Short fuse

Public discontent could boil over into the streets in the weeks ahead

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

K ing Gyanendra’s eagerly-anticipated speech on the first anniversary of his takeover on Wednesday was seen as positive by some because it didn’t contain anything new. The king could have banned parties, scrapped the constitution, declared martial law. But he decided to tell sceptical subjects how much things have improved since he took over.

Unlike previous addresses the king was soft on the mainstream parties, he didn’t abuse ‘terrorists’ too much and even spared the international community. This has given a glimmer of hope that the king meant it when he said he wanted to bury ‘past bitterness’. But things may be too far gone for the political party leadership to join the king without him first handing power back to an interim government acceptable to all that would supervise future general elections. The parties suspect the king is firmly set on his three-year timetable for a kind of democracy that would keep him in charge. The king for his part seems determined not to hand power to the present crop of political leaders.

“The distance between the king and the parties continues to widen and next week’s elections will make things much worse,” says Prakash Chandrak Lohani of the Rastriya Janashakti Party. While both the parties and the palace circle each other, the Maoists are pressing ahead with their campaign to bring the war to the cities with the devastating attack on Tansen on Tuesday and publicly warning about attacks in the Valley next week.

In the worst-case scenario, the Maoists will ride the parties’ agitation to create trouble and provoke brutal crackdowns by the security forces, which they hope will escalate into a street uprising. In the chaos, the state will not be able to distinguish between party activists and Maoists, leading to urban guerrilla warfare.

The parties, driven to desperation by the regime’s crackdown on democracy, don’t seem to see the danger. “Let the government impose curfews, the more it does so the more successful our movement becomes,” KP Oli of the UML said at a forum this week.

But in private, other senior party leaders told us they are aware of being squeezed between the Maoists and the royal regime and that a further escalation in violence would give the regime the excuse to crack down even more.

“When constitutional forces like the parties are hand in glove with unconstitutional forces like the Maoists, it will only help terrorism,” warns political analyst Shastra Dutta Pant. Prolonged street unrest will further undermine the economy and increase public discontent that could boil over into the streets.

“When the people do not get basic necessities to survive, they will certainly come out on the streets, which could lead to civil unrest,” predicts economist Raghab D Pant, whose Institute for Development Studies brought out a report that wars of civil unrest fuelled by economic collapse.

Seriously worried

- The UN system in Nepal expressed deep concern on Thursday that 75 polling stations for next week’s elections will be located in school buildings. “If schools become a place where the conflict is fought out, then they are no longer safe as places of education,” the statement said.

- Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, in a statement timed for 1 February expressed concern about the lack of progress in returning democracy. “The sad failure by the king and his government to declare a truce and to engage in dialogue at the time of the recent Maoist unilateral ceasefire was an opportunity missed,” Solana added.

- The Commander of US Pacific Command, Admiral William J Fallon, met King Gyanendra and senior military and other officials Wednesday. He said before leaving: “Reconciliation between the king and the parties is not only indispensable to bring back democracy but also to effectively address the insurgency by the Maoists.”

- President of the international Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Christopher Warren said of the detention of journalists on Wednesday: “The violent intervention of police and the targeting of journalists during a crackdown on the political opposition is totally unacceptable.”

- Amnesty International called on the royal regime to release immediately and unconditionally all those who have been detained for peaceful exercise of their rights during a crackdown on the political opposition over the past two weeks.
Once more we got faulty premises, empty promises and lots of doublespeak stepped up. The army presence on the streets was anticipation was high. Political activists was all double-speak about faulty premises and empty promises. It speech this year also consisted mainly of to be a damp squib. democracy. The army didn't arrive at our S TAT E  O F  T HE  STAT E will be purely ceremonial. hammer will have nothing to hit. It fight and the palace will have no they promised in their agreement violence and steer themselves royal regime is to renounce take the wind out of the sails of the parties. But the comrades must be in a fix: they can't this on. Hence the mass detentions of party activists and civil policemen, razing Tansen or other. Even the rebels themselves have a deeper distrust of those who don't than they do for each those who believe in violence as the only way to rise to power have power has meant they can elected to their former positions. Some of these things we come to expect of him. He didn't annunciate a new constitution for monarchic democracy. The army didn't arrive at our new exams. People checked their post- paid mobiles and they were still working. There was no new state of emergency. Mercifully, the king's address turned out to be a damp squib. Like the February First Address, the speech this year also consisted mainly of faulty premises and empty promises. It was all double-speak about authoritarianism being the mainstay of meaninglessness democracy. However, compared to his grave commentaries last year, the king looked relatively calm this time around. Some of his self-assessments, however, sounded outrageous. Even as the king was pronouncing the security situation in the country had improved, the Maoists had just finished sacking the capital of Palpa district. He claimed that in the past year corruption had lessened, the administration-de-politicised, fiscal discipline enforced, decentralisation strengthened, and a balance between security concerns and human rights established. Nepalis, he said, have wholeheartedly embraced municipal elections. Ert, not quite, Your Majesty. Any independent observer can see the municipal polls have degenerated from being a farce because of the political party boycott to a tragedy because of the assassinations by the Maoists. Hazars for candidates remaining in the fray, dangers to officials assigned to election duty, and risks for voters making the trip to polling booths remain as high as they were before the royal address this week. The king stupefiedly avoided criticism of mainstream parties and censure of international community, but he came across as a man still determined to play the game by his own rules. To his credit, the king admitted in his Wednesday speech that history is the judge of the people's conduct during times of crisis. Someday when a free and independent historian will sit down to appropriate the blame for the murder of Bijay Lal Das (a restless youth who wanted to be mayor of Janakpur), it’s very unlikely that we will all still refer to him, as once upon Chairman Panchaudha alone. The confrontational politics of Gyanendra has also deepened the country's crisis even if he doesn't seem to see it that way. Pashupati Shumsher is the chairman of an averagely royalist political outfit but even he has been compelled to tell all these polls “a joke”. Unfortunately the joke is on common Nepalis, a group that hard-core monarchists don’t consider worthy of any respect. Experiences throughout the world have shown that history doesn’t always move in the direction desired by princes, potentates and other pretenders. On 14 February, the Iranian people will remember the 27th anniversary of the overthrow of their 2,000-year-old dynasty. Lessons of the Iranian uprising are salutary for Nepali political parties. But the international community may need to lend credence to the rumour of the Iranians who have made a return to war has eroded the little public support mustered during the 15-day period. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited protest peacefully. 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IGNORANCE
This is in response to Dr Jacob George's letter 'Thug' (#283) in which he shows his ignorance about the ground realities in Nepal. I fail to understand what his concept of freedom is. And what restraint is he talking about? To make sweeping arrests, cutting phone lines and imposing an unprecedented dawn to dusk curfew is restraint? If he thinks that the previous regimes were corrupt and incompetent he should see what the current regime is up to. The people of Nepal have suffered enough at the hands of an obdurate monarch and it is ridiculous that there are still some misled people in the world who would support such a rule.

