DAUGHTER SLAUGHTER

More innocent victims as a senseless war enters its 11th year

NARESH NEWAR in NAWALPARASI

In the dusty village of Debda VDC, the death of young college student Asmita Chapagain has left villagers numb with shock.

On 9 February, Asmita was blown up by a roadside bomb planted by Maoists along the Mahendra Highway near Sunuwal. Asmita’s friend Purnima Thapa watched her body fly 100m when the massive bomb hidden under a pile of rocks exploded.

“Everything looked so peaceful, there were rocks blocking the road and as we passed there was a huge explosion,” recalls Purnima, surrounded by dozens of friends and family members at Asmita’s house. The five girls were cycling home after shopping at the Indian border market, Thutibari.

There is still no official report on how the bomb was triggered but villagers believe that the Maoist set it off when they saw injured soldiers being transported in jeeps belonging to two national dailies that were marked ‘Press’.

As rebel leaders Prachanda and Baburam were busy giving interviews to mark the 10th anniversary of their revolution, there was scant attention to the hundreds of innocent Nepalis like Asmita who have been killed for no reason.

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“They told me to shut up and not utter another word,” she recalls. Eventually, Asmita’s body and the injured were carried 15km to the village on a rickshaw.

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mark the first anniversary of his direct rule, His Majesty King Gyanendra summarized up the situation: terrorist activities have been largely controlled and are limited to stray incidents, the nation has been saved from becoming a failed state, the peoples’ strongest desire is for peace, democracy and development, to strengthen meaningful democracy, the government would hold elections at all levels within 15 months, the crown’s interest was only to uphold the glorious tradition of our history and to work in the interest of the people and finally an appeal to all to forget the bitter past and to reconcile in the national interest. His strategy had been both correct and if he were sincere in delivering on his promises, we would soon achieve peace and be in true democracy. Unfortunately, even as he addressed the nation and in these two weeks after, the Maoists have intensified their attacks on security forces extending the death and destruction. The regime feels that the Maoists must surrender their arms before it will begin to negotiate, which is a very wrong appreciation of the ground reality. The king is trying to consolidate his hold by blaming and ridiculing the parties, the parties are blaming the king for his unconstitutional and regressive acts and signing the 12 point agreement with the Maoists to fight against the king’s authoritarian rule and for the establishment of total democracy, the Maoists are engaged in their hopeless quest for the forcible overthrow of the old order and replacing it with a ‘democratic republic’. Although the regime gave in by accepting all controlling corruption, implementing good governance and de-politicization of the civil service, its main agenda seems to be holding elections at any cost, even if the political parties do not agree to participate in them. As the uncertainty and delays continue, there are some self-evident truths about the past 10 years of conflict: 

- The nation and its people can no longer sustain this conflict and thus the urgency of a peace process
- There is no military solution.
- (NP) Prachanda gives indications of the Maoists’ willingness to resolve the conflict through dialogue if minimum demands are met.
- The international community and civil society are more than willing to help mediate or facilitate.
- There is a need to evolve a new paradigm to address state restructuring for the devolution of power.
- Also for inclusive political participation of all people through proportional representation in parliament on the basis of total elections voted for.

There is competition among the royal ministers to say the most outlandish things and then a court jester comes along and makes it look so obvious, so naive, so tasteless and off-putting that only the information minister Shrish Misra and his ilk are wont to discuss the use of personal judgement. Rana and his ilk are content to be just the arbitrator of good journalism. He also wants to be the monitor, regulator, prosecutor and the arbiter. He hinted that a ‘professional body’ is to be formed to keep independent media in check. Now that more high-profile all-in-one royal commissions created to fight ‘corruptions’ has been silently cremated, Rana may have to rethink his strategy. 

In this age of doublespeak, words like objectivity, impartiality, neutrality and professionalism have become the hot favourites. Rana and his ilk are wont to dictate the ‘one-sided’ views of journalists of the democratic persuasion. A council of journalists loyal to the royalists have been created to counter the influence of media of the democratic persuasion. We are told by the self-appointed moral police of the press that journalists should cease to be activists and maintain their neutrality. They say we are biased and should strive for professionalism. 

Cowardly against political bias in the independent media is usually the preoccupation of editors. In a profession that deals with public issues such as journalism, law and education, the line separating objectivity with activism is extremely thin. Should lawyers defend serial killers? It is a question that has vexed media for generations. No code of conduct can lay down the rules when subjectivity has to be the ultimate consideration. Consider a hypothetical situation where a public-ballyhoo-conscious journalist informs a BBC reporters that he will blow up Big Ben at a certain date and time. Should reporters keep the confidence of the source, switch the destruction and report the story as an impartial observer or should they inform the police and protect the monument? When democracy is in danger, when its basic freedoms are in jeopardy do we continue with journalism-as-usual or is there a higher calling? Is it sufficient to be ‘objective’ about something that is determined to wrest away your freedom? 

Censorship and artful hangnails have an earful listening to all the king’s men every night on television. Most of what they say is so tasteless and off-putting that only the stale media runs the entire statements—the rest do them a favour by running just excerpts. Shriram Rana isn’t content to be just the arbitrator of good journalism. He also wants to be the monitor, regulator, prosecutor and the arbiter. He hinted that a ‘professional body’ is to be formed to keep independent media in check. Now that more high-profile all-in-one royal commissions created to fight ‘corruptions’ has been silently cremated, Rana may have to rethink his strategy.

