Red alert
Alarmed by the Nepal crisis, Euro MPs urge a return to democracy

KUNDA DIXIT in STRASBOURG

One year after King Gyanendra’s takeover, European parliamentarians here are set to step up pressure on him to call off controversial municipal polls on 8 February, restore democracy and begin a peace process.

In interviews here, MEPs from across the political spectrum were unanimous that the king is taking the country down the wrong path and he must roll back his move before it is too late for the country and himself.

“We are very concerned about what has happened in Nepal this past week and we see a return to democratic values and respect for human rights as an essential step in restoring peace,” Eneko Landaburu, head of the EU’s department of external relations, told us.

To mark one year of the king’s takeover, the Sub-committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament has called for a hearing on Nepal on 20 February that will be attended by top officials and may issue a strong resolution against the royal takeover.

On 1 February itself, the lobby group Euro Step is organising a high-level discussion in Brussels titled ‘The Future of Democracy, Peace and Human Rights in Nepal’ to be addressed by Swiss and British delegates, senior Commission officials and the human rights adviser to EU Council secretary general, Javier Solana.

Here and in Brussels, European officials are sufficiently alarmed to step up consultations with rights groups and governments. They see it as a positive sign that Nepal figured in talks between senior Indian and Chinese officials in Beijing earlier this month. China’s expression of concern and calls for reconciliation this week were also seen by European Nepal-watchers as a significant departure from Beijing’s previous position about not commenting on Nepal’s internal affairs.

In Brussels, the Commission’s Nepal handlers are preparing the Country Strategy Paper for 2007-2013. While not wanting Nepal to suffer from aid cuts, they say future outlays will hinge on how fast the country returns to democracy. "We will maintain some money for Nepal but it will only go to support the democratic process, human rights and conflict mitigation," one official said.

European officials are also scathing about the Maoists’ return to conflict, saying it jeopardises the party-Maoist pact. Said one senior adviser at the EU parliament: “There is just no way Europe will back an obsolete ideology that uses violence, it will be difficult to explain it to our citizens.

Europe recently signed a ‘strategic partnership’ with India to coordinate foreign policy more closely and officials said this would include Nepal. Socialist MEP from Britain, Neena Gill, who is also chair of the delegation for relations with SAARC, says: “We regard India as a key country with influence in the region and on Nepal we will consult them closely.”

Press Freedom for Peace and Democracy

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Inside looking out

After 10 years, why wait for more deaths if there is no military solution?

We international observers and friends of Nepal agree there will be no military solution to the crisis in Nepal. Why should we then wait for more deaths, refugees, abductions and massive human rights violations?

It makes no sense to tolerate a deepening humanitarian crisis throughout the countryside if build on this by adding a well-coordinated international effort to foster a meaningful peace process.

Just peace has to come from within the country. Only an alliance of non-armed democratic forces will be able to constructively handle the present polarisation and overcome the political impasse. Only a democratic movement made up of trustworthy personalities and innovative institutions can urge the two extremes to the mainstream. In the past, I have seen ways to resolve the conflict: the palace and the parties boosted the Maoist rebellion. Together they launched a repressive and militarised answer by the palace. At the end of the day, the victims of both strategies are the democratic forces and rural Nepalis.

The Maoists have already declared their interest and political will to join the mainstream. Believe them; the cadre don't want to go old as has happened in Bhutan. The 12-point understanding is a necessary but not sufficient manifestation of this will.

Further proof is needed during a second and third round of talks. Details have to be nailed down as precisely as possible.

If there is no military solution to Nepal’s civil war, we have to recognise the Maoists as a political party at the negotiation table. However, the government ignored the death and destruction inrun anywhere. The government ignored the death and destruction in

THREATS

Kudos to the Nepali government for its restraint, despite attempts by political saboteurs to destroy the state. These are just plain-English words that defined a peace rally in Kathmandu to continue an illogical protest to waylay elections. I support Home Minister Kamal Thapa’s (Back to February First’, #282) view that the whole affair is another crafty way of making the government lose its standing.

OPINION

I really liked reading Rita Thapa’s ‘The art of giving’ (#268), I admire your style of copiing with your single hood by finding your own way. I would love to meet with you someday.

TOUGH ENGLISH

When I read any English language newspaper or magazine from Nepal and compare it with yours I find it very difficult to understand. The titles are complex and distracting. For example, ‘BBC, CNN or AP are far more readable and understandable for me because of their simplicity in expression. Otherwise why would I understand 10 percent of the story in other papers and only 50 percent in yours? My English proficiency by CBT TOEFL Reading is 27.00. Structure and Grammar is 28/30 and writing is 6/6. So, I just want to know if other readers of Nepal Times also find it very, very

HELP NEEDED

Kunda Dixit should see a shrink!

Kapil Rana, email

Mr J.K. it is not Ram Bahadur Bomzon who needs saving, it is us the Niepal people who need to be saved. At times of grave crisis it is great comfort, solace and hope that this ‘Little Bodhisattva’ provides to the Neapali people regardless of his intentions. He provides much needed solace psychologically, sociologically and spiritually during a tumultuous period in our history. We should be thanking him for showing us the way of peace—first look within.

Sudhanshu Dixit

KAUSHAL PANDAY

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Guest Column

Günther Baechler

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Autocracy for beginners

A lesson on how to lose legitimacy in quick easy steps

One year after the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Nepali Army assumed the responsibilities of CEO through royal proclamation, the question of legitimacy continues to haunt the regime. No matter how you read the law of the land, there is no provision in the 1990 constitution that permits the king to act as the fountainhead of all state authority. Democracy was hijacked at gunpoint last year and it has brought nothing but woe to everyone.

STATE OF THE STATE

CK Lal

During the Cold War, American academicians cloaked naked power grasps with the Doctrine of State Necessity. It helped the west justify support to tin-pot dictators by: a) that which is otherwise unlawful, necessity makes lawful, b) that the safety of the people is the supreme law, c) the safety of the State is the supreme law.

