agree on a solution have turned many of them "political. They are now aware of the rights and freedoms they hold within the little space they now occupy and those that they could claim if they had a country they could call their own. Growing awareness has also lead to politicisation along party lines, which some say has distracted refugee leaders away from pressing problems such as human rights and an early return. The rise of political parties has in fact impeded the way to a solution as instead of working together the parties compete against each other, they add. As frustrations rise and morale dips, there are disturbing signs such as increasing indiscipline, rise in alcohol abuse and domestic violence. The walls of a nursery school are lined with posters decrying domestic violence and rape. Asked if the condition was so bad that children had to be made aware from such a young age, a passing local smiles and explains, "that is not for the children, it is to create awareness among the parents who come to drop their children off".

Increasingly, husbands here are taking second wives, abandoning the first. This happened to both Nirma and her mother Krishna Maya. "It has been five years since he left me and my newborn child Kamala. I hear he is now living in another camp with a younger woman but we haven’t heard from him since," says Nirma echoing her mother, Krishna Maya’s story. Krishna Maya’s husband left her the year they arrived from Bhutan because she did not have a son. Officially the refugees cannot work outside the camps but every morning at around seven, a stream of cycles leaves the camp. One aid worker revealed that the Nepali government is ‘relatively lenient’ about employment so the refugees work but for shamefully low wages due to their illegal status and oversupply. The frustration is more apparent among the well educated youth as their ambitions rise beyond the camps. Says Karan Girung, a class 12 English student of Sanischare Camp in Moram, “Already teach grades one and two in the camp here. Later I want to teach at a private boarding school. I know finding a job will be difficult—there are many who complete their degrees and move out only to be forced to come back because they can’t find jobs. Those are probably the most frustrated people here”.

Although the camps lack barbed wires, fences or gates to block their passage to the outside world, an invisible wall surrounds the refugees. The outside world is a sinister place for a person without citizenship and no papers to prove who they are. As Hari Maya, 60, says, “I am an old woman now. I want to go back to my own country, back to my farm and die there. That is my only wish—to be able to die in my own backyard."
Detention. True, the massive destruction of politicians was once again railroaded into morning, almost the entire crop of national and orders. True, yesterday (Thursday) and unconstitutional ordinances, decrees themselves that the national prospects are economy with the able assistance of the Country in Vernacular.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit

Nepal has to unload a lot of historical discriminatory garbage as well as the negative legacy of Chairman Gyawendra in the form of illegal and unconstitutional ordinances, decrees and orders. True, yesterday (Thursday) morning, almost the entire crop of national politicians was once again railroaded into detention. True, the massive destruction of the national spirit at the hands of the Maoist rebellion requires a colossal recovery effort. But when royalty is shown the door and the Maoist forced to give up their brutal campaign, the country will have achieved a catharsis and the future will be ours to build. The twin rebel royal challenge has allowed the nation to mature in a telescoped period of time and the people will be better for it as along as we land on all four feet.

Once we land thus, the underpinnings for a successful nation-state are all there. The lack of formal colonisation delivered, in the modern era, a Kathmandu economic power elite so lacking in sophistication that it did not have the perspective to understand the atavistic nature of the royal takeover and react instinctively against the chairman’s coup d’état. But no matter, the advantages of non-colonisation are legion even if oft repeated. Most importantly, the fact that the British stayed away has allowed Nepal a continuous history that provides a spine of identity that other nation states of Southasia began to build only after 1947.

While many of the myriad tongues of Nepal are sadly in decline, the fact is that Nepali as the link language provides a platform for political and economic cohesion. Nepal differs from nearly every Southasian country in this sense—there is not the distinction between the English-speaking ‘creamy layer’ and the vernacular masses you find everywhere else. In Delhi, Colombo, Kathmandu and even Dhaka, just to take two examples, the vibrant journalistic sphere and the loud and raucous political arena in Nepal functions entirely in the Nepali language, without English elite interference. There is not the demographic and class divide between the English and Vernacular, which spells more efficient politics, all else remaining constant.