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In his interview with Nepali Times, Baburam Bhattarai advises ‘enlightened persons’ not to get ‘swayed by sentimental politics’. If ‘ideology’ it comes when loss of life; in Nepal it is a lie—support for the government, it is basically to get rid of monarchy and war. How can this man grin and

debate. As Deepa Rai says, the violence associated with the Maoists seems to the electoral agenda they started with, their 42-point demand. Besides, the country is going
derogated himself in a barracks in Ghorahi, in 2001. ‘popularity’.

**S K Aryal, email**

Even with such grave threats of bodily harm and serious consequences, a turn of 50,000 must be considered as a victory in a number in municipal elections. Imagining what the figure would have been if the violence in Nepal is a threat lingering behind the majority of the Nepali public. We must admit that our political leader are not capable leaders. They are 100 percent Indian backed, with Indian mentality and are more Indian than Nepali, therefore dismissed as anti-nationals, until they stand up as Nepalis.

**Paras Dewan, email**

The writing is on the wall for King Gyanendra if he wants to see it: the 21st turnout in last week’s civic polls was a referendum and only one-fifth of the people voted for an inter-vening force.

**Gyan Subba, email**

Despite everything I am optimising the ‘Dalit way’? Historically since 2007 BS there have been radical changes (10) that have been widely welcomed. So perhaps the turn of the tables in the activities signals a change. Our family is originally from Palpa, and declared itself as a derelict of the destruction. It is not a strategic town and the public outcry against its destruction has perhaps made the leader’s words more meaningful. The elections have been a total failure, and the king lost face and squire. I think he will look for a compromise or even a way out of the mess. Pradibhet, the hard man, expatriate Nepalis who feel the same way once in a while in their daily life. Just before reading her article, I was reading the interview of Baburam Bhattarai and I was amazed by the contrast in the sentiments expressed in her article and those of Baburam and like politicians who run our country by coercion. While ordinary people deplore violence and desire peace, the politicians are just happy to use violence as a means to their ends (the ends basically seem to have their logic). For the Maoists it is basically to get rid of monarchy and for the government, it is basically to save the monarchy: The perpetrators of violence seem to have lost the civilized way of sorting out differences through dialogue and discussion. As Deepa Rai says, the violence associated with the Maoists seems to the electoral agenda they started with, their 42-point demand.

**Suni Shrestha, email**

**SIKKIM AGAIN**

**Editorial** (‘The Long War’, #285) is really disgusting. In fact, the mortal history of Sikkim is being repeated in Nepal. In 1973, India organised role in front of the palace of Chogyal the way it is doing in Nepal in front of Narayanhiti. Just as the Indian agents in Sikkim did then, the parties in Nepal are also moving a formal request for protection from India. As Chogyal was abused, the King of Sikkim was also being abused. India had only one

**C Thapa**

**HOPELESS**

CK Lal’s ‘Helpless, hopeless, helpless’ (#285) has just expressed in perfect words what I could only scream in my own head. Unless these major political parties come to their senses (which they have not so far even), as CK Lal has nicely explained we have helpless Nepalis have nothing to hope for. Even if the Chairman came to terms with them (thoughtful thinking, without their own conscious awakening and perhaps within party clarity), I really don’t see any outlet to the current impasse.

**M Nammu, email**

**TOILET TALK**

Your translation from Jana Aastha of ‘Royal bathroom’ (#285) shows your lack of exposure and knowledge. Every country has special facilities for heads of states, including the US, where a friend of mine is an official. And Rs 200,000 is quite a modest sum for a bathroom these days; they don’t go after bathrooms any more. In fact, one could literally hand over the plate called Nepal to India just to realise how much of a burden that would actually be to the southern neighbour. Should be the current foreign policy stance of our southern neighbour; then we could for once heave a sigh of relief and expect an end to the following torments: 13-year-old Bhutanese refugee crisis thrust upon us, safe haven to Nepal rebels, regular inundation of Nepal’s villages by Indian dams on the border against all international norms, endless hassles in trade and transit facilities against established international conventions, using Nepal politicians as surrogates for regime change in Nepal (as in 1961 and 1990) and between 1960 and 1990) invoking negative place image against the landlocked neighbour. Pradip should also look around in India’s immediate neighbourhood such as Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, not to mention Pakistan, to gauge whether it is only Nepal that is complaining. We know that democracy will definitely flourish in Nepal and deliver its people from chronic and abject poverty as long as our own politicians behave more responsibly. India could do an immense turn to Nepal by not using the latter’s corrupt, unscrupulous and unprincipled leaders for its own ulterior ends.

**Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Lalitpur**

**PEOPLE’S VOICE**

Deepa Rai’s Nepali Pan column ‘Violence and vengeance’ (#285) echoes the feelings of many people back home. Mr Bhattarai’s assertion that there is no fair sense be construed as false or ‘popularity’.

**K Rana, email**

Deepa Rai’s Nepali Pan column ‘Violence and vengeance’ (#285) echoes the feelings of many people back home. Mr Bhattarai’s assertion that there is no fair sense be construed as false or **inadequate**.
The Sunuwal battle was short but fierce. Faced with a surprise attack by overwhelming numbers, the soldiers didn’t stand a chance. Local journalists reported that the Maoists gunned down soldiers who had already surrendered after telling them to run. Although the battle was reported in the national media, human rights activists who visited the site have yet to cite this violation of the rules of war. No politician or human rights activist has yet visited Asmita’s family. The Maoists haven’t bothered to apologise.