The state necessity thesis has since been quoted by the advocates of military regimes everywhere to justify almost anything. Nepal's rulers have been ardent adherents of political experiments in Pakistan and it is instructive to look at the implications of this doctrine in Kathmandu.

The apex court of Pakistan first enunciated the principle in 1955 thus: “Subject to the condition of absoluteness, extremeness and imminence, an act which would otherwise be illegal becomes legal if it is done bona fide under the stress of necessity, the necessity being referable to an intention to preserve the Constitution, the State and the Society and to prevent it from dissolution.” If the justification for February First was similar, then it ended up achieving the exact opposite in Nepal.

In 1977, Pakistan's Supreme Court quoted the 1955 judgment to validate the Zia-ul-Haq regime but laid out the grounds of rationalisation in clearer terms. It said that a military takeover could be justified only if it met at least four conditions: a) an imperative and inevitable necessity or exceptional circumstances, b) no other remedy to apply, c) the measure taken must be proportionate to the necessity, and d) it must be of a temporary character limited to the duration of the exceptional circumstances.

To do away with even these four conditions, General Musharraf issued a Provisional Constitution Order, which barred the courts from issuing ‘any order against the Chief Executive or any person exercising powers or jurisdiction under his authority’. In justifying the 1999 coup, the court had to resort to Latin, saying: ‘salus populi ex supreme lex’ (the welfare of the people is the supreme law of any land).

Here in Nepal, the king has failed the test of performance legitimacy. Over the year of his rule, the economy has gone into a tailspin, society is on the verge of disintegration and the polity has all but surrendered to the military. The dark days of long blackouts are back in Nepal after nearly a decade. For the first time since the insurgency began, the spectre of failed state haunts even most optimistic Nepalis.

The drift towards autocracy began to unfold after 4 October 2002. On 1 February 2006, the experiment climaxed with the military storming into our newswomen. Now even the media that had given the king the benefit of doubt has lost faith. That perhaps has been the biggest loss of all: February First served mortal victory to the Maoists on a silver platter. It proved that their diagnosis of the root cause of evils afflicting Nepali society have been correct all along.

Unfortunately, a corollary to that assumption is that we may have to tolerate totalitarianism to defeat authoritarianism. The madness of the Maoist methods as evidenced by the pointless assassination of a minor political actor like Vijay Lal Das of Janakpur shows that for the communists, the end still justifies the means.

However, part of their prescription may now be inevitable: a constituent assembly to herald the end of monarchy is imperative.
Research for whose benefit?

A vaccine tested on 2,000 Nepali soldiers will soon be released in the market

A vaccine for Hepatitis E that was tested on Nepali soldiers three years ago will soon be released into the market, reviving doubts about the ethics of testing.

Two thousand Nepali soldiers were used to test the vaccine developed for the US Army in clinical trials in 2001-2003. One thousand soldiers received vaccine injections on day one, after one month and then six months later. The remaining 1,000 soldiers got placebo.

The company developing the vaccine, ClassTrack Inc., announced in December that the drug had proven 96 percent effective and it that would take the next steps to market it. Critics have asked whether the soldiers were properly informed and whether Nepal would benefit. The government says it must balance ethical concerns with the need for prudential medical know-how.

The field trial was organized by the US Army's research institute for Medical Sciences, which set up the Walter Reed AFRIMS Research Unit in Nepal. The unit was formed in Kathmandu in 1995. The army had long wanted a vaccine to combat Hepatitis E, a water-borne disease that causes half of all hepatitis deaths in the world.

The lab had been working on soldiers in Lalitpur in 1998. Nepal was chosen because Hepatitis E is endemic here.

The results of the US-Nepal trials were encouraging so WARBUN recruited another trial on 2,000-3,000 locals in Lalitpur. But people there began asking questions, such as how they would benefit from lending their bodies to science. Soon the media and NGOs heard of the plans and began asking ethical questions. "The volunteers had signed an agreement without knowing what they had signed because they were either illiterate or semi-illiterate," says Executive Director Lajana Munarbar. "Our concern (in Lalitpur) was that the process followed was not ethical. The volunteers had signed an agreement without knowing what they had signed because they were either illiterate or semi-illiterate.

The NEHC had ethical guidelines for research when the Hepatitis E vaccine trials began. But they were probably not widely disseminated, says Adhikari, who is also dean of the Institute of Medical Research at Tribhuvan University. Today's standard is the National Ethical Guidelines for Human Research in Nepal, first published in 2001. "If this proposal came to us now, we would ask ‘how are you going to ensure that people can consent to the use of this vaccine?’ But probably at that time the question was not asked," Adhikari added.

The NEHC would also ensure that all researchers should manage disposal funds has delayed disposal (See ‘The Dirty Dozen’, 200). According to Jay Ram Adhikari, national coordinator for the Persistent Organic Pesticide Management Committee now under the Nepal Environmental and Scientific Services and coordinator of the PWG, the plan is being prepared and it is possible that at least some of the pesticides will be disposed of locally. The National Implementation Plan will be completed by May/June and we will reach a conclusion regarding the proper disposal of POPs,” he told us.

Others question Nepal's ability to safely dispose of 31 acres of contaminated land, according to the environmental assessment report of the Environmental and Scientific Services and coordinator of the PWG, says the government lacks the capability to dispose of these chemicals. If you incinerate pesticide it will spread,” Sharma told us.

One bright note is that the use of chemical pesticides for agriculture has decreased significantly over the years as farmers return to using organic fertilizers and more environment-friendly options to protect their crops, according to officials at the Pesticide Registrar's office.