It is because all else has not been constant that political stability and economic advance has been denied the Nepali people even though their nation-state is capable. There are enough examples to show that Nepal could have ‘democratically’ worked for the people if there is indeed that stability and the presence of an alert civil society to watchdog and lead up the politicians. Nepal’s successful experiments in local government, community/public radio and community forestry, just to take some recent example, prove that this country of ‘manageable’ size and population can make things work quicker than countries in the neighbourhood.

Nepal is one of few countries in the world today where there exists today a vibrant movement for a return to democracy and where the contours of that democracy is already visible in dawn’s early light— not many can say that for Pakistan, for example. When the chairman-kracked down, the civil society— in particular the lawyers, the human rights defenders and the journalists—did not succumb, instead, over the past year, they ratcheted up their opposition and rejected outright the continuous flow of royal ordinances and orders. This movement for democracy has remained on track despite the fact of the spotlight Maoists (whose leadership sees the writing on the wall) but is yet to pick up the courage to tell the romantically idealised cadre that the game is up and the countrymen everywhere in Delhi, Colombo, Kathmandu and even Dhaka, must unite to take two examples, the vibrant journalistic sphere, the civil society, and the countrywide social sphere will respond with alacrity to the demands of inclusive democracy now being born and clear, and understood, across the land.

All in all, the actions of Chairman Gyawendra are hastening the day of democracy in Nepal, which, in the darkest hour, is the spirit up.!

Dirty dam draws dirty smelters

KUALA LUMPUR—Trans-national aluminium smelters, some teaming up with Malaysian partners, are beating a path to eastern Sarawak State with an eye to surplus power generated by the problem-ridden Bakun Dam.

The much-delayed dam on Borneo Island was originally scheduled for completion in 2003 but is now only expected to start generating electricity from late 2009. Faced with soaring electricity tariffs and raw material costs, many aluminium plants have closed shop in the US and Europe. Major smelters are now courting the globe for places where electricity is cheap and their sights have narrowed on Bakun’s excess potential, even as environmentalists worry about the project’s impact.

The 2,400-megawatt Bakun project was approved by former premier Mahathir Mohamad in 1994, amidst an outcry that it would displace thousands of indigenous people. Planners ambitiously aimed to channel 70 percent of the dam’s generated power across the South China Sea to Peninsular Malaysia by laying over 600km of submarine cables.

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US missiles fuel opposition

KARACHI—Missile strikes carried out by the United States on Damadola village near the Afghan border, killing 18 people, can fuel religious fanatics in this country and seriously complicate US President George W Bush’s ‘war on terror’, say moderate political leaders and security analysts.

“Political realities in Pakistan need to be better understood by the Americans. They could do with more consideration for the sentiments of a smaller power that America claims as its ally,” said BM Kulty, organising secretary of the Pakistan Vera Partit, who lived in this officially Islamic country of 150 million people are opposed to Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf’s policy of supporting Washington’s war directed against the al-Qaeda terrorist network— the leadership of which is believed to be holed up in the remote tribal areas of the Pakistan-Afghan border. Indeed, the target of last week’s attacks was Ayman al-Zawahiri, second-in-command to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden who, according to intelligence agencies, was expected to be present at the scene of the attack for a dinner to celebrate Eid festivities. “Benefit from the incident is being reaped by Islamist parties that are taking credit for the protest campaign (against the air strikes),” said Kulty. (IPS)
Golf with goals

You won’t get grumpy when you know what you want

Very often when I am at a golf club, I overhear golfers grumbling about their rounds. Their errant drives or three-pulls overshadow all other conversation. The truth is that even the world’s greatest golfers play very few rounds to their expectations. Tiger Woods says, “I probably hit a maximum of two good shots in a round.” I believe that every golfer should enjoy his round regardless of the score. The best way to do that is to be focused on what you want to achieve. Before you go out onto the course, figure out what you expect from a round. Do you just want to post a good score or crunch a drive 300 yards? Does finding every fairway off the tee make you happy or would you rather play for that perfect swing?