“We are just ordinary people so why would they come?” asks Asmita’s father Somnath, dressed in white with his head shaved. “We cremated her on Friday and that is because of the fear of landmines and stones and tree trunks blocking the roads. Local officials say they are taking a ‘go-slow’ approach in removing the piles of rubble. On Wednesday, soldiers in hot pursuit of Maoists were again ambushed near the Navalpari-Palpa border. Three soldiers died and 15 were injured.

Despite the conciliatory tone of their leader’s anniversary interviews, the Maoists have in fact stepped up their attacks in weeks. In a bid to isolate Butwal from its rural hinterland, the rebels have placed hundreds of roadblocks in the west and urban areas and along highways in recent months. In a stretch of the road Thursday, the roadside bomb detonated killing him and Paru, who was cycling nearby. “I saw a huge cloud of black smoke and then I saw her thrown quite a distance,” recalls Paru’s close friend, Kali Thapa, 17 (pictured, right) who was riding just a few metres behind her. Kali was only slightly injured by flying rocks but she is still in complete shock and has not been able to sleep since that day. Kali’s relatives and neighbours are worried about her health. Paru’s mother has not been able to speak or eat since the death of her daughter, one of her six children. Neighbours are devastated and aren’t sure where else can we go?”

The highway had reopened at least two-dozen piles of boulders or fallen trees on the main highway linking Navalpari and Rupandehi. Buses and large trucks that made the same detours tilted dangerously to one side as they drove on the soft shoulder. The highway had reopened just hours earlier after hundreds of Maoists swept down on a army convoy forces along a seven-km stretch of the road Thursday, killing 16 plus one young woman riding her bike with friends.

“So we drove to Butwal but couldn’t go any further. A pile of boulders blocked the highway to Dang, leaving just enough room for biker motorcycles and rickshaws to pass. Sunday morning we tried to leave and was forced to change direction to Palpa. About five kins along the winding road flanked by steep green hills was again blocked by a metre-thick tree that had been felled across the highway.

A road cut through where locals had tried to remove a chunk of the tree to reopen the road—but they were warned off.
Crowd control

What if such a show of large crowds is actually a wrong indicator of one's democratic strength?

For almost four years now, private sector newspapers have been handling photos that show large groups of people attending anti-government rallies in Kathmandu and elsewhere. From the other side of the fence, state-funded media have been displaying images of large crowds of people turning up to greet the king wherever he goes. In either case, both sides continue to point to the same conclusion: so many people cannot be wrong. In today’s uncertain times in Nepal, showing off the size of one’s crowd has become a convenient indicator that’s supposed to validate a claimant’s strength of one’s political position.

But what if such a show of large crowds is actually a wrong indicator of one’s democratic strength?

In his book The Wisdom of Crowds, James Surowiecki writes about four criteria that make a crowd’s decisions accurate. First, such a crowd has to have a diversity of opinion. Each person should have some private information, even if it’s just an eccentric interpretation of known facts. Surowiecki adds that “diversity contributes not just by adding different perspectives to the group but also by making it easier for individuals to say what they really think.”

The second criterion is decentralization. This means that people’s opinions are not determined by the opinions of those around them. Obviously, a crowd that lets in a variety of opinions, including dissenting ones, is more tolerant of independent voices than one where there’s pressure to conform to a nongraphm with everyone seeking rigid consensus that “offers no one rather than excites everyone.”

The third criterion is decentralization, which allows for individuals to bring in their specialization and inject local knowledge into the crowd’s deliberations. Aggregation is the fourth stage. It is a process of narrowing down all the individual private judgments and then turning them into a collective decision. If a crowd includes these four criteria, Surowiecki says, its judgment is likely to be accurate.

But what do these criteria mean for our crowd-dependent political processes? It’s arguable that of our two groups the one aligned with the political parties is more diverse in terms of opinion. On one level, it is more likely to represent disparate sections of our societies. But the difference ends there. Given that political parties remain rigidly hierarchical entities that do not allow for any independence of thought, it’s hard to see how they actually get to derive the benefits of diversity, independence and decentralization in their ranks.

As a result, for the longest time their protests appeared to have been adrenalin programs devised by a few zealots to keep themselves busy, not something that really bubbled up to the surface because of the demands placed by diverse sections of the crowd. One danger about such narrow leadership is that by not adequately bringing dissenting voices, independent opinions and local knowledge into its decision-making apparatus, it is more likely to reach an extreme but wrong conclusion about the strength of support it actually enjoys in public.

It’s time for those who claim that their legitimacy—either on the street or in the corridors of power—comes from the crowd to actually get to derive the benefits of diversity, independence and decentralization. There is a way to tap into the extant wisdom of the crowd.
Friction necessary
Excerpts of interview with Harish Garung
Himadri Khulharepatra, 13-27 February

When the Maoists launched their ‘people’s war’, the eighth five-year plan was nearing its completion and Nepal’s economic growth was nearly six percent. The conflict has had a huge impact on the economy and development. On the positive side, there has been a massive change in the political sphere. The nation is now simmering with debate on social and political issues increasing awareness about the root causes of the revolts.