Newer rules on importing and distributing pesticides are now in place to prevent mass import of chemicals that could lead to a repeat of past problems. ●
Bad debts down

Government-owned Rastriya Bajrangi Bank says it will reduce its bad debts or non-performing assets to 28 percent by July 2007 from the current level of about 50 percent. Experts say the RBI will have to continue with its modernising bid in order to achieve that target. “The bank would achieve its goal by adopting a modern banking approach,” said deep-economy governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, Bir Bikram Rayamajhi. RBI officials claim that the bank has recovered Rs 7.4 billion in cash over the past three years and completed restructuring of Rs 2.56 billion worth of loans. Officials say the bank has been trying to automate 47 of its branches to improve performance and loan recovery. Under the financial sector reform programs of international financial agencies, the central bank has allowed RBI and the Nepal Bank Limited to be managed by foreign teams.

Andhikola bags award

The Andhikola Power Plant of Sobha Power Company (BPC) has won the Blue Planet Prize of UNESCO and the International Hydropower Association for the year 2005. The private sector BPC runs the 12.3 MW Jhimruk power plant in Pyuthan. Andhikola in Syangja, which is to be upgraded from 5.1 to 9.4 MW. The company also plans to add several more power generation centres to take its total generation capacity to 50 MW by 2010. The Blue Planet trophy honours Andhikola’s achievements in rural electrification.

World wetlands

The Nepal Tourism Board and Friends of the Bagmati in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) from Canada have launched a special package to promote the World Wetlands Day 2006 and the ‘2nd Taudaha Jamboree’, from 28 January to 4 February in Kathmandu.

NEW PRODUCTS

EVEREST SAVINGS: Everest Bank Ltd. (EBL) has launched Sunaulo Bhaiwya Yojana, a deposit scheme that will enable rural villagers to earn savings interest at the rate of 50 percent each month for a specified period of time. The bank will pay the principal amount along with half-yearly compounded interest to the depositors at the time of maturity. The deposit period is 1-5 years. The scheme also includes the flexibility to extend an advance up to 80 percent of the deposited amount at an interest rate 1.25 percent higher than the deposit rate.

FINGERPRINT SAFE: Home Furnishers has introduced the first ever Fingerprint Lock Safe in Nepal, made by Korea’s Bumi Safe Company. The safe is able to read fingerprints, which can be verified within less than one second. You can also enter a digital password.

Back to the Stone Age

The fruits of war include electricity and oil shortages

This Beed received a spate of emails from well wishers ahead when the curfew was clamped on this valley last week. When mobile phones were cut, more worried queries arrived. They came to the state sponsored bands, in the form of a day-long curfew, and people started offering me their homes and advice on why I should leave Nepal.

Perhaps it is to be expected that a country that resorts to curfew-wars and disruptive communication lines without explaining why such measures are necessary will produce a reaction. Regardless, the impact on the economy is starting to tell. It’s a pity, for example, that the tourism industry cannot see three good months in succession. People in power who make decisions that impact the economy do not realise that a single advisory can kill businesses for months. Another classic case is the energy sector. A 1.5-2 hour blackout schedule has suddenly expanded to 17 hours and experts suggest this may increase again in a month or two.

This is something we will have to live with till Pashupatinath knows when. On one hand there is no way that donors will cough up ‘free’ money to build generation plants and on the other, no private investor would be willing to take the risk today. Hydropower units require at least four years to be built but Nepal has no plans on the drawing board.

Five years of myopia is starting to show in the form of blackouts. Alongside the shortage of power is a bankrupt NOC (Nepal Oil Corporation). Fuel prices are high and the price of generation from captive diesel plants is double the price of electricity. Political myopia and potentially vested interests have delayed reformist legislation resulting in this cold, dark winter.

With no electricity nor diesel, the Stone Age appears near. Conversely, if we had not experienced such problems over the last decade, our gross domestic product (GDP) could today be closer to $ 5 billion which much of which could have been invested in development. The comparison is not made just to cry over the past but to put into perspective what we have potentially lost in the past decade’s conflict.

High energy costs and erratic supply of petroleum products also means a direct inflation hit. As inflation touches the double digit mark and GDP growth turns negative, the economy further suffers. There are many examples in the world of governments being toppled due to inflation, which results in more frustration for the common citizens. The worst scenario of all would see the political exchange rate with India being reviewed downwards, precisely at the time when it is needed. A depreciated Nepali Rupee is the last thing this economy needs.

While neighbouring economies are growing at a rapid pace, we are seeing stagnation. More fuel tax revenues and fewer open borders, already witnessing a pilot citizen ID scheme, becomes more restricted. This would clamp down the Nepali economy even further.

Common sense suggests that running a good economy is always better than ruling a bad one. However, it is not uncommon for common sense to lose out. By the time the political equations are settled, we will have lost more. The Beed has always maintained that giving up the business of war at the cost of the business of peace is always difficult for people who have tasted the fruits of war. We have to look at the larger picture. A country of 25 million depends on it.

www.arthabeed.com
**Polls a ploy**

UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal in Kathmandu, 24 January