Dr Pranab Shrestha, Bansbari

• Kunda Dixit's 'Red alert' (#283) gives an indication of the growing international concern over Nepal's political process and warns us about our future. Despite international observation, suggestions and pressure over the political crisis however, the condition in Nepal is worsening. At this point, the Nepalese people and the king have to ask ourselves whether some irrational condition was conducive to Nepal's misery. I fail to understand what his creative imagination is after all. But of late, most of your content has become political, and that too, bitter against the present government. Therefore they don't look at it anymore. For a weekly of your get-up and good English, it could be rated as a good paper to be read by Nepal's intellectuals. You should try to have more on the arts, literature, travel, tourism, science and less politics. We are sick of politics. Our problem is that neither the king, the royal regime nor any other force is rising above personal interest. In the eyes of the world one Nepal is fighting against another to destroy the country.

Prof Ashok R Bajracharya, New Baneshwor

• Though in the US at the moment, pursuing a degree in architecture, I have few sources of information that help me know what is going on back home. Thanks to the glories of the world wide web and your absolutely entertaining and informative eSpecial website (www.nepalitimes.com) I am able to keep myself up to date with what is going on in Nepal.

Varun Rana, email

• I go through your paper every week. You have done an extraordinarily good job. I enjoy your views and the quality of your articles also seem to be highly experienced and their articles are professionally written and that further enhances your quality. Please keep up the good work. We are with you.

CL Rizal, Toronto

CORRECTION
In 'SNV Nepal's silver jubilee' (#281) SNV Director Matthias Muyersens's exact words should have been: "In the actual context, it is very important to understand the conflict dynamics in the districts and to strive that all our programs are conflict sensitive and, wherever possible, conflict transforming."

1 February 2005

L E T T E R S

1 February 2006

Samjana Pokhare, email

• I read, with interest, comments by Stephen McClelland, head of Asia Directorate DfID (‘Donor’s dilemma’, #282) and interview with Jean-Marc Mangin, Canada’s first secretary in the same issue concerning staff security in the delivery of development activities in Nepal. As a development project implementer, I welcome the priority given to employee’s safety. However, one important question arises: while donors accept responsibility for the safety of their own staff, who is responsible for the safety of partner organisations staff?

Nawaraj Upadhyaya, Jawalakhel

• Help! The country is sliding deeper into turmoil with no end in sight. No elections, no local government, no parliament, no talk...just curfews and bandas, student anarchy on the streets and fireworks across the country. So what’s next? Politicians boast of creating ever more trouble instead of offering a solution. Do they have any clue where they are taking this country? It is time we faced the facts and put childish nationalistic overconfidence aside to invite international mediation to end the suffering of the Nepalese people.

Bhul Kaji, Kathmandu

• Re: your editorial ‘Regime change’ (#283). The only thing we need in Nepal is editor change of your publication then the rest will work out fine. King Gyanaendra is a godsend to Nepal. In these difficult times the true people of Nepal are behind him. May Lord Vishnu protect him and show him the path as is required.

Name withheld, email

• You poll question: ‘One year after February First, have the goals of the royal takeover been achieved?’ (#283) is not appropriate in the present context because the government hasn’t had enough time to achieve its goals. Let’s give them time to work and then ask the same question later.

Harka, email

• After reading at the doomsday scenarios in Nepal, I’m tempted to look at the silver lining, if it is any consolation. Political analysts are by definition pessimists and the ones in your stable seem to be no exception. The dire predictions rarely happen because there are natural brakes in society: Initial, family, community links that prevent people from going to the brink. These brakes are more effective in soft states like ours where there are ways to let off steam. It is when there is nowhere to let off steam and the frustrations get bottled up and grievances spill over that things fall apart. But I think all Nepalis have to tap into our innate resilience and good sense. I predict that the Maoists, the king and the political parties will react only when pushed to the brink and they will pull back once they see the chasm below.

R Sorrel, Kathmandu

• Living far away from Nepal and looking at the tragic pictures of Taransau reduced to rubble on your website (Nepali Times eSpecial) and then reading the synopsis of King Gyanendra’s address to the nation I couldn’t help grieving for my motherland. The king may be well-meaning but he seems to be out of touch with the reality of what is going on in his kingdom. The similarity of his televised address this week with 1 February 2005 was obviously designed to show that he is firmly set on his course. But what if it is this course that takes NRM (and us) over the edge of the cliff? In his speech, the king gave a positive spin to his one-year-rule and said the security situation had improved but even as he spoke 20 people lay dead in Palpa. Gory, beloved country.

Kanita KC, email

TGF
It was distressing to read BP Gurung’s ‘Tough English’ complaint in your Letters section (#283). The comparison with BBC, CNN or AP is unwarranted, as those are mass-circulation media targeted at quite different audiences. True, some NT definitions—including the many free online ones—that can explain difficult words, in the process enriching his dictionaries—including the many free online ones—that can explain difficult words, in the process enriching his...
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Kantil KC, email

TGIF

- It was interesting to read BP Gurung’s ‘Tough English’ complaint in your Letters section (#283). The comparison with BBC, CNN or AP is unwarranted, as those are mass-circulation media targeted at quite different audiences. True, some NT dictionaries—including the many free online ones—that can explain difficult words, in the process enriching his vocabulary. After a full week of the ‘English-language’ dailies of Kathmandu, I for one look forward to TGIF, when I can sit back and enjoy the perceptive, provocative, penetrating and definitely polished writing of the Nepali Times.

Sushan Hoikih, Kathmandu

- I have been subscribing your weekly for over two years. Those early days my children would snatch your latest copy from my hands every Friday to read it first. But of late, most of your content has become political, and that too, bitter against the present government. Therefore they don’t look at it anymore. For a weekly of your get-up and go English, it could be rated as a good paper to be read by Nepali intellectuals. You should try to have more on the arts, literature, travel, tourism, science and less politics. We are sick of politics. Our problem is that neither the king, the royal regime nor any other force is rising above personal interest. In the eyes of the world one Nepal is fighting against another to destroy the country.

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Varun Rana, email

- I go through your paper every week. You have done an extraordinarily good job. I enjoy your views and the quality of writing is excellent. People who write your articles also seem to be highly experienced and their articles are professionally written and that further enhances your quality. Please keep up the good work. We are with you.

CL Rizal, Toronto

CORRECTION

In ‘SNV Nepal’s silver jubilee’ (#281) SNV Director Matthias Meyersons’ exact words should have been: “In the actual context, it is very important to understand the conflict dynamics in the districts and to strive that all our programs are conflict sensitive and, wherever possible, conflict transforming.”