No change can take place without friction. The Maoists resorted to the insurgency after concluding that normal political efforts could not bring change because politics and the economy continued to be ruled by traditional power centres. Despite almost a decade of rule by democratic forces, no social change occurred and economic gains were not evenly distributed. It is hard to decide who is more responsible—the rulers or the rebels. I think the ruler should shoulder more of the responsibility because they weren’t inclusive. Conflicts like these do not have military solutions and should be solved through dialogue. But that depends on how flexible and inclusive the ruling class is. Every second or third sentence of the king’s speech on 1 February contained words like ‘democracy’ and ‘people’. But if you look at the speech as a whole, it was neither for democracy nor the people. Some people who accept elections as the foundation of democracy are backers of a corrupt assembly. At the same time, I think that King Tribhuvan was discussing war back in 1950. Today, the Maoists are also opting for it because they have realised that they cannot win only by means of arms and they want an alternative medium. In my opinion, a constituent assembly is the medicine to cure the problems simmering in the society. It is not only a good lesson. It was with good intentions that King Gyanendra formed the RCCF. The country will not move forward unless the king’s recent decision to remove the provision for the establishment of a constituent assembly is reversed. A constituent assembly is primary aim at controlling floods in Kosi basin will also generate power.

PRESENT ARMS: A Maoist show of force with captured guns.

After I listened to the king’s speech on 1 February last year, I believed that a special effort would be made to establish peace. But I have not seen any such move. Instead, state resources are being diverted to wage war. While the people kept demanding peace, the state ignored it. I am not a member of the political parties, I call myself an independent intellectual. But the parties have been sidelined by the state. The king should have acted as a guardian of the nation and the parties to come on board and share their grievances. But the king’s recent speech gave no indication that he will take that route. Why the king made such a speech is something I cannot understand. It appeared he was trying to wipe out the parties to mark the 20th anniversary of his move. An independent country earns its reputation either through its democratic practices. In Nepal’s case, we have failed in both. The international community in general has a negative image of Nepal which must also be improved. The king has embarked on forming a new democratic alliance.

Drilling for dam
Nepal Samacharpatra, 9 February

Field work has started at Butwalchheta for the preparation of a detailed report on the Kosi High Dam with the end of 2006
ourselves. Tomorrow if outsiders must work as mediators to settle our differences, perhaps denting our image as an independent country, who will take the blame? The only way left is for the king to bring together constitutional forces and take the initiative to start a peace process. The king is not the leader of a political party, he should be above it all.

RCCC paper trail

Kathmandu Today, 16 February

After the Supreme Court decommissioned the RCCC this week, no one is sure what to do with its documents. Former RCCC officials have suggested that the secretariat burn the papers. According to a press release issued by new prime minister Babahur Das and former prime minister Prakash Man Singh, the king has asked the secretariat to burn his million bill-bond but the bills of at least a dozen others against whom the commission filed cases, including the constrctor of the Melamchi Drinking Water Supply Project, Jeopchiring Lama, the hydropower secretary Tikadutta Niraula and the managing director of the Department of Forests Jamunakrishna Tamrakar, have not been returned. There is still confusion about whether they will be reinstated in their former posts.

Arming Maoists

Kapilendri, 14 February

The Indian police have detained two people, Upendra Singh and Ranjan Singh, and accused them of supplying arms to Nepali Maoists. Though working as cloth merchants in Bathana town close to the Nepal-India border, the men were captured with three pistols at Fabisganj on Sunday. The police say they were caught red-handed when officers went undercover as customers interested in buying arms. Jogbani, Raxaul, Supaul and Bhimnagar have been identified as places from where Maoists import their arms. Nepali security forces have denied any knowledge that weapons are imported from the Jogbani side but Indian police insist that during fair (haat) days—Sunday, Tuesday and Friday—Maoists have been known to smuggle arms from Bathana. According to sources, drugs and counterfeit money are also being smuggled.

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CAREER OPPORTUNITY

ServingMinds

The Commission for Educational Exchanges between the United States and Nepal (also known as USEF or the Fulbright Commission) announces the 2006 competition for the Fulbright and the East-West Center (EWC) Scholarships. Those selected would begin their US studies beginning August 2006. The scholarship program provides all expenses (including travel) for a master’s degree program of up to two years at selected U.S. universities, in any field except medicine, engineering, or computer science. The EWC scholarships of the University of Hawaii (UH) and the University of Hawai’i System can only be offered at UH-L (Honolulu) and UH-W (Automotive School) and in any field offered at UH-L. The scholarship provides a partial monthly stipend, housing, health insurance, book allowance. However, candidates selected for the EWC scholarship will be responsible for personal monthly expenses of $4,000, transportation to and from Honolulu, and any other costs not provided by the Center. Applicants for either program may be employed by any governmental agency, semi-government agency, private business, NGO or INGO.

Application Forms & Deadlines

Application forms and detailed information regarding the competition are available from the USEF/Nepal office in Gyaneshwar (between 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Monday - Friday); the Ministry of Education, the National Planning Commission; Tribhuvan University Rector’s Office; Kathmandu University Rector’s Office; Samruddhi Sambhurana Kendra in Bhaktapur (Siddhartha Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Kalakkali); Birgunj (Nepalgunj Chamber of Industry, Morang, Bardia, Makwanpur); and with Campus Chairs at most of the Valley and some campuses. Interested persons are encouraged to access and download the application and information from the Commission’s website www fulbrightstudy nepal.org.

General Requirements for entering competition:

At applicants must:
1. Possess Nepali citizenship.
2. Be under 30 years of age. Those applying for the master’s degree under the Fulbright or EWC program, or be under 45 years of age for those applying for the Ph.D. degree under the EWC program, as of the application filing deadline date (March 17, 2006).