The king’s election call is based on his incorrect analysis that he would have a better chance of winning if he made many small bids with one stone. His first card was to lure in the parties to take part in polls so he could portray himself as a democrat and legitimise all of his undemocratic moves. If the parties did not participate, Plan B was to sideline them on charges that they had lost their credibility among the people and had been displaced. The third scheme was to cash in on possible indifference and rifts among the parties. It was expected that the isolated royal regime would be able to entice one of the factions of the parties’ alliance. The dangerous part of this plan is that the king’s loyalists and yes men won elections riding rubber stamps like the Election Commission and the royal administration. It is very important to understand that this is all part of a grand design to create political parties comprising their votaries and to upset the mainstream political blocs. The king wants to institutionalise his autocratic regime and by amending the 1991 constitution plans to establish a guided democracy under an active monarchy. The drama of this election must be seen in the context of the appointments of zonal and regional administrators and army interference in the civil administration in the name of a unified command. Now we see their efforts to create mass opposition against elections so that the rulers are forced to hold the vote within the confines of army barracks and police stations. Once security personnel in civil dress and their family members are made to cast their votes within these areas, such an election becomes meaningless. You will not find legitimacy anywhere in the whole world for such polls. The Maoists long ago announced they would not allow the vote to take place. In that case, it’s possible that the government may announce that the candidates were elected unopposed, which would produce a result void of any credibility and legitimacy. Our campaign of boycotting the municipal polls is only a prelude to a much larger campaign of boycotting the polls and isolating the rulers. Of course, the UML utilised the chaos and instability to oppose elections, but they would point out shortcomings and ask for necessary changes but not boycott the polls entirely. In our case, the party has decided to not only to boycott the polls but also to work towards violating the rights of the voters and the candidates. Ironically, it is the parties who talk about human rights. They cannot deny the fact that it was they who allowed Hindi movies in the market even after the artists have denounced them. The Nepal bandha, with its demand that small vehicles should not be allowed to ply more than 30km, was an orchestrated plan but they kept quiet about Indian vehicles that were allowed to operate freely in Nepal. If the parties are not being remote controlled by foreign forces, these are the questions they need to answer. Why do they not take part in the elections? Why are they for a constituent assembly instead of a democrat and legitimise all of his undemocratic moves. If the parties did not participate, Plan B was to sideline them on charges that they had lost their credibility among the people and had been displaced. The third scheme was to cash in on possible indifference and rifts among the parties. It was expected that the isolated royal regime would be able to entice one of the factions of the parties’ alliance. The dangerous part of this plan is that the king’s loyalists and yes men won elections riding rubber stamps like the Election Commission and the royal administration. 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Two ‘ists’

Rituraj in Himal Khabarpatrika,
14-20 January

Some people in Nepal like to call America ‘imperialist’ and India ‘expansionist’. But compare the construction work of new boundary walls at the American Club in Phora Darbar and the Indian embassy and something doesn’t seem right. The expansion of the American Club south of the royal palace has resulted in an impressive and wider sidewalk and has made the Kantipath intersection less congested. On the other hand, the Indian Embassy has raised the height of its wall in the narrow lane connecting Lajimpai to Kapurthala and Sinamangal section so that now looks like a tunnel. The Indian Embassy has the largest area of any embassy in Kathmandu but yet it didn’t offer to make the road wider, while the Americans were much more generous. The so-called imperialists turned out not to covet territory as much as the so-called expansionists, who would give an inch. Maybe that is the difference between the two.

Renewed fear

Nepal Samacharpatria, 24 January

The pain caused by the deaths of 12 people killed by a soldier in Nagarkot has still not healed for their families and friends of the innocent victims and now they have to face up to rumours of Maoist planning mass abductions in their villages. Over 300 youths from the wards of Nagarkot have already fled to Kathmandu and Bhaktapur in the past week. Former VDC chairman Bil Bahadur Tamang said the rumour has left villagers sleepless. Even the police are now taking shelter inside the army barracks due to fears of Maoist attack. Police officer Deepak Guru justified the step due to the heightening insecure situation.

Forced candidates

Ghatma ra Bichar, 25 January

The government, which has taken a firm decision to hold the municipal elections albeit no citizen is willing to freely declare their candidacy, is on a mission for people willing to run for office. After officials began calling district offices in search of candidates, mandales (pro-monarchists) are in a state of fear. With increasing pressure from the government, VDC chairmen and vice-chairmen in Banke, Barda, Kailali, Dang and Karnali have reportedly fled to India. Kamal Thapa and others who were brought into the government to ensure that there are candidates for the posts of mayor and vice-mayor have been constantly pressuring them. After getting calls from ministers, secretaries, palace officials and people like Sachit Shamsher, their family members have refused to even give out their contact information. Many of the pro-monarchists who have been forced to give their names for candidacy have reportedly left instructions to their wives to “run the household properly and buy a white sari”.

Speaking out

Statement by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, 26 January

The country is facing a grave crisis unprecedented in its history—one that we can and that we must avert. If wisdom and reason can be made to prevail among all the major political forces and if the best interests of the nation and the aspirations of the Nepali people for peace and democracy are given precedence then we are still in time to salvage our beloved country. This is not the time to apportion blame or to settle old scores. This is the time for contemplation and reconciliation. I strongly urge His Majesty the King to take initiatives for a dialogue with the parliamentary political parties. I urge the King:

• To issue a Royal Proclamation that immediately ends the direct rule assumed on 1 February, 2005.
• To unconditionally release all of those who have been detained unlawfully and undemocratically; leaders of political parties and their supporters, human rights activists, journalists, students and others.
• To withdraw curfews imposed in the Kathmandu Valley and other parts of the country.
• To cancel elections to the local bodies with immediate effect, and
• To invite the parliamentary parties for a dialogue and to form a democratic government. And that government must have full powers to negotiate on behalf of the Nepali people to settle the Maoist conflict and ultimately hold elections for the parliament.