Do you just want to post a good score or achieve. Before you go out onto the course, figure out what you want from a round. Do you just want to post a good score or crunch a drive 300 yards? Does finding every fairway off the tee make you happy or would you rather play for that perfect swing?

“Tiger Woods says, “I probably hit a maximum of two good shots in a round.””

Determine what gives you more pleasure because, believe me, if golf makes you happy at the end of the day, you are bound to improve. If belting the ball is your game, just go ahead and enjoy yourself. If you want to cut corners with your driver, be prepared to risk the shot going out of bounds.

Length has its risks and rewards and while a reward will make you smile, the risk should not sadden you. You have to learn the importance of accepting a result. If scoring is important, you must put strategies and routines into play. When club selection becomes important, you have to play to your strength and at various times sacrifice distance in favour of accuracy.

I would suggest that you experiment. Go to the course one day and give it your best. Use the most dangerous routes for reaching the green. Don’t worry about the score. Keep recalling the few shots that actually turned out as per your plans. On another day, go with the intention of reducing your strokes. Play conservatively. Then analyse both your days to see what gave you more happiness. Once you know that, you will find ways of improving your game.

Remember, the most important thing on the course is to enjoy the course’s lush green fairways and ambience.

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

The government should make sports a priority

Hatchets have long been buried. The former captain of the national football team, Ganesh Thapa, is back in his rightful position as the president of the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA). Nepal Times spoke to Thapa about ANFA’s current activities and how he plans to take Nepal’s most popular sport further.

Nepali Times: What are the future plans of ANFA?

With the help of the Goal Project and our own resources we have established three technical centres where coaches are given training. Our priority at this moment is building our own football stadium. Since most of the tournaments are held in Kathmandu, we are looking for land here. Within two weeks we will know and in two years time the stadium will be ready.

How is the relationship between ANFA and the government’s National Sports Council (NSC)?

The relationship is fine but as far as ANFA is concerned, we are an independent body. From this year on we will receive no help (financially) from NSC. Even if we demand, His Majesty’s Government perhaps does not have the budget and more importantly sports is not a priority for it. We are collecting our own resources through our own means and are no longer dependent on NSC.

What is most essential for the development of the game?

First we need the help of the government—sports should be given priority. And then of course we need money. We are raising our own resources and are doing the best we can but this is not enough to take the game further.

How is ANFA mobilising the resources it has?

Good things hardly appear in the media. ANFA has been recognised as among the three best football associations in the world, along with the likes of Japan and Qatar. I am not saying this because I am the president of the association but as a player. Our grassroots-level programs are being implemented in 38 districts. To choose the best of the best from all over the nation we are holding school level tournaments throughout the country. Then there are the under-14, under-17 and national level tournaments so we can prepare the best of the best for the future. We have our own Academy (ANFA complex, Satdobato) where we are providing everything, including education to 80 kids all year round. Our main goal is to start selecting and training the best young talents so that we can produce the best footballers. You will see the results in the years to come.

What are the weaknesses of Nepali footballers?

Lack of international exposure, which leads to lack of confidence. Second, physically we are not strong. At the Academy (in the ANFA complex in Satdobato) I can only afford to give the minimum diet as per Nepali standards. If we had money I would give them a better diet, have better coaches and send them abroad for training and tournaments. Only if there are proper incentives will players perform better. That is why we have put cash prizes up to 27 lakhs for the league games so that it encourages the youth to play football.

Why do you think the government is not giving enough support?

It is not just football—the government does not have a policy towards any sports. You will see media persons, actors and academicians get felicitated but what about sports personalities? For example, Nepal beat India in the recent SAF games. The captain was Raju Shukya. He was a temporary staff at the RNAC and a week after he came back he was among three people to be thrown out. How will players be able to perform under such conditions? Unless there is a change in thought and mentality there is no use sending proposals to the government.