(a) Applicants for the master’s degree under Fulbright or EWC program: possess either a four years bachelor’s degree, or, in the case of the master’s degree of fewer than four years duration, a master’s degree is also required, such that the total number of years of formal education equals at least 16. Students with a three-year bachelor degree who have completed only the first year of a two-year master’s program, master’s degree student who have cleared all exams but still need to fulfill other university-mandated degree requirements, or students who have two or more bachelor’s degrees but no master’s degree are ineligible to apply.

(b) Applicants for the Ph.D. degree under EWC program: possess a master’s degree that is equivalent to the US master’s degree; that is, a master’s degree that required at least 18 years of continuous study. A letter (or email) received from the relevant department at the University of Hawaii stating that the candidate is eligible to apply for admission to the PhD program, that the study objectives are compatible with the program and that facility are available to advise should be attached with the application.

Applicants must have at least three years (for men) or four years (women) of professional experience in full-time, professional work experience in an area directly relevant to the applicant’s chosen field of study as of the application filing deadline date (March 17, 2006).

The commission can be documented by a letter of attestation copied from employer(s) that verify applicant’s position(s) and years of employment. Even if you worked at several organizations, you are eligible to apply as long as your work experience at those organizations adds up to the minimum work-duration requirement.

(a) Individual holding master’s degree equivalent to a U.S. master’s degree is ineligible to apply for the Fulbright scholarship competition, but are eligible to apply for the East-West Center competition Ph.D. program; and individuals who have previously resided in the United States for six months or more during the preceding five years prior to the application submission deadline are ineligible to apply for the Fulbright program. In addition, it is common to not individuals with, or in the possession of, a U.S. citizenship or U.S. permanent resident status; employees of USEF/Nepal and local employees of U.S. Mission in Nepal who work for the US Department of State, and their spouses and dependent children (who are ineligible for grants during the period of their employment and for one year following the termination of employment).

(Refer to the official document for full details and requirements.)
Ballet dancer, master chef, hotelier, tiger hunter, fighter pilot and trapeze artist—the list that describes Boris Lissanevitch is endless. He was a man you would meet once and never forget. Everyone knows Boris as the founder of the Chinnery restaurant and Calcutta’s Club 300 but what about as the father of Nepali tourism? Or even possibly King Tribhuban’s diplomatic emissary?

Boris Lissanevitch was a legend even before he ever set foot in Nepal. His reputation as a dancer for the Diaghilev’s Ballet Russe was indomitable. “I owe everything to the Russian Revolution” claims Boris in the Michel Peissel’s book *Tiger for Breakfast*. After being a part of the revolution at the age of 15 and even being hit on the thigh by a bullet, Boris at the age of 19 was ready to make his escape from Russia in 1924. After his escape, Boris toured the world for more than 10 years before he decided to make his base in Calcutta. This led to the break-up of his first marriage, as his wife Kira, who was also a dancer with the Ballet Russe, wanted to return to the US but Boris knew his future was in Asia.

Boris then proceeded to establish Calcutta’s famous Club 300. Based on London’s Club 400, which was known for its exclusive membership, Club 300 strove to outdo its western counterpart. During the British Raj it was the first club that allowed both Indians and British to be members and it attracted society’s crème de la crème, from Maharajas to fighter pilots. During this period Boris also met his second wife, Inger. She was visiting Calcutta on her way to Europe and all Boris needed was one glimpse before he decided to follow her to Europe. His wooing paid off and despite the couple’s 23-year age difference they were married in 1950.

As Club 300 grew more popular it was not unusual to find visiting dignitaries or royalty from neighboring countries enjoying Boris’s famous hospitality. Among them was King Tribhuban, a frequent and popular guest. The monarch was so impressed with Boris and his lifestyle, that allowed both Indians and British to be members and it attracted society’s crème de la crème, from Maharajas to fighter pilots.

As his son Alexander remembers, “It wasn’t just with the hospitality of the Nepali people that he fell in love with, it was the innocence of the Nepali smile that captivated him.” Soon after, King Tribhuban asked Boris to open a hotel in Kathmandu and to teach him to dance. There is much speculation about why the monarch asked Boris to move to Nepal, Rajendra Adhikari, President of the Nepal-Russia Cultural Association says, “Rumours have it that Boris helped during the fall of the Rasas. King Tribhuban couldn’t have done it without Indian support and the best man (to assist)

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Whether Boris was a diplomatic emissary or played a hand in restoring the Shah dynasty is not certain but his role as the father of tourism in Nepal is undoubtedly deserved. Boris arrived in Nepal in 1951 and forever changed the way foreigners looked at this country.

As Adhikari says: “In the 1950s, people abroad knew only two things about Nepal—Mt Everest and Boris.” Kathmandu’s first international hotel, the Royal, which included the soon famous Chimney Restaurant were where Boris showed his legendary hospitality and culinary skills.

Still, despite the new establishment, few tourists were coming to Nepal. Visas were difficult to obtain and the government limited visits. Boris was determined to change this. He convinced a group of 20 tourists from Calcutta, mostly women, to come to Nepal in 1955 and then proceeded to have a hot discussion with King Mahendra about granting them a 15-day visa. Finally the king relented, the guests arrived and Boris held the country’s first handicraft exhibition in his hotel.