I am proud to be a founding member of the Nepali Congress Party, the party that successfully led two revolutions, the first against the Rana oligarchy in 1951 and the second against the king’s autocratic panchyatal system in 1990. But at this crossroad I am profoundly saddened and deeply hurt by the split within the party. I appeal to both factions to reconcile. I urge my friends to set aside their grievances, put aside personal ego and ambitions and work collectively and without delay towards uniting the party. A democratic and united Nepal Congress Party can be an untenable instrument of permanent peace and stable democracy that is inclusive and egalitarian. Let democracy and peace prevail as we take our beloved country into the 21st century and let us allow the people freedom to develop in their own way.
Ten lost

Despite being the only district headquarters in Nepal that has suffered a major Maoist attack not once but twice, Jumla is surprisingly laid back. This high and remote town is in the icy grip of winter. The snow this year has been thick and a freezing wind blows down from the white-clad mountains to the north. People don’t linger much, even in the feeble sun. Jumla is an astounding representation of what lies beyond in the Karnali region. For those who can’t quite make it to Mugu and Simikot, Jumla provides an accessible example of what rulers in Kathmandu have ignored over the years. Its tarmacked airport runway and the slightly kinder weather make it relatively easy to get to all year round. The flights from Nepalganj being more cargo than people these days but the Jumlis are used to the sight of NGO workers and journalists getting off the plane. When the airport runway was asphalted in 1998 it was hoped it would lure tourists to this remote western district, which is the gateway to Rara Lake and beyond. But the insurgency soon engulfed the region and the expected tourism-led economic boom never happened. The only large bazaar in a district of 25,000 people lies along a ridge by the banks of the Tila also home to an estimated 4,000 soldiers in the heavily fortified army base overlooking the town. Essentially, therefore, this far outpost of His Majesty’s Government is a garrison town. Children play in the snow covered fields on top of soil already prepared for winter barley. They run around barefoot in the snow, some attracting admiration and others pity from strangers passing by. Fathers uncharacteristically tend to the needs of their young ones, spinning yarn and knitting scarves. Everyday life continues despite the ever-present threat of violence.

Along the Karnali Highway south there are no teenagers and young adults to be seen in the villages. The only youngsters are children playing in the snow. The Karnali Highway isn’t even finished yet and it’s already had a road accident.
meet are those who seem to be in ‘the party’. Tasks traditionally undertaken by the younger generation are now predominantly carried out by women and the older inhabitants and this includes the community groups that are engaged in digging the World Bank-funded road.

The Maoists tolerate the road-building and in some place actively promote it. There appears to be some confusion about the party’s aims, even among the rebel cadre. The majority seem unaware of the ideological underpinnings of the revolution, although they seemed to have memorised the slogans and jargon of the struggle. Some appear to have paid a terrible price for their involvement: they were missing limbs or had been maimed.

The Karnali Highway isn’t even finished yet and Jumla has already had its first road accident. One of the tractors that was ferried here by chopper fell off the road into the Tila, killing four people. Both the state and the rebels are competing for the hearts and minds of the people and since the road is so popular, both are helping to build it. Given the war zone on the Kalikot border, it may take a few more years for this stretch of highway to be linked to Surkhet but for now at least a 30 km stretch will soon be ready from Jumla southwards to the Maoist-run micro-hydro plant at Rarali.

Most young male Jumlis have fled the winter cold to migrate for seasonal work in India. They will return in late spring with their savings, as they have done for generations to plant rice in the irrigated fields along the Tila. Then they will return to India again.

As long as true development doesn’t come to Jumla, this annual coming and going will continue. Even the conflict hasn’t really changed the rhythm of life in this far-flung land.
Food insecurity is a complex problem that delivering more rice won’t solve

Food security is in deficit districts like in Rukum is mainly due to the government’s failure to develop the farming technology.

If there has been one negative influence on Nepal’s food and agriculture, it is the lack of government agricultural programs, especially management of the food distribution system, marketing of agricultural products and establishing effective post-harvest food storage systems.

The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), which specializes in food security, has repeatedly said that our country, unlike Sudan’s Darfur or other famine-hit African regions, does not face a food crisis so extreme that it requires emergency humanitarian relief.

A new WFP study, Household Food Security, provides an excellent analysis of food vulnerability in Nepal’s food-deficit districts. Based on a sampling study conducted in 43 districts with 168 communities and 1,676 households, it provides the real causes of food shortage, its economic and health impacts and recommends ways to improve the situation.

It begins with the concept of ‘hungry poor households’ in 41 of the 43 districts. These include families who own limited assets, lack access to remittances from labour migration and live in larger households. The problem is especially acute in districts with low Human Development Indexes.

Ethically speaking, it is not just Dalits and janajatis who suffer but Brahmins also, says the report.

The farms of the hungry poor do not generate enough food to meet household needs mostly due to small land holdings that result from distribution of lands among many male relatives. As a result, the families need to buy food from the market but due to a lack of cash, they often end up in debt after buying on credit or borrowing at high interest rates.

According to the study, around 71 percent of the hungry poor consumes purchased food on credit or with borrowed money, which the WFP points out is a coping strategy rather than a productive activity.

The study found that an average of 44 percent of household expenditure is on cereals and less on animal foods such as pulses, vegetables, fruit, milk and eggs.

This often leads to low intake of proteins and micronutrients, one reason why these families face problems of malnourishment. The worst malnourishment among children is found in mountain regions, it added.

WFP recommends comprehensive solutions based on multi-sectoral approaches to improve food security. Access to improved family sanitation, education, health care, employment and low-interest agricultural loans are needed, it says, along with “infrastructure improvements to develop a functioning agricultural market system”.

The conflict has made delivery of food more difficult, points out the WFP, but it has not created the problems.

Households Food Security World Food Program, Nepal
War need not be bad for health

In Sri Lanka, health and education programs are intact despite conflict. Why can’t it be the same in Nepal?

ARUNA UPRETY in BATTICALOA, SRI LANKA

H
eres in eastern Sri Lanka, one year after the tsunami and amidst a fracturing ceasefire, thoughts turn to a return to war in Nepal. Inevitably, one is inclined to make comparisons and the paradox is that despite a separatist civil war that is much more virulent than Nepal’s, the health care system on this island is still intact. Tensions are rising again in Sri Lanka’s north-east, too, after four years of ceasefire. Both sides have rebel leaders who have a man in charge of their health service. There are no guns about as we go to see him and he speaks fluent English. Even more surprising, he had all the public health issues in the area at his fingertips or if he didn’t remember he would pull out a file and find the information which includes assessments, research and programs.