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Zinda is about life and how a happy one can easily change. Bala (Sanjay Dutt) and Nisha (Celina Jaitley) live a happy life in Bangkok until one day something strange happens to Bala. He awakens to find himself locked in a room not knowing how he got there. Not knowing where his future lies, Bala spends a long 14 years alone in the room. There he learns what it is to be ‘alive’ but his happiness drains away as he becomes insane.

Call 4442220 for show timings  
www.jainepal.com

DINING
Buffet Breakfast at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and deserts.
4491234

Maki Newa Bhutu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi.
4497884

Mexican and Italian options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999

Barbeque at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999

DINING
Buffet Breakfast at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and deserts.
4491234

Maki Newa Bhutu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi.
4497884

Mexican and Italian food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935

Great Dining options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999

Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 5.30 PM 21 January. Radisson Hotel. Tickets Rs 750. Dwarika’s

Cadenza & Friends: The sounds of Nep-Jazz. Featuring some of the best Jazz and Classical musicians in the country. 5.30 PM 21 January. Radisson Hotel. Tickets Rs 800. For more details call 4441067

Uncork the Good Times Fusion: Ciney and Par-e-jat playing with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, at Niek’s Place Live music every Wednesday and Saturday. 8PM, Upstairs Lajimpat

Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622

sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622

Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday. 8PM, Thamel

Sutra Art Workshop opens 19 January.

Best of 8 Crafts art competition at Wild Art Gallery. 1-8 each month. 4218410

Radio@radiosagarmatha.org, www.radiosagarmatha.org

Satellite pictures taken on Thursday morning indicate sunny days ahead through the weekend. However, a fresh westerly front is on the way and might bring some high and dry clouds early next week.

Nepali weather

by MAUSAM BEED

Temperature fluctuations and variations in humidity levels will be seen due to the drought in the country. Jet streams above the Arabian Sea have delivered packets of fog over the tarai resulting in reduced visibility and cancellation of all flights to Tarai regions and Pokhara for several days. From Thursday, sunny days are expected to return in the Tarai although parts of the tarai should still be under fog.

NEPALI WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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Getaways
Home away from home Shivapuri Heights Cottage for bookings 9941371927, sohan@escape2nepal.com

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, award winning relaxation in Pokhara. Reservations 01 4361500

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

Star Cruises/Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500.00 only. 2012345.

Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

Conferences at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

EXHIBITIONS
Combination 3 an exhibition of paintings and sculptures. Nepal Art Council. 28 January 2PM

Filters of a Journey Oil paintings by Adhi Sadhu Chakraborty 18-31 January, Park Gallery Lazimpat. 4419353

Metamorphosis an exhibition of contemporary paintings and sculpture. 31 January, 11AM-6PM, Siddhartha Art Gallery

Events
The Syrian Bride A film by Eran Riklis. 22 January, 5.30 PM.

Wild Art Gallery opens 19 January. Thamel

Sutra Art Workshop 15-30 January, International Mountain Museum, Pokhara. 4242106

Youth Discussion 15-30 January, International Mountain Museum, Pokhara. 4242106

Uncork the Good Times Fusion: Ciney and Par-e-jat playing with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, at Niek’s Place

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Basketball training camp for school and college level students. 5-25 January, GAA Hall. 4491234

MUSIC
The Cloud Walkers at Rex Bar. Request the music of your choice.

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu: 4491234

Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle

Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday. 8PM, Upstairs Lajimpat

JCS Quintet at Niki’s Place

Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622

Unplugged sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622

Live Music at Jenui Bar, Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4221711

Live Jazz by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

Cadenza & Friends: The sounds of Nep-Jazz. Featuring some of the best Jazz and Classical musicians in the country. 5.30 PM 21 January. Radisson Hotel. Tickets Rs 800. For more details call 4441067

Uncork the Good Times Fusion: Ciney and Par-e-jat playing Popular Sounds of 70’s Thursday 7PM. Rs. 750. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

Popular Sounds of 70’s Friday 7PM. Rs. 750. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

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for school and college level students. 5-25 January. GAA Hall. 4491234

To book your visit please call 4442220

For more details call 4451212.
“If you want to do something you can do it but you have to dare to do it,” says Pushpa Basnet, 22, who overcame failure to become founder and president of the Early Childhood Development Centre in Bhanghateni. Established six months ago, the centre cares for children under the age of six whose parents are in jail, most of them in the women’s prison in Sundhara.