Boris was a familiar sight on the streets of Kathmandu—red faced and cheery in his typical short-sleeved shirts, pants and cigar. Growing up with him was similar to leading a royal life. As Alexander fondly recalls, “We lived in a large European style palace, with ayahs and lots of animals, from tigers to deer. It was very grand—even when we went to school at St Xaviers in Jawalakhel, we used to go on horseback.”

Despite the legends that his life was weaving, Boris was unable to sustain his businesses. Every great man has his frailty and Boris’s was a lack of business acumen. “He was very giving, kind and tremendously generous. He never looked at business from a materialistic view—that was his greatest charm and his biggest drawback,” says Alexander.

Everyone who came to him but couldn’t afford the Royal Hotel’s prices stayed as his personal guest. Mountaineering expeditions would camp out on his lawns. But Boris’s ultimate fall came after the opening of the splendid Yak and Yeti Hotel in 1977. Though he opened a few restaurants and dabbled in other projects after that, he was never able to regain his earlier fame.

Boris died at 80 in Kathmandu and as per his wish was buried at the British cemetery. He had been all over but chose to make his home in Nepal. He was a legend any nation would’ve been proud of but he devoted himself to this country, giving as much as he took from it, if not more. •

State banquet given by King Mahendra and Queen Ratna for Jawaharlal Nehru catered by Boris. BP Koirala can also be seen on the far right.

Boris at the Royal hotel with strawberries which he was the first to cultivate in Nepal.

The banquet hall in Singha Darbar where Boris catered all state banquets until 1965.

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The banquet hall in Singha Darbar where Boris catered all state banquets until 1965.
Nepal Day in Holland
High country in a low country

Nepal may be the highest place on earth and the Netherlands may be below sea level but the two countries always sit alphabetically side by side at international conferences. So there has been a certain closeness to relations.

And with Nepal marking a host of anniversaries in February: the various ways 1 February was marked, then Democracy Day on 18 February and the anniversary of the Maoist ‘People’s War’ on 13 February. Well, February Fever has now struck the Queendom of the Netherlands as well. Sunday 12 February was marked by the International Council for Friends of Nepal (ICFON), a Dutch development aid organisation, celebrating its 14th successful ‘Nepaldag’ in south Amsterdam.

ICFON has been supporting Nepali NGOs since 1991 in activities to improve the livelihoods of Nepal’s citizens. While focusing primarily on educational projects, ICFON also supports agricultural and health initiatives for Nepal’s rural poor and organises a yearly Nepal Day in Holland, an event attended by hundreds of Dutch and Nepalis. Culture, history, development assistance and, of course, food, are discussed and shared. As the impact of Nepal’s conflict has increased over the years, so too the content of the Nepal Day has changed.

Originally aimed more at the NGO and tourist sectors, the last few years have seen a steady increase in talks and films, some contributed by the Himalaya Film Festival based in the Netherlands, about the political quagmire and violence which have become undeniable features of Nepal. At this year’s event, two films about the conflict were shown: The Living of Jogimara, an emotionally powerful documentary by Mohan Mainali, and a 20 minute promo of a fascinating new film which follows the lives of six very different women who are all affected by Nepal’s civil war.

During a Q&A session which followed the films, many members of the audience expressed their profound concern about the recent actions of the royal government and the conduct of the Maoists.

Even though tourism to the embattled kingdom is down, at least 300 people attended ICFON’s Nepal Day last weekend to share their experiences and learn more about the country. Alongside craft stalls and a handful of independent travelers, in attendance were fifteen of the Dutch NGOs who continue to work in Nepal even in this time of unrest, including Madat Nepal and Stichting Vajra, and one travel agency.

As much as informing Dutch citizens about the wonders and troubles of this Himalayan nation, ICFON’s Nepal Day is a sign to Nepalis abroad that there is sincere interest in their country even far beyond its borders.

Mark Turin in Amsterdam
A new veterinary drug may allow vulture populations in India and Nepal to revive

MARTY LOGAN

A new veterinary drug that will replace one that is responsible for poisoning vultures in the subcontinent could spell hope for the endangered raptores.

Three years ago South Asian countries had committed at a conference in Kathmandu to ban the anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac that vultures ingested from carcasses of dead livestock and which ultimately killed them. But the ban was not being enforced with the urgency required.

The new drug, meloxicam, has been found by researchers to be non-toxic for vultures. Conservationists hope it will be easier to replace diclofenac than to ban it altogether.

Last week’s international conference on vulture conservation in New Delhi was attended by four other Nepali specialists.

The vultures in the subcontinent are facing an extinction threat, according to a report presented at the conference by the British-based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) vulture conservation programme.

Mr Baral, said: “We are facing a very serious situation. The number of vultures has dropped dramatically in India and Nepal. The vulture population in Nepal has dropped by more than 90 percent of India’s population of White-rumped and Slender-billed vultures.”

The Nepalese population of White-rumped and Slender-billed vultures has dropped more than 95 percent in the last 10 years, leaving us with less than five percent of the world’s White-rumped population and below one percent of its Slender-billed population says BCN. Across the region the White-rumped breeding population has plummeted to more than 5,000 pairs. Today fewer than 1,000 breeding pairs remain in the wild. “It’s pretty much the same scenario as in India,” said Baral.

Vultures play a vital role as scavengers and help halt the spread of disease. Fewer vultures means more food for stray dogs, allowing them to thrive and potentially leading to increased incidence of rabies. India’s Puri community also uses vultures to dispose of their dead. A practice that could become unsustainable unless the vulture population rebounds.