The Nepal Times
Among the most courageous of the kingdom’s residents must be Yam Bahadhur Pariyar (right), the humble Pokhara street sweeper who is standing for mayor in Nepal’s municipal elections. On Tuesday he was on the grounds of the city’s municipal guesthouse, under the watchful gaze of armed police who have the responsibility of keeping Pariyar and his fellow candidates out of harm’s way.

Unlike the more than 500 men and women across the country who over the past week withdrew their names from the ballot, Pariyar refuses to be intimidated by threats from any quarter. “My dream for Nepal is peace,” he states with the confidence of a seasoned politician. “I am the man who picks up other people’s garbage. Pokhara’s citizens over the years have come to know and trust me. And I will do my best to deal with all the problems that Pokhara is facing.”

Pariyar may lack the impressive professional credentials of many of the nation’s municipal candidates but his sincerity sets him apart from the pack. And he has a plan for Pokhara, taking a page out of the policy manual of Europe’s Green Party, emphasising conservation and resource management. “We need to improve the quality of Phewa Lake and to protect our places of natural beauty. Only then will tourists return,” he says.

When asked whether he can win the support of the local business community, the street sweeper replied without hesitation that he would work hand-in-hand with the city’s hotel personnel to “create the best possible environment for tourism”.

If Pariyar is successful at the ballot box (his main rival is a former DDC chairman) he will follow in the footsteps of others who have overcome poverty and discrimination and defied expectations. President Luis Ignacio Lula of Brazil worked as a shoeshine boy and shared a single bedroom behind a Sao Paulo bar with his parents and seven siblings.

Like Lula, candidate Pariyar was forced to quit school as a child to help support his family. And like Brazil’s charismatic leader, Pariyar has had to endure taunts and discrimination from more privileged members of society.

Does he fear for his safety, knowing that Maoists have already killed one candidate? “I hope that the Maoists would see me as a street sweeper who is attempting to become mayor of the city,” he replied, “they won’t support me but I don’t think they will kill me either.”

Whatever the outcome of Pokhara’s municipal election, lasting peace in Nepal will require a new generation of politicians with personal integrity who are committed to improving the well-being of the nation’s citizens. Electing Yam Bahadhur Pariyar to public office would be one small step in the right direction.

Peter Dalglish is a lawyer and the founder of Street Kids International.
Battered ‘Brand Nepal’

The state must realize its whimsical acts hurt our global image

With a new term in office, the state’s security of power, international media freedom groups have condemned what they say is a ‘year of repression of Nepal’s media’. The International Mission for Press Freedom and Free Elections in Nepal which visited Nepal last year to monitor the state of the media.

‘Nepal’s journalists have been confronted with an autocratic regime for the past 365 days. During this period, the independent press has lost most of the legal and constitutional protection it had acquired since 1990, more than a thousand journalists have lost their jobs and the government-induced economic pressure has increased on many media companies,’ the mission said in a statement.

Deurali Janata

Nepal’s leading remittances expert, Deurali Janata, has been in business on Jan. 28. Vice-Chairman of the Nepal Planning Commission, Shankar Sharma, and Mr. Minister of Health Dr. Basuh Dhan Mishra attended the function.

KUNDA DIXIT

The state of Nepal appears altogether intent on sending out wrong signals about its brand as a ‘hub of democracy’. It says that it wants to take advantage of globalisation. To that end, even without getting into the details of safety and health issues, it aspires to be a point of transit between China and India. But on the other hand it is depriving people by enacting acts that negate positive publicity around the world, it tarnishes Nepal’s image as a safe, secure and reliable place for tourism and business. True, the Maoist rebellion has not helped Nepal. But then hardly anyone mistakes the Maoists as advocates of free-market democracy. The trouble with the state is that it purposely avoids to lose the benefits of globalisation and free-market democracy and then, step by step, goes on to do just the opposite. The result is that Nepal’s credibility is compromised, long-term interests are hurt and the value of Brand Nepal is eroded.

As citizens we have to take the demonstration of the nation’s brand by the state seriously because, as Anholt-GMI Nations Brands points out, “globalisation means countries compete with one another, but this has run the attention, trust and respect of investors, tourists, consumers, data, influences, media and the governments of government to government.” If the attention we receive is only curfew, censorship, violence, demonstrations, whimsical actions of the state against businesses and skimmishes that leave people dead everyday, it’s hard for us to be proud of Nepal. And with our brand not doing well in the global market, our collective chances of attracting meaningful jobs, earning higher incomes and enjoying a higher quality of life in the long run is diminished. Patriotism alone, alas, does not put food on the table.

But like a seconded, the state takes refuge in patriotism as a remedy for all ills. In doing so, it fails to understand that in these open times patriotism is malleably portable. A Nepali can live in Queensland or Qatar and still love Nepal. He can be a citizen of the world and tell anyone telling her how to do so. Instead, she is likely to be against how the state’s actions have led to the State of Nepal being looked upon by the international media as a country that is spinning out of control. Negative global press is not only compatible with the state’s professionalism but acts like a brand还有 which not only ensures that the state is kept on the straight and narrow but also provides a competitive advantage to the state.

So what is stopping you? It is high time people stop the propaganda: the unconstitutional rigidity that is the symbol of a constitutional meeting point.

So the real problem seems to be a lack of trust between the king and the party leadership?

Well if the king did not trust the political parties, he would not have been so quick to restore the constitution. He is a constitutional monarch. Those who say they support the constitutional monarchy, however, interpret it in their own partisan manner.

In the past year, Nepal’s international isolation has deepened and now even the Chinese have shifted their stand.

I see not shift in the Chinese stand. What the Chinese have been saying is that this is an internal matter and they continue to say that Nepal is a strategic country, they will watch it. If they say they will watch it, they will watch it.

But the Chinese have for the first time expressed serious concern about what is happening in Nepal. The concern is genuine. The state of Nepal is a matter of serious concern for both China and India. Will there be any concrete change in the government’s media policy? The journalism sector has lost its credibility in many ways. There is a need to correct the disorganised state of Nepali journalism and make it more professional. I am filling for the vacuum in media-related laws but those with vested interests will obviously not like it. If the press becomes a hurdle in the government’s effort to restore democracy, we will have to re-examine its role.

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There has been a genuine effort for reconciliation with the parties?

What is a genuine effort? After 4 October 2002 the king kept on meeting the parties’ leaders for 27 months and asked them to form a national government. The leaders can say they didn’t agree but even then 1 February the parties did not respond to calls to join the government. The doors for talks are always open. But, there has to be a genuine effort to reach an agreement.

Before you answer this question, you need to think what it is that is stopping you?