Basnet was inspired to start the project during a jail visit during her second year of a bachelor’s course at Xaviers College though she has been interested in social work since she worked as an after-school volunteer in Bal Mandir. “I never thought that prisons would have such young children. We thought we could take them out but you know how it is—friends talk but it’s hard to get things started.”

But they overcame that lethargy and finally got things rolling. With the support of a core group of seven—Rupak Rana, Kammu Pokherel, Purnima Basnet, Juni Shrestha, Mina KC and Aruna Karmacharya—the centre was readied for business: “I am really proud of my team. It’s been all friends and it has been about teamwork,” says Basnet.

She is also proud of her own achievements. Having failed in third grade, Basnet didn’t pass the SLC on her first attempt and was also held back in her second year of college for missing classes. Making the centre work became her way of proving that determination can overcome past failures. “I could have stayed back and cried but I chose not to. Today I look back and I know I have achieved so much.”

Most of the centre’s children are aged two to six years. They are picked up from the jail at 8AM and dropped back at 4PM, a daylong release from the four walls of the prison where their mothers are confined. Sano Kanchi’s mother is in jail for killing her husband. At the end of a day spent at the centre the girl, barely a year old, refuses to return to the prison until Basnet promises to get her the next day.

The group has been trying to keep the centre going by raising money from family and friends. They also sell products made in the jails by the children’s mothers and use a portion of the profits to buy the centre’s food and other necessities.

The centre currently cares for eight children and Basnet has approached other jails to inform them of their services. The good the centre has done for the children is apparent in their happy faces and healthy bodies. Says Basnet, “It brings me immense satisfaction to see the improvement in the children. I will never give up. Even now, every chance I get I run back to work.”
O

ly after the scientific community announced last week that forests don’t just give off oxygen but also methane did it become clear that we have been barking up the wrong tree all along to counter global warming in this country.

His Majesty’s Government seems to have known about this as far back as early last year, which explains why all the trees along Kathmandu’s streets were chopped down following the royal movement and why the stumps have still not been replaced by new saplings.

What this discovery about trees as methane generators also means is that all our past efforts to expand this country’s forest cover and contribute to a greener earth has come to naught. In fact, by increasing the tree cover in Nepal over the past 20 years it seems we may have actually made the earth warmer. Oops, now what do we do? Well, there is really no other option but to start destroying our forests all over again and let them grow back. And we have no time to lose, so let’s get cracking.

As responsible global citizens there are lots of other things we can do individually and collectively to stop the earth from heating up. So, in the public interest, we hereby list 10 ways we can all help lessen the impact of climate change:

1. Immediately set a time limit on speeches by the Second Vice- chairman to less than five minutes so that there is a check on the emission of hot air.
2. Stop breathing. Every breath you take consumes precious atmospheric oxygen and gives off harmful carbon dioxide. Remember every molecule counts!
3. Organise tantric rituals and make animal sacrifices at select shrines across the subcontinent to appease the gods.
4. Cut flatulence in cattle and livestock. There are an estimated 22 million cows and 17 million goats in Nepal and if all of them felt free to pass wind without let or hindrance imagine the kind of accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere we’d be left with. We’re not even counting yaks and water buffaloes here and we all know how embarrassing those two can be in polite company.
5. Organise maha yagya in Tundikhel for harmony in the universe and burn 15 tons of rice seeds and feed 108 brahmins.
6. Immediately scrap the community forestry program.
7. Create artificial shortage of LPG but I notice the government has already thought of that this winter.
8. Soda contains carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, so avoid it. Henceforth, take your double whiskey neat.
10. Ask Pashupatinath one last time to protect us all.