Among the recommendations made at the New Delhi meeting:

1. Step up regional cooperation between the vulture range states like India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Burma.

2. Immediate steps to completely phase out diclofenac.

3. Urgent censuses of vulture populations.

According to Baral, Nepal’s Ministry of Health has the authority to ban diclofenac but the request would have to come from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.

“The government should immediately ban the veterinary use of diclofenac and facilitate companies to produce the safe alternative drug meloxicam,” said Baral, adding that authorities “should provide subsidies until meloxicam takes over the diclofenac affected areas.”

Experts at the New Delhi meeting urged more breeding centres such as one at Pinopore, Harayana that houses 61 vultures, including 10 slender-billed, the first captive population of this most endangered species Nepal’s DNPWC has been approached for a proposed breeding centre in Chitwan for which BCN will be the main technical partner. But, says Baral: “Progress has been rather slow.”

Speaking truth to power

Our media elite are becoming dangerously predictable

N o one knows how this will end. The king and the parties may settle their differences, Nepal may become a democratic republic or the Maoists may eventually prevail with a totalitarian regime. Some outcomes have greater probabilities than others but it is difficult to visualize the nature of the prospective political landscape of Nepal in the short term.

Regardless of who wins, principal historians are unlikely to look upon many in our media elite, liberals and those from whom they take their cue internationally with much sympathy. Many advocates of an unfiltered free press and total democracy have participated in a concerted effort of misinformation, obscuration and exaggeration. That some of these individuals were exposed to western ideals of intellectual inquiry may be baffling to some—but less so to others who are increasingly becoming aware of this group’s ethos that shrouds rational debate with group-think.

As a profession (self-appointed in many cases) champions of human rights, democracy and liberalism, Nepali intellectuals have taken the responsibility for the people they represent. In general, the media and political leaders have spoken the truth to those in power, as they should. Yet when it comes to the Maoists they gently whisper truth. During the municipal elections one party activist was killed and another seriously injured by the RNA during a demonstration in Dang. The incident has now been labelled ‘a crime against humanity’ and pictures of grieving relatives at the cremation are played out in the media ostensibly to promote the image of brutal authoritarianism in Nepal. But the story of the taxi driver shot in Patan by the Maoists to enforce their five-day national shutdown wasn’t worthy to rate as an egregious violation of human rights.

The exaggeration has reached such proportions that incidents attributed to the royal garden range from the garden variety ‘crime against humanity’ as in the New Delhi market case. But when the Home Minister rationally outlined the brutal nature of the attack in Tansen and asked why the media and the parties failed to condemn it, he was rebutted by the seven-party alliance with “we don’t have to comment on every atrocity.”

The UN’s ridiculous query for ‘clarification’ of what the Maoists meant by ‘disrupting elections’ was answered quite unambiguously by later actions.

Why should anyone care? First, there is a distortion of the very principle of rights itself. Exercising one’s right for unfiltered protest rates higher than someone’s right to earn a workingman’s living. Second, the exaggerated spin around hundreds of years of monarchical rule as the ‘root cause’ ends up giving us false assurance that culture, geography and a host of other factors has nothing to do with the Rana oligarchy and Shah autocracy as the ‘root cause’. It detracts from the fact that the Maoists have devastated Nepal further in 10 years than in all of the years of dynastic rule, even before the Shivas. Nepal was created by this dynasty not from the consolidation of thriving democratic republics but with one’s own baggage of feudalism, oppression and economic backwardness.

This doesn’t mean that the Rana oligarchy and Shah autocracy were culturally low and economically unenlightened periods of rule but we must see them in perspective in the light of the Maoists.

Note that next door, we have a kingdom that has ethnically and ideologically cleansed 20 percent of its population, a situation that the UN, despite all its bluster, has been unable to solve. Nepal’s royal government isn’t by a long shot Burma, North Korea, Syria, Chechnya or even Bhutan. Context, nuance and perspective, especially if one is preaching concepts of civil society and the rule of law as key values.

But instead of seeing the choices as bad and simply unacceptable, this campaign to characterise the regime as the most odious of all time has somehow convinced those that should be in the middle ground to back the unacceptable choice.

A more sober assessment will eventually emerge in the future and it is likely that it will in many cases be damning. At that time, they might realise that speaking truth to power means speaking truth to all power.
Why India is a natural ally

The strategic partnership that the US and EU looks more desirable and plausible with democratic India

With a Muslim president, a Sikh prime minister, a Hindu foreign minister, and a foreign-born Christian president of its ruling Congress Party, India is as remarkable a success story as the 20-year boom that China’s Communist Party has delivered.

Indeed, since 1991 India has been shedding its socialist legacies and posting 7.5 percent average annual GDP growth, only marginally slower than China. India has opened up its economy to world trade and started to privatise many of its state-owned industries (albeit often too slowly).

The EU is keen to link into India’s boom. The first EU Galileo satellite—intended as an alternative to America’s GPS system—was launched in late December with India as a full partner. Also in December, India became the latest nation to join the EU in the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) team.

In a sense, India’s democracy sometimes hinders immediate growth. Unlike in China, India’s government cannot simply ride roughshod over local interests by, say, leveling a village to build a roadway or a dam. But this is a sacrifice that India seems more than willing to make to safeguard its freedoms.

That sacrifice is particularly visible in today’s Congress-led Indian government, which relies on support from the Left Front. India’s communists (unlike China’s) remain ideologically driven and the Left Front is resisting privatisation of state assets, lifting caps on foreign direct investment and creating a more flexible labor market.