I am likely to be aghast and say that. But then hardly anyone mistakes the Maoists as advocates of free-market democracy. The trouble with the state is that it purposely avoids to lose the benefits of globalisation and free-market democracy and then, step by step, goes on to do just the opposite. The result is that Nepal’s credibility is compromised, long-term interests are hurt and the value of Brand Nepal is eroded.

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But like a seconded, the state takes refuge in patriotism as a remedy for all ills. In doing so, it fails to understand that in these open times patriotism is malleably portable. A Nepali can live in Queensland or Qatar and still love Nepal. He can be a citizen of the world and tell anyone telling her how to do so. Instead, she is likely to be against how the state’s actions have led to the State of Nepal being looked upon by the international media as a country that is spinning out of control. Negative global press is not only compatible with the state’s professionalism but acts like a brand还有 which not only ensures that the state is kept on the straight and narrow but also provides a competitive advantage to the state.


**Jungle rule**

Naraya, 2 February

Just when the government’s ban on demos, protest rallies and mass meetings have become common in urban areas, deep jungles even in remote areas have also come under the spell of such prohibitions. The jungles in and around several villages of Palpa district are a case in point. The Palpa district administration has issued a notice prohibiting not only protest rallies and mass meetings but also normal movement of people in the jungles here until further notice. The ban has also come in effect in the jungles of Nawalparasi and Rupandehi districts because they share borders. The local administration says the ban is aimed at containing Maoist activities but it is ordinary people who collect fodder who are bearing the brunt. “Security officials say the forests are used by Maoists to hold meetings before launching attacks against government bases. But, villagers are not convinced. “Security is fine. But, how can we collect firewood,” asked housewife Ratha Thapa, “we need alternatives to survive. “Security officials defend their moves saying that they are for the people’s good. So far civilians have not been caught in the crossfire. But, many including children have been injured in explosions.

**Manhandled**

Dinsurkot, 29 January

Lying in serious condition with head wounds at Miteri Hospital, the president of the Padma Kanya Student’s Union, Bindu Adhikari, recalled how policemen beat up young female students at her campus. “We were in the streets in front of our campus demonstrating peacefully. Then the police came and started using force to stop our peaceful rally. We ran into the campus premises but they chased us and hit us with their batons, bricks and stones. I was severely beaten and then collapsed on the ground. The police used their heavy boots to thrash and break fingers on my left hand. Just before I passed out, I saw a group of male policemen kicking our vice-president, Deepa Siwakoti, and beating her senseless with their batons. They were acting on orders from Kedar Oli from police headquarters. Using men to manhandle girls and women is against the international human rights law. This is not the first time that such an incident has taken place. But this has not demoralised us—we shall continue with our movement.”

**King’s gamble**

Desvant, 29 January

The king is isolated. Even the royalists hardly seem to have seen around the palace anymore, notably vanishing at a time when he needed them more than ever. All the king has now is the strength of arms, which he has been using to force the elections on the citizens. The nation’s security force, which is supposed to be fighting on the battlefield, is now also engaged in search and hunting candidates and voters for the 8 February municipal polls. The central government has become a “normal” and isolated than ever in Nepali history. The king’s election spectacles has aroused the nation and the world. Not even staunch royalists had imagined that the king would take such a lunging step into the 21st century just to save the monarchy. We can expect much worse in coming days.

The families of the royal slaves spend their three hours dying the deaths of their relatives. It seems that the government has already prepared for this given that it has announced it will provide life insurance for candidates. Members of one poor farming family were already certain when they discovered their breadwinner inside army barracks, where he had already been declared a candidate. The farmer has no idea what that means. There are many more examples in every town and village, from far east to far west. Every candidate is kept either inside the barracks or under heavy police protection. The king is fully aware of all this but is gambling on the lives of the citizens for his future.

**Costly year**

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 January

- Royal visit to Bangladesh, Tunisia and Africa: Rs 177.8 million in direct costs, Rs 8 million in payments to Royal Nepal Airlines and Rs 320 million in losses to the national airline.
- Royal visit to the Boao Summit and Jakarta: Rs 70 million.
- Crown Prince Paras’ Japan trip: Rs 27.9 million.
- Crown Prince Paras’ Saudi visit: Rs 2.243.718.
- Ramesh Nath Pandey’s China visit: Rs 1.036.251.
- Ramesh Nath Pandey’s UN visit: Rs 6.026.422.
- Ramesh Nath Pandey in Moscow and Islamabad: Rs 1.961.684.
- Ramesh Nath Pandey in SAAARC: Rs 1.099.629.

**Frozen foreign aid:**

- Denmark: Rs 8.5 billion.
- World Bank: Rs 12.5 billion.
- Swiss: Rs 1.37 billion.
- UK: Rs 150 million.
- Canada: Rs 350 million.
- ADB: Rs 5 billion.
- Norway: Rs 2 billion.
- Sweden: Rs 2.6 billion.

(Source: Rastra Bank and donor statements)

**Army votes**

Jana Aastha, 1 February

At a time when RNA spokesman Brig Gen Nepal Bhusan Chand announced that the army had been mandated to provide security in the upcoming municipal elections, the Royal Nepal Army has already announced its stance for votes. But the vote the army is asking for has nothing to do with the elections. It has sought the votes regarding Maoist infiltration of the capital. The army has introduced a ballot on its website asking voters to vote by answering a question: “Do you think the Maoists have infiltrated the capital?” The question has three possible answers: Yes, No, and Don’t Know. The website (www.rna.mil.np) shows that 83 visitors had cast their votes by Sunday. Of those, 61 percent had voted suggesting there was Maoist infiltration in the capital. Thirty visitors had preferred to answer no and infiltration and eight percent had said that they did not know. The army has suspected infiltration of Maoists in the capital with the return of the rebels attacking the police stations in Thamikut, Dhusikhut and other places in Kathmandu Valley on 4 January. The suspicion has been further solidified under unidentified gunmen shot and killed the coffin of a royalist mayorial candidate Dal Bahadur Rai in Lalitpur district on 31 January. At a time when the army has become vigilant about this infiltration, the rebels are said to have prepared a capital command to surround the capital, boosting their presence in 13 districts around the Valley, East of Kathmandu, the Maoists have established a special regional bureau covering Dolakha, Ramechhap, Simlipalchok and Kabre with Area Commanders. A new area commander (Kanchan) has been designated as its chief. In the west, Chitwan, Gulmi, Bhadrapur, Novokot and Raura districts have been included in a special regional bureau headed by Hitendra Pandey (Uttras). South of Kathmandu they have set up a bureau that will use Mukwarpur, Bara, Parsa and Rastahat as bases to launch attacks on the capital. The rebels have established a special valley bureau covering Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and some parts of Makwanpur district.