Having visited the war-torn far western regions of Nepal many times over the past 10 years of conflict I never came across a single Nepali Maoist leader who had ever even a fraction of the health information about the local population as this man had. No Maoist I met in Nepal ever kept any records or had reports. And while Nepal’s conflict has made an already horrific public health situation much worse, here in Sri Lanka health and education are so important that in the past, both sides have stopped fighting at exam time or during vaccination campaigns.

The Sri Lankan government still pays for schools and teachers, hospitals and doctors. The Tamil Tigers allow health workers access to their territory whenever there is an inoculation drive or health survey. Except in some remote parts of northeastern Sri Lanka, the immunisation coverage in Sri Lanka is much higher by far than anywhere else in South Asia. There are some areas where health personnel lie about the success of their vaccination campaigns and in these places it is very reminiscent of Nepal. In one village in the Tiger-controlled north-east we asked the women if all the children were given polio doses. They said sometimes children were given only one dose and the health worker would fill out the card to make it look like all the doses were given so he wouldn’t have to come back.

Even before the ceasefire, the midwives of Sri Lanka’s public health service were doing a good job. The result is that despite the war, Sri Lanka’s maternal mortality rate is at par with middle-income countries and much lower than other nations in the region. In Sri Lanka, less than 40 mothers die for every 100,000 live births while Nepal’s national rate is 1,000, and in parts of Rolpa and Jumla it is at least 1,000.

The reason is Sri Lanka’s heavy investment in health and education since independence. The momentum of this success has kept public health systems intact despite disruptions caused by conflict.

It is just the opposite in Nepal. Health and education have suffered directly as a result of the conflict. In fact, there is a deliberate policy in Nepal to target education as a part of the conflict strategy.

Sri Lanka’s emphasis on health and education are self-enforcing. Higher literacy of women (65 percent of women here are literate compared to 35 percent in Nepal) has helped reduce infant and maternal mortality.

The other reason is that most Sri Lankan women give birth in hospitals where complications can be treated. In Nepal, only 10 percent of deliveries take place in hospitals. But in far and midwestern Nepal, nearly 100 percent of deliveries are at home. No two wars are alike. There are things Nepal shouldn’t learn from Sri Lanka, especially about allowing ethnic tensions to boil over into full-scale civil war. But there are things we should learn how despite the conflict there is still a strong emphasis on female literacy and public health.

Dr Aruna Uprety is working for an international aid agency in Sri Lanka.
Courting catastrophe
We can and must plan for unlikely events, like the Indian Ocean tsunami

RICHARD POSNER

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ne year after the Indian Ocean tsunami, what are the lessons? The
biggest one is that it was the type of disaster to which policymakers pay too little attention to. One that has a very low or unknown probability of occurring but that creates enormous losses if it does occur. As great as the resulting death toll, physical and emotional suffering of survivors and property damage caused by the tsunami were, even greater losses. Moreover, more damage could be inflicted by other disasters of low (but not

negligible) or unknown, probability. For example, the asteroid that exploded over Siberia in 1908 with the force of a hydrogen bomb might have killed millions of people. That is an average of 2,500 deaths per year. If such a toll could be substantially reduced at a moderate cost, the investment would be worthwhile.

Educating residents of low-lying coastal areas on the warning signs of a tsunami (tremors and a sudden recession in the ocean), establishing a warning system involving emergency broadcasts, telephoned warnings and air-raid-type sirens and improving emergency response systems would have saved many of the 250,000 who were killed by the Indian Ocean tsunami. At the same time, the cost would have been wel1 below any reasonable estimate of the enormous losses that can be expected from tsunamis.

There are several reasons why such measures weren’t taken in anticipation of a tsunami on the scale that occurred. First, although a once-in-a-century event is as likely to occur at the beginning of the century as at any other time, it is much less likely to occur in the first decade of the century than later. Politicians with limited terms of office and thus foreshortened political horizons are more likely not to focus on low-risk disaster possibilities, since the risk of damage to their careers from failing to take precautionary measures is truncated.

Second, the aftermath of defensive measures such as building and maintaining defensive measures requires governmental action, the fact that government is a centralised system of control makes it difficult for officials to respond to the full spectrum of possible risks against which cost justified measures might be taken. Given the variety of matters to which they must attend, officials are likely to have a high threshold of attention below which risks are ignored. Third, wherever risks arise from local or global rather than local, many national governments, especially in poorer and smaller countries, may drag their heels in taking precautionary measures.

The fact that a disaster of a particular type has not occurred recently or even ever is a reason to ignore it. The danger of an asteroid strike, which is within human memory (or even ever) is a reason to ignore it. The lack of scenario mapping dangerously close large asteroids. At the current rate, NASA may not complete the task for another decade, even though such mapping is the key to an asteroid defense because it may give us years of warning.

Many developing nations are gaining from prolonged high oil prices, unlike in the past. The oil price of 1998, when oil prices were 25 dollars per barrel, is not a sustainable price but is well above international oil prices and is expected to remain high in the near term and the impact on growth and inflation will vary from country to country,” says World Economic Situation and Prospects 2005. With international oil prices about 42 percent higher than in 2004, the combined oil export revenues of energy-rich Middle Eastern nations are estimated to have reached a hefty 300 billion dollars in 2005.

High oil prices

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Awesome Aussie Open

Martina’s return leads a fantastic women’s draw

One of my favourite pastimes is watching TV coverage of grand-slam events such as the Australian Open. I love the tension and drama. Whether it is rooting for an underdog or admiring the talent of Roger Federer, there is never a dull moment. The only problem is staying awake late at night to watch the live action from Melbourne. The year’s first grand slam has not disappointed me. By the time this column is published, the men’s and women’s finals would have already been determined. Here are my thoughts and predictions for this year’s Australian Open.

Martina mania

I remember watching Martina Hingis play the finals of the French Open Junior tournament when she was just 13 years old. I could not believe how good she was at such a young age. She had an amazing feel for the game. Martina was a supreme tactician and master of improvisation. It did not surprise me when she dominated women’s tennis for a number of years before she retired with foot injuries. How refreshing it has been to see her roll over her opponents in her first major since retirement. Welcome back Martina, we have missed your flair on and off the court.

Marcos who?

How about the play of Marcos Baghdatis from Cyprus? This young man has the game and the charisma to be a star on the men’s tour for years. Watching him steamroll over Andy Roddick with 58 dodgers was amazing. It was also great to see the Greek fans go wild and cheer for him helping him play his best tennis. If a country with fewer than a million people can produce a player the calibre of Marcos, there is hope for countries like Nepal. Don’t be surprised if he goes all the way to play Roger Federer in the finals.

Positive spin

Table tennis poised for a comeback, says new chief

A little money and long-term investment in players could return table tennis in Nepal to its heydays of the 1970s when our players competed with mid-level Asian teams. Says Chaturamanda Rajyavida, the first elected president of the All Nepal Table Tennis Association (ANTTA): “We’re not far behind. It’s just a matter of time, technique and investment.”

His strategy? Attract player interest with prize-money tournaments and identify young prospects brimming with talent among the cement tables found in schoolyards and vacant lots across Nepal. “We are concomitantly initializing on schools,” adds the former number one doubles player at his personal office in Tripureshwor, which also doubles as the ANTTA headquarter. “In nine months we’ve held more than 16 inter-school tournaments. For a school they’re very easy to organise and table tennis is very popular.”

Netting young players is one thing, holding on to them is another. “They play for two or three months but then their exams come and they stay home because of family pressure. We’re trying to put together a stipend that would keep them coming.”

Six months ago, ANTTA hosted its first cash tournament, with Rs 100,000 up for grabs. Rajyavida is hoping to organise another one within a couple of months, followed by the South Asian Junior Championships, which ANTTA will host in midyear. Last year, Nepal’s boys grabbed a bronze medal at the same event.

The organisation also hopes to convince the Nepal Sports Council to fund a team to travel to the world team championships in Bremen, Germany in April. But its president says everyone’s main goal is the SAF Games in Sri Lanka, recently postponed till August.

India is the region’s best, followed by Sri Lanka and Pakistan. “We’re only a bit behind them,” Rajyavida says. “Sri Lanka is coming up quickly, they’re investing a lot in sports there.” He adds, “In sports you have to look at the long-term. It’s not just a matter of one year.”

Women Rule

For the first time in years, all the top women players were fit to play in a grand-slam event. Injuries have taken a toll on the stars of the WTA tour of late so it was good to see them all battle. Serena, Venus, Sharapova, Henin, Clijsters and Davenport are intriguing personalities and it is very important that they are able to compete with one another to create rivalries and capture the imaginations of tennis fans worldwide. One of the Belgians will hoist the trophy and I have a gut feeling that it will be Justine Henin.

Men Depleted

The absence of Marat Safin, Andre Agassi and Rafael Nadal put a major shocker if Federer does not hoist the trophy Sunday. It would definitely reduce the spate of injuries. These athletes could come back rested to showcase their best form. With the departure of Roddick and Hewitt early on, it would be a major shocker if Federer does not hoist the trophy Sunday.

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An overseas smash

Table tennis appears to be a hit with Nepalis overseas. The first North America Nepal Open tournament was held at the 2005 ANA convention in Texas. The overwhelming champion was former national player Sanjeeta Shrestha, the only woman among 25 participants, who won both the singles and doubles titles (with Suraj Neupane). Sanjeeta was also Minnesota State’s 2005 champion. This Saturday, the Nepal Seattle Society is hosting its first NSS Open Table Tennis Championships tournament. It will include women’s and men’s draws and momos and chiya will be available.

www.nepalseattle.org/stabletennis.html
**EXHIBITIONS**
- **Combination 3** an exhibition of paintings and sculptures. Nepal Art Council 28 January 2 PM.
- Fragments of a Journey Oil paintings by Aditi Sadhu. Chandrabhaga. 18-31 January. Park Gallery Lizapmat. 4419353

**EVENTS**
- Reflecting Changing Realities in Nepali Art lecture by Sangeeta Thapa, 27 January. 9.30 AM. Shankar Hotel.
- German Jocks by Nutan Singh. 27 January. 4.15 PM, Geethe Zentrum.
- Clean Up Valley 2005 Prize distribution ceremony for schools and students participating in Clean Up Week and Poster, Poetry and Essay Competitions on Friday 27 January, 10 AM. 4279712.
- 2nd Taudaha Jamboree Bird watching, Cycle rally, Taudaha Mela & Walk In Activities. 28 January, Contact Shraddhi / Bijay Friends of the Bagmati. 4470770
- Walk With WAVE V heritage walk from Teku - Thapathali. 28 January 9 AM, National Trading, Teku.

**MUSIC**
- Paleti to feature Daisy Baral. 27 January, Nepa-laya R plaza. Tickets Rs. 500. 5552839.
- Cadenza & Friends Live 28 January 1905, 1.30 PM Onwards. Tickets Rs. 800.
- Musician Night at Moksh Live, 27 January. Tickets Rs.150. 5526212.
- The Cloud Walkers at Rox Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234.
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday. 8 PM. Upstairs Lizapmat.
- 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 Jumlel Bar. Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4217111
- Uncork the Good Times Fusion: Ciney and Par-e-j playing popular sounds of 70’s Friday 7 PM onwards. Rs. 750. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

**DINING**
- Buffet Breakfast at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and desserts. 4491234
- Maki Newa Bhutu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singh. 4439784
- Mexican and Italian food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935
- Great Dining options at AI Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soalteet Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- Plai du Jour at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- Wonderful Wednesdays at Fusion, Dwarika’s, happy hour 5-9 PM.
- The Sidewalk BBQ with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- Breakfast at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily.
- Omelettes made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath. Tel: ++977-1-545680, 545681, radio@radiosagarmatha.org, Fax: ++ 977-1- 530227

**NEPALI WEATHER**

To feature Daisy Baral, 27 January, Nepa~laya R plaza. Tickets Rs. 500. 5552839.