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**The only thing countries like the EU and the US do is bully small countries.**

— Former Chief of Army staff Satchit Shumshere Rana in Nepal Samacharpatra, 31 January

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**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

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From THE NEPALI PRESS

3 - 9 February 2006 #284

World Bank representative Ken Ohashi in Nepal, 5 February

The events of 2005 have once again proved the correctness of the World Bank's country assistance strategy. Strategically, it focuses on three important issues. First, if there are efforts for financial reforms we will support them. Examples include the Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC). Secondly we support reforms that contribute to the creation of people-centred government. Since any system can be dismantled, it is only planned progress that can help reduce losses and misuse. Enabling the process of public policy making, increasing transparency and responsibility and capacity building fall into this group. Handing over schools to community management, the Midterm Expenditure Framework and the Purchase Act are some examples. The third change that we support is the decentralisation of resource management to the local government and communities. This helps transfer social and political momentum to the more disadvantaged groups within communities and we believe that it will, in the long run, provide the drive for the transformation of Nepal into a more open and fundamentally democratic society. The year 2005 was a difficult one. It steered its course from the king's 1 February move and the Maoist conflict escalated. On the other side, the coalition between seven parliamentary parties developed gradually. At the end of the year, these three forces put forth their respective, somewhat unclear, stands for possible peace and the restoration of democracy. Where these latest developments will lead Nepal remains unclear. But even with the setbacks of 2005, we should not give up hope. We need to have a long-term vision for Nepal. If we fail to develop one, we will be overlooking the real challenges of the country's development. The year 2005 has reminded us that we need to work on the fundamentals. Who knows? In 2006, Nepal could see its luck return again, just like during the reform process of 2003.

Ken's concerns

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Nepal's garment slump

Abhiyan, 10 January – 5 February 2006

Ratnakar Adhikari is a garment specialist with UNDP in Sri Lanka who opened the Kathmandu-based South Asia Watch on Trade and Environment with which UNDP and ActionAid has begun a study on Nepal's garment industry.

Abhiyan: Nepal's garment industry is sliding down. What does this indicate? Ratnakar Adhikari: The UNDP Research Centre recently conducted a study on the state of the garment industry of 12 Asian countries which found that garment industries in four countries (Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia) were worse off than before. America is the main market for Nepali garments and exports began declining since 2003. Compared to 2004 exports decreased by 40 percent in 2005.

There are two main reasons for this. First, the garment quota provided by America for Nepal was abolished. At present the US is very biased in its attitude towards developing and underdeveloped countries. While the quota for Nepal, Laos and other underdeveloped countries has been removed, America has received subsidies. This has taken the American garment market from Asia to Africa. The other reason is that we weren't able to compete internationally.

Why weren't we able to adapt and compete in the international market? We knew the Nepali garment industry was going down. The government is mainly to blame. The reform structure that the government should have made was not there. In many countries like Cambodia the government has given subsidies on electricity and taxes. Many have given similar subsidies on import and manufacture of raw materials. Besides giving a little discount on import of raw material the Nepal government has not provided anything else.

How about the industry itself? The industrialists also only focused on what they were traditionally manufacturing. They failed to produce new designs according to market demand or look for new markets.

Esp enabling state programme

The Esp (Enabling State Programme) of Wto/Nepal was launched on 11 January 2001 as an eight year programme with the objective of deepening the knowledge of governance issues in Nepal and assisting Nepalese efforts in devising and implementing change processes through innovative approaches. Esp with its “pro-poor” governance focus aims to improve the conditions of those living in poverty by addressing key issues relating primarily to social exclusion, corruption, decentralised local governance and access to justice.

Esp Programme Manager

Job purpose: To ensure efficient and effective implementation of all aspects of Esp in line with DFIDN policies and procedures

Responsibility:

• DFIDN Senior Governance Adviser

Other Relationships:

• HMGN agencies
• DFIDN Project Managers/Team Leaders
• DFIDN Advisers

Responsibilities:

• Project scoping, design and project document preparation
• Recruitment, management and development of all programme staff
• Supervision of exploratory activities
• Monitoring of Esp-satellite governance projects
• Disseminating a better understanding of governance issues through research, publications and interactive forums
• Overseeing Esp public relations in respect of prime stakeholders, HMGN agencies, donors and the media
• Representing Esp in meetings and discussion groups
• Overall management of all administrative and financial matters

Competencies Required for the Post:

• Generic Competencies

• Working with others
• Communicating and influencing
• Managing knowledge and information
• Analytical thinking and judgment
• Leading and managing
• Forward thinking

Qualifications Required for the Post:

• Masters degree in a governance related subject
• At least 5 years of work experience in governance with a minimum of 2 years experiences in senior management position in comparable development agencies

Women and men candidates from disadvantaged caste/ethnic/religious groups with relevant qualification and experience are encouraged to apply. For Application Form and further information, including Terms of Reference, please e-mail: hardiecinct.net.ro or collect from Human Resource Development Centre (HRDEC) Pvt Ltd, Taichikko, Lalitpur, Phone 5542055/5542054.

Closing date for application is 23 February 2006.
Until about five years ago, Nepali pashmina was haute couture among the world’s rich and famous. Cashmere was out and people flaunted their pashminas, from Buckingham Palace to Beverly Hills.

In 1997 alone Nepal exported Rs 3 million worth of the fabric, and by 2000 the figure had risen to more than Rs 5.6 billion. The industry employed over 50,000 people and made up at least 82 percent of all handicraft exports from Nepal in 2000-2001, with manufacturers producing everything from scarves, shawls, blankets and mufflers to dressing gowns. It looked like Nepal finally had a global brand name to call its own.

Pashmina making began as a cottage industry, catering mainly to the local market. The few investors who saw its potential had to be patient before profits began to flow. And just as they started earning dividends, the industry realized it had one more lesson to learn—it’s not easy doing business in an era of globalisation.

When Nepal’s neighbours saw pashmina’s potential, they brought economies of scale and just copied the product. There was a glut in the market, prices went into freefall. The Chinese had cheaper labour, lower production costs, skilled manpower and most importantly, their own raw material, something that Nepal was actually importing from the northern neighbour.

With the markets tightening, the unregistered factories were the first to go but the long-term businessmen were wounded. Not only did exports nosedive, retail businesses that relied on tourist buyers also suffered.

By this time everyone in Nepal wanted a piece of the pashmina pie. A Rastriya Bank study shows that the number of registered factories jumped from 25 in 1993 to 959 by 1999. The 70-30 formula (70 percent pashmina and 30 percent silk), which had worked fine till then succumbed to competition and woollen shawls and other items began to be passed off as pashmina.

The government has promised reforms to help them, like a refund on VAT, duty drawback and bonded warehouses. People like Pushpa Man Shrestha of Nepal Pashmina Industry, one of the main players in the business for more than two decades, are still hopeful. “The US and Europe still have a soft corner for Nepali pashmina,” he says. “It’s a question of survival. The Chinese and the Indians are too large for us to compete with.”

Unfortunately this was exactly what makers here tried to copy. “Indians totally spoilt the market for us. They had variety, and embroidery skills, which we did not. Maintaining quality in the face of competition was tough,” explained Roshan Timilsina of Innoxa Pashmina, whose main markets were Italy, Japan and Korea.

But after years of downturn, it looks like the industry is coming out of the slump. Shopkeepers like Bishnu Dhungel of Lovely Handicrafts in Thanaipur today spend the day waiting for the odd tourist to appear. Days of no business are not uncommon. Timilsina closed his factory more than a year ago and now only calls his workers when there are large orders. But after years of downturn, it looks like the industry is coming out of the slump. The government has promised reforms to help them, like a refund on VAT, duty drawback and bonded warehouses.

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natural and new markets

compete with so we have found ways to overcome the challenge. Nepali pashmina makers are now restricting themselves to shawls but have focused on niche markets of apparel and household items made from the fabric. The other pashmina items are: pillow cases, bed sheets and dressing gowns. Even men are wearing pashmina now in the form of mufflers, vests and sweaters.

The pashmina market is still a money-maker but the private sector alone cannot take on the giant neighbours. Securing a registered trademark for Nepali pashmina and encouraging the production of our own raw material, which is possible considering Nepalis in the north do raise sheep, could be steps to putting pashmina back on the shelves of the world’s boutiques.

Pashmina is made from the soft wool found under the coarse hair of the chyangra or mountain goat. In its raw form pashmina is softer than cotton and as a fabric it is warmer than wool and smoother than silk, thus making it one of the most desirable of fabrics. Pashmina has been used by highland communities like the Thakalis and Gurungs for daily wear since time immemorial. Only in the last two decades did the international fashion discover pashmina.
Erna's joint venture

A Dutch artist collaborates with Kathmandu artisans for an exhibition of silver ornaments in London next week

Mark Turin
in Amsterdam

Erna Anema was a 25-year-old art school graduate when she first travelled to Nepal in 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to journey overland, like so many Europeans before them but the deteriorating situation in Iran meant that they had to fly directly to Kathmandu to travel and trek in the Himalayas. Coming to Nepal had long been high on Erna’s list of desires, after reading a book as a child about the 1953 conquest of Chomolungma. While she had expected to be bowled over by the natural beauty of the country, the fine craftsmanship of the metal workers and jewelers fascinated her the most, sowing the seeds of future collaboration.

When she was studying at the prestigious Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, where she now teaches, Erna had become interested in working with gold and silver and wanted one day to collaborate with the skilled Newar craftsmen in Kathmandu valley. It wasn’t until 1995, however, that this germ of an idea would blossom into a joint venture. In the intervening years, while working as a professional artist, Erna often holidayed in Nepal with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Nepali craftsmen with whom she had become acquainted and eventually developed a desire to work with gold and silver and wanted one day to collaborate with the skilled Newar craftsmen in Kathmandu valley.

One of the unexpected challenges in working with craftspeople in Nepal is the difficulty of accurately conveying an artistic idea in a manner that has local resonance. Trained to produce careful technical drawings in two- or three-point perspective, Erna soon realised that her Newar co-workers were unable to ‘read’ such visualisations, even if they marvelled at her precision.

The rough but elegant simplicity which Erna achieves in her art is unsightly to most of these craftsmen, suggesting that her artistic commissions make up only a small part of their annual income. While respecting traditional craft techniques, Erna delights in bringing small gifts for her friends and colleagues Rajesh, Sarej, Mohan, Nabin and Gautam, such as strong work gloves, books on gilding and gas masks to combat the noxious mercury fumes which are released when Patan’s craftsmen decorate temple domes.

Erna’s oeuvre is made up of three components: objects, jewellery and paintings. The first two are made in collaboration with craftsmen from Patan, while her painting is solo work from her studio in the Netherlands. Soon after an exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu in the late 1990s, while Erna was teaching a workshop at Nepal’s Art Academy, she organised a successful exhibition in Haarlem at which all exhibited items were sold.

Her most recent artistic adventure is the Lal Project, which she will take on tour to London next week. A lal is a Nepali unit of measurement for silver, from which Erna makes beaten silver brooches of different sizes and constellations.

Erna’s joint venture

The Power of Ayurveda

Introducing New Clinic Plus Ayurvedic Shampoo with the goodness of Neem, Tulsi and other essential ayurvedic ingredients to keep your hair healthy and shiny. Give your hair Clinic Plus Ayurvedic wash everyday.

For more on lals and Erna’s other:
www.ernaanema.nl/

Eld News
Training Courses, February 2006

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Targeted

As always, villagers suffered most in the past year

NARESH NEWAR

It’s 6PM in the village of Phaparbari in Makawanpur. Jamu Maya Bajaj is holding her son, born only two hours ago. Her father-in-law, 83-year-old Pratap Singh, is busy preparing a gahcham to celebrate the birth of his first grandson. They hear the sound of a helicopter. Soon after, a bomb lands near their home.

The walls of the wooden house collapse, all six family members run out and jump into trenches dug by the Maoists. Jamu barely has the strength to reach for cover, where she collapses. In the ensuing panic, she forgets her baby inside the burning house. A female Maoist rushes in and rescues the newborn.

RNA soldiers appear from behind the stune walls, bullets are flying everywhere. Pratap is hit in the head.

Manish Bajaj also runs out of his house as it catches fire. His 3-year-old son, who was spared an escape when their house was bombed by an army helicopter in Makawanpur, last week.

BORN TO VIOLENCE: Jamu cradles her newborn son, both had a miraculous escape when their house was bombed by an army helicopter in Makawanpur.

Targeted

country’s human rights crisis and its humanitarian consequences have deepened further, especially in rural areas. Insect has newly published 300 Days of Royal Takeover outlines the severe impact on civilians. (See box)

Besides the security force and rebels, anti-Maoist vigilante groups backed by the state emerged as a threat. The media was subjected to severe restrictions and the government sent soldiers with machine guns to camp in several villages across the country. Thousands of journalists were arrested.

“Even the most powerful institution, the judiciary, has lost its independence,” says advocate Tikaram Bhattarai. Development institutions, the judiciary, have lost its independence, adds Siwakoti.

International support has boosted the morale of activists, democrats and journalists to fight back. For democracy, adds Siwakoti.

As human rights violations mounted in the aftermath of the royal takeover, the UN established an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which monitors abuses by both the state and the rebels.

International pressure hasn’t forced the king to roll back his takeover, but according to Kundan Aryal of Insect, it has stopped him from going all the way. Aryal says, “There would have been much more atrocities in the absence of international support.”