**GETAWAYS**
- Home away from home Shivaipuri Heights Cottage for bookings 9841371857, sohan@escapecrench.com
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, award winning relaxation in Pokhara. Reservations 01 436 1500
- Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Star Cruises/Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Ciney and Par-e-jat playing
- Break away from busy city life and enjoy the serenity of nature at Shivaipuri Heights Cottage. Tel: 9851012264
- Conferences at Godawari Village Resort. 5560675

**ABOUT TOWN**
- English filmmaker Sue (Alice Patten) comes to India to make a documentary drama on freedom fighter Bhagat Singh and his contemporaries. But after failing to gather funds for the film, she decides to recruit students from Delhi University. She finds DJ (Aamir Khan), a DU graduate, Aslam (Kunal Kapoor), a middle-class Muslim poet, philosopher and guide, Sukhi (Sharman Joshi), Laxman Pandey (Atul Kulkarni) and the fundamentalist Sonia (Soha Ali Khan), a vivacious tomboy engaged to Ajay (Mandarohan), a pilot. Sue’s film makes DJ and his friends stop and realise what it means to be the descendants of great men. And the story of Rang De Basanti begins.

**CALL 4442220 FOR SHOW TIMINGS.**

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

**Nepali Language** by MAUSAM BEED

The Magha-chau (winter rain) is yet to arrive making January the third consecutive month without rain. This has resulted in record low humidity levels and dryness. Satellite pictures show a persistent westerly jet carrying fresh clouds over the Pakistani himalaya but it is unlikely to reach us because of a high pressure zone in its way. However there is good possibility of sunny intervals early next week as break-away high and dry clouds are on the way. Though subsequent weather fronts have passed without bringing rains, they have done a good job of chasing the thick foggy layer covering the Ganga plain away. Conclusion: Valley residents should expect more sunny days and chilly mornings this weekend but sunny intervals early next week.

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From beggar to seller

Ten years ago she was a familiar face around Darbar Marg and Thamel. You could see her clutching her infant daughter and four other kids, begging every other passer-by for a rupee or two.

Sabila Khatun left her village in Malangwa VDC in Sarlahi district for a better life in Kathmandu with her family of five children and husband in 1994. The landless Khatun family had nothing left in the village and the capital was their last refuge. But the city was not an easy place to adjust in, as they soon learned. Sabila’s husband tried to get a job but months of failure forced him into alcoholism and pushed Sabila to the streets to beg.

Her children were her main concern. Fortunately for her, a few foreigners took pity and put them in schools. When her children started going to school they in turn pressured their mother to giving up begging.

One day, when Sabila’s purse was full with Rs 300 from a tourist, she decided enough was enough and that she would give up begging and go into business.

She went to a shop and bought a few moneybags, the kind with Buddhist designs on the front that you hang from your shoulders. With these wares to sell, Sabila started her new life.

It has been almost seven years since she gave up begging. Life hasn’t been easy and there have been other tests. Her husband returned to Sarlahi, got caught in a robbery scam and later married another woman. All this has only made Sabila, now 36, stronger. “My only concern is to make sure my children receive a proper education,” she says.

Today, with the help of a few good foreign friends, her children attend private schools while Sabila sells woollen gloves, caps, socks, embroidered pillow and cushion cases and cigarettes in Tridevi Marg. The competition is tough, but she isn’t giving up easily. “Times are bad, but you have to do what you have to do,” she says, proud that at least she makes her living doing an honest day’s work.

(Alok Tumbahangphey)
D on't laugh. Given the present state of the nation, it is our duty to inform all concerned authorities, heads of constitutional bodies, and public sector forces that laughing in public will henceforth be totally banned in all 75 district headquarters from 1 Jestha 2058. Guffaws, giggles and chuckles are hereby declared against the national interest, since they distract attention from our most serious problem: our continued inability to take things seriously.

An alliance of 108 left-out parties led by the Unruffled Marxleninbad will start a phase-wise nationwide programme to protest the misuse of laughter in all its forms. Led by its vanguard student wing, the All-over-Nepal Campaign To Abolish Laughter and Glee (Revolting) will first target state-controlled media, which is the source of much mirth all over the kingdom at prime-time everyday.

It is extremely detrimental for our national morality, our territorial imperative and sovereignty that the entire nation breaks into gales of laughter before, during and after the evening news on radio and television. I don't speak in jest when I say that the mouths organs of government lack a certain gravitas. They will therefore be forced to refrain from outright comedy in their broadcasts, to wit: they will be forced to look and sound more tragic as befitting the times.

Although the editors are understandably tickled pink by the goings-on in our landlocked Himalayan kingdom of 23 million, they must exercise restraint, and not overstep their bounds. Today, more than ever before, we need journalists who understand that although the constitution (much to our amusement) guarantees the freedom to laugh at whoever we want whenever we want to, this freedom comes with responsibility and should not be abused. And more importantly, we must never, ever, laugh at ourselves since this will have a negative impact on our sense of national self-esteem, self-importance, self-aggrandisement and ultimately erode our self-defence.

Epidemiologists tell us that laughter is contagious, and this is all the more reason that we must stop this nonsense of breaking into fits of laughter at every tiny excuse. Remember: laughter spreads by word of mouth. So, every time you feel like chortling in public, spare a thought for the innocent bystanders who will be inadvertently infected. This is why, however amused we may be, we must suppress our urge to laugh at least until such time as an all-clear is sounded and we know that the country's current crisis has passed. You, at the back in the Groucho mask, what are you sniggering at?

(From #42)