300 days after February First

- 1,478 Nepalis killed in 65 districts in 2005. The state was responsible for 95%.
- 100 disappeared following state detention, thousands more were abducted by the Maoists.
- More than 6,000 political activists and human rights defenders were arrested, many are still in detention.
- During the first six months, nearly 1,000 journalists were out of jobs.
- Tourist revenue dropped by Rs 1.2 billion.
- Nearly $250 million in development aid was suspended.

The economy was hit hard. Tourism reeled, particularly because many western countries issued negative travel advisories. Nearly $250 million in development aid was frozen or slashed. And despite the king’s assertion in his recap of the past year that foreign relations was “stable and had clarity” Nepal’s isolation has never been deeper.

The UN Committee on the Rights

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where she collapses. In the ensuing panic, she forgets her baby inside the burning house. A female Maoist rushes in and rescues the newborn.

RNA soldiers appear from behind the stune walls, bullets are flying everywhere. Pratap is hit in the head.

Manish Bajaj also runs out of his house as it catches fire. His 3-year-old son, who was spared an escape when their house was bombed by an army helicopter in Makawanpur, last week.

BORN TO VIOLENCE: Jamu cradles her newborn son, both had a miraculous escape when their house was bombed by an army helicopter in Makawanpur.

Targeted
Nepal’s rebels, India’s scandals, Balochistan’s plight, the list goes on...
Arjun rising

Indian golfer paves the way for Asian pros

I am indeed a great admirer of Tiger Woods but when Indian golfer Arjun Atwal is in contention, my heart says ARJUN, ARJUN. That was the case last weekend on the Buick Invitational on the USPGA tour. Young and dynamic Sergio Garcia was leading the field at 11 under par going into the final round, Woods (who has won the tournament the previous three times) was just one stroke off the lead and there was Arjun at 8 under par with a slim chance of victory only if he produced a spectacular final round. Trust me, I was wholeheartedly supporting Arjwal.

After the regulation 72 holes, three players were tied at 10 under and Atwal was at 9 under. He had a chance to tie for the top spot but missed the birdie putt on the last hole from eight feet. However he still managed to finish tied for fourth, which helped him to jump to 16th place on the PGA tour after three appearances, earning $256,668.

Atwal is the first Indian to have secured, in 2004, a tour card for the USPGA, the world’s most celebrated golf tour. Other Asians who have qualified can be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Atwal’s compatriot Daniel Chopra also secured his card in the same year but Chopra plays under the Swedish flag as his mother is Swedish. Atwal has not only secured the tour card but has also proved that he has the skills and physical strength to compete at the very top. He is one of the best putters on the PGA tour and has registered a putting average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world.

Every week I check the PGA tour’s web page to see how this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world. Atwal has apparently had the best putting average on the PGA tour in 2005—an average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world.

Atwal is undoubtedly a trendsetter for Indian and Asian golfers alike. Atwal is the first Indian to have secured, in 2004, a tour card for the USPGA, the world’s most celebrated golf tour. Other Asians who have qualified can be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Atwal has taken advantage of its spectacular setting to develop a tourist industry and lately it has become an educational and medical centre as well. Atwal has apparently had the best putting average on the PGA tour in 2005—an average of 1.710. Atwal is already on the world map with the world’s top professional golfers, and he has even been chosen to have the best putting average on the PGA tour in 2005—an average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world.

P kohala has taken advantage of its spectacular setting to develop a tourist industry and lately it has become an educational and medical centre as well. Today, the city is destined to become a sports hub too. Atwal has not only secured the tour card but has also proved that he has the skills and physical strength to compete at the very top. He is one of the best putters on the PGA tour and has registered a putting average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world.

Pokhara as a sports hub

The town’s potential for sports tourism is finally being realised

Pokhara was at 9 under. He had a chance to tie for the top spot but missed the birdie putt on the last hole from eight feet. However he still managed to finish tied for fourth, which helped him to jump to 16th place on the PGA tour after three appearances, earning $256,668 last season in 24 appearances.

He is the only Indian professional golfer to win on the European PGA tour and has registered triumphs at the Caltex Singapore Masters, in 2002, and the Carlsberg Malaysian Open the following year. He is the first professional to have crossed the million-dollar mark on the Asian tour after winning the Hero Honda Masters 2003—an average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the PGA tour and in the world.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Slide show by Korean Artist, Mr. Lee K.H and Photographer Mr. Choi Y.H. 3 February 3PM Buddha Gallery zen café

EVENTS
- Interaction Program at College of Applied Sciences ‘Let’s celebrate world wetland day together’ followed by a picnic at Nagdhara. 4 February, contact Yatra at 553234.
- Youth Forum at GAA hall discussing ‘youths in decision making’. 3 February, 3PM onwards.
- Yuva Chaitali at the Martin Chautari organised by Youth initiative will focus on ‘Good Governance- Youth Perspective’ 3-5PM, 410759.
- Stammtisch workshop on the similarities between Nepal and German language. 3 February Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali. 4250871
- Sri Panchami 3 February

MUSIC
- The Cloud Walkers at Rox Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rumour Dog Bar & Plaza.
- Celebrating Bob Marley’s Birthday lets get together and feel all right at Moksh. Live every Wednesday (Jazz) and at Niek’s Place. Every Tuesday.
- Uncork the Good Times Fusion- The bar at Dwarka’s presents Ciney and Par-jeat playing Popular Sounds of 70’s with Fabulous Cocktails. Tantalising BBQs by the poolside every Friday from 7PM onwards. Rs. 750, includes a small bottle of Carlsberg beer or a soft drink. Dwarka’s Hotel, 4479448

DINING
- Buffet Breakfast at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and desserts. 4491234
- Maki Newa Bhuftu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4493784
- Mexican and Italian food at Fuzone Café, Lajimpat. 5543935
- Great Dining options at AFresco, Bakhundole, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Saucelite Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- Plat du Jour at the Shambala Garden, Shankri-La. 4412999
- Wonderful Wednesdays at Fusion, Dwarka’s, happy hour 5-9PM.
- The Sidewalk BBQ with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shankri-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. 4375279
- Breakfast with birds lunch with butterflies and dinner by the Fire Place. Farm House Café. 4375279

NEPAL WEATHER
Sunny days ahead. Haze, high clouds this weekend but no sign of impending rain. Expect cloudy days thanks to the intense haze, high cloud this weekend but sunny days ahead.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Banquet options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Saucelite Crowne Plaza. 4273999

GETAWAYS
- Home away from home Shivapuri Heights Cottage for bookings. 9841371927, sohan@escapenepal.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
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa, 4375280
- Star Cruises-Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500 only. 2012345.
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245
- Conferences at Godavari Village Resort. 5060676

Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are deported from London to the house of an eccentric professor during World War II. They find life there extremely dull until Lucy discovers a wardrobe that leads to a magical world called Narnia, where animals can talk and all are ruled over by the wise and benevolent lion Aslan. The others don’t believe her at first but soon all of them go through a storm. The land is being kept in a perpetual winter by the evil White Witch Jadis, who turns anyone who doesn’t obey her into stone. The children join Aslan and the animals loyal to him in an attempt to vanquish Jadis.

Let's get together and feel all right at Moksh.

hyatt@hyattregencykathmandu.com

14 CITY

Nepal weather forecast
The weather forecast for the next five days is as follows:

Friday (20) - A few scattered showers in the western region, with sunny weather in the eastern region.
Saturday (21) - Mostly sunny weather with some scattered clouds in the western region.
Sunday (22) - Clear skies with minimal chances of scattered showers.
Monday (23) - Mostly sunny weather with clear skies.
Tuesday (24) - Clear skies with minimal chances of scattered showers.

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

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The sun is shining, the sky is clear, and the weather is pleasant.

with dinner by the Fire Place. Farm House Café. 4375279

The sun is shining, the sky is clear, and the weather is pleasant.

With Aslan’s help, the children battle Jadis and her followers, including the evil White Witch. With the help of the armoire's magic and the courage of those who believe, Narnia is restored to its former glory.

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The sun is shining, the sky is clear, and the weather is pleasant.

January came and went and still no rain, making it the driest three winter months in a decade. Although this trend has been apparent in recent winters, this year’s case is unusual for the intensity of dryness immediately after a weak summer monsoon. Satellite pictures show fresh western fronts carrying clouds over the western Himalaya, where they collide with southern jet streams and diffuse. That brings fragmented patches of dry clouds to our skies but no sign of impending rain. Expect cloudy days thanks to the intense haze, high cloud this weekend but sunny days ahead.

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SMOKE SCREEN: The jet carrying Admiral William Fallon makes an approach into Kathmandu airport on Wednesday. The head of the US Pacific Command was supposed to arrive a day earlier but his plane couldn’t land in Kathmandu because of poor visibility caused by smog.

ALL TOGETHER: French Ambassador Michel Jolivet with the families of the Nepali victims of the 20 October Mt Kang Guru avalanche in which eight Nepalis and seven French climbers died. Each family got Rs 22,000, the third such payment since the tragedy.

SAVE THE WETLANDS: Participants of the Taudaha Jamboree ride alongside Taudaha Lake to mark World Wetlands Day on Wednesday.

VOWS WONS: Winners of VOW magazine’s Top 10 College Women contest pose with their prizes at Hotel Radisson on Tuesday.

W when Tirtha Man Maskey arrived to take up his assignment of warden of Royal Chitwan National Park in 1973 there was a crowd waiting for him. He thought they were there to garland him. “Actually they were there to beat me up,” Maskey recalls. The people of Chitwan saw the park as a threat to their livelihood.

More than 30 years later, Chitwan is cited worldwide as a model for people and park strategy where villagers actively work for conservation. Maskey’s pioneering work at Royal Chitwan and later in the Department of National Parks and Wildlife recently won him the 2005 Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Media Award which he got from Britain’s Prince Philip. Last year Maskey was also honoured with the 2004 Order of the Golden Ark by late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

With other Nepali conservationists, Maskey was successful in educating communities surrounding Nepal’s national parks that they could benefit from the tourism and biodiversity conservation. He designed the buffer zones around protected areas that cushioned human pressure.

Maskey has also championed the cause of the endangered Gangetic gharial. Collecting eggs from the wild, the small fish-eating crocodiles are hatched and raised at rearing facilities for five years before being released to their natural habitat. Chitwan’s gharial farm set up with help from the Frankfurt Zoo has not just helped save the reptile from extinction but also turned into a tourist attraction in its own right.

Maskey was also recognised for strengthening anti-poaching operations in Nepal’s national parks and it is due to these efforts that Nepal’s rhinos and tigers are not being hunted down as they are elsewhere. Maskey has also been a key figure in international coordination to enhance transboundary conservation.

“"If you are creative and willing to initiate your own projects, there are plenty of jobs in wildlife research and conservation in Nepal,” says Maskey who retired as director general of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation last month. But this doesn’t mean retirement from conservation, Maskey wants to keep on with his research and writing. After all, he is the only Nepali to have a frog named after him: the Sphaerothaeca maskeyi a rare amphibian that he discovered.

Last month, Maskey went to Royal Bardia National Park for a farewell visit. There was a large crowd waiting for him at the warden’s office. This time they were really there to garland him.

(Mallika Aryal)
It is only when a country has election symbols for each and every one of its political parties that we can safely surmise it has a policy that has finally come of age and that society is ripe for democracy. Campaign slogans at election time that go ‘Vote for Spectacles’ or ‘Rooster for Mayor’ or even ‘Vote for Bow and Arrow, or Else!’ prove that a country is indeed a mature multiparty democracy where voters exercise their adulterated franchise to elect a symbol that they least dislike. That is why certain western democracies are democracies in name only because they don’t have symbols like us.

It is especially when elections are symbolic, like the upcoming municipal polls that elections symbols take on a heightened sense of urgency. An election symbol represents all that is good and wholesome about a political party and like a picture that speaks a thousand words it tells voters what its party manifesto stands for in a neat little drawing. That is why political parties fight tooth and nail for their symbol because it symbolises attributes that they hold dear.

For example, some parties have spectacles as symbol because they have a lack of vision, others have a hand because it shows they will be on the take the minute they get to power so they can distribute the largesse, still others prefer the dirty finger because they are a bunch of sleazebags and they don’t really mind if everyone knows it.

To make it easier for those of you who are of voting age and above to make up your minds about who to cast your valuable ballots for among parties contesting forthcoming elections, those boycotting them or even those engaged in trying to prevent them, we bring you in the interest of national unity and amity a rough guide to the choice available and their preferred election symbols.

### Election symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burning Tyre</td>
<td>NC</td>
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<td>Flying Brick</td>
<td>NC-D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slingshot</td>
<td>CPN (Unified Marxbad Not-so-Leninbad)</td>
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<td>Four Fingers</td>
<td>CPN (Gang of Four)</td>
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<td>Grenade</td>
<td>CPN (Muder and Mayhem)</td>
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<td>Pressure Cooker</td>
<td>CPN (Maobad)</td>
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<td>Hollow</td>
<td>RPP (KT)</td>
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<td>Hello</td>
<td>RPP (PSJR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Halo</td>
<td>RPP (Holier Than Thou)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muscles</td>
<td>Rastnya Janashadi Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>Champagne Glass</td>
<td>partynepal.com</td>
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