Yet the essential reforms remain on track. It is clearly in India’s interests to join forces with the EU in negotiations within the WTO to lower protectionist barriers, particularly in services such as accounting, law and finance, as this will free up trade and generate greater investment flows. India already is being treated with growing respect in global economic councils.

The main problem in pushing this strategic partnership ahead lies mostly within the EU, where there is a split between protectionists and advocates of free trade. In particular the EU must resist calls for higher tariffs from southern European textile manufacturers, as these businesses have failed to restructure, despite ample warnings over the last decade to do so.

Indeed, the EU should regard growth in India not as a competitive threat but as a golden opportunity that will benefit everyone. The global economy is not a zero-sum game and the challenge for European politicians will be to explain this to EU members, particularly countries like France that are resistant to globalisation and keen on building a Fortress Europe. French President Jacques Chirac’s visit this week provided a perfect moment for India to make it clear that strategic partnerships and protectionism (as seems to be occurring in the French effort to block Mittal’s bid for the Belgian-French steel group Arcelor) don’t mix.

The second point of convergence between Indian and western interests is that India can perhaps serve as a counterweight to China. The world is beginning to notice that India has nearly the same number of people as China, plus a more benign system of government and no designs on its neighbors. China hawks in both India and the west dream that strategic partnership will link the world’s great democracies.

Yet neither India nor the EU wants their friendship to be part of an anti-China axis. Indeed, India has mostly succeeded in ending the chill that set in after 1998, when it declared China to be the main target of its nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, Europe, India and America are all aware that today’s friendship could become tomorrow’s alliance if China turns hostile.

Charles Tannock is UK Conservative Foreign Affairs Spokesman in the European Parliament and contributed this comment to Nepali Times.
Tiger’s biggest victory yet

Golf’s #1 opens a centre for underprivileged kids

People choose a field, they work hard at it, a few attain glory but only a very few have both the foresight and vision to realise that they need to give something back to society. I was thoroughly impressed and pleased when I read that the world’s number one golfer, Tiger Woods, did something unprecedented last week off the golf course, opening a $25-million golf learning centre for underprivileged kids.

Woods, a winner of 57 tournaments worldwide and 10 major championships, feels that opening the centre is by far the greatest thing he has ever done because it has the potential to shape many lives. It is estimated that 5,000 kids will pass through the Tiger Woods learning centre by the end of this year alone. The 35,000-square-foot facility is located next to the HG ‘Dad’ Miller Golf Course, where Woods played when he was in high school. Kids who want to attend will have to apply by writing their own letters. Those accepted will attend interactive programs in science, math and technology along with golf.

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This is no doubt a grand contribution by an individual sportsman or woman and similar to those made by other superstars with vision, such as football’s David Beckham and tennis legend Andre Agassi. The US Golf Association has substantial development programs and has been a huge force for the development of golf but it cannot do it all alone.

In Nepal, we don’t even have a basic program to mentor our youth players nor a golfing legend like Tiger Woods to give needed support. In fact, the sport’s future looks gloomy with no support forthcoming from national authorities. But instead of lamenting this state of affairs, it is time that we come together and plan how to build up this sport. Golf is growing rapidly worldwide so unless we start to seriously look into this issue we will be left further and further behind.

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

Slipping and sliding to gold

Action has begun at the cold countries’ playground, the winter Olympics

ANoop Pandey

With 85 countries participating, the 2006 winter Olympic Games in Torino Italy is sure to one of the year’s most widely watched sporting extravaganzas. Below is a roundup of some of the most popular events:

Alpine Skiing

Men’s events and the women’s slalom and giant slalom will take place at Sestriere, 100 km from Torino while the Women’s downhill, super G and combined events will be held at San Sicario Fraitave. Event finals are scheduled for 12-25 February.

It’s no coincidence that Western European countries lying at the foot of the Alps have dominated this sport, particularly Austria, which has won 85 medals, including 26 gold.

Bobsliegh

The bobsliegh’s Olympic debut was the four-man event at the 1924 Winter Games. The two-man event followed eight years later. The first women’s bobsliegh event was held in 2002. In bobsliegh a driver steers by pulling one rope with his right hand to turn right or a separate rope with his left hand to go left. The sleds rip down the icy track one at a time racing against the clock, reaching speeds of up to 90 mph. The team with the lowest aggregate time after two runs wins.

Figure skating

In the early 1860s, New York’s Jackson Haines introduced a new combination of music, ballet, ice skating and dancing that wasn’t well received in his country. So he took his revolutionary ideas to Vienna, Austria, where they flourished. Figure skating debuted indoor at the 1908 Olympic Summer Games in London. Singles and pairs competitions have been part of every Winter Games since 1924.

The men’s and women’s singles and pairs competitions each consist of two parts: a short program in which skaters must complete required elements and a free skate, a longer program that has few restrictions and emphasises skaters’ artistry. The ice dancing competition was introduced in 1976.

Freestyle skiing

Freestyle skiing saw its first Olympic action as a demonstration sport at the 1998 Calgary Games. Its immense popularity, particularly with the Gen-X crowd, made it an official medal sport at Albertville in 1992 and it has been a staple of the Winter Olympics ever since. There are two disciplines in freestyle—aerials and moguls. Ballet is another discipline associated with freestyle but it has yet to be accepted as an Olympic event.

The aerial event is perhaps the most breathtaking freestyle event. Competitors begin at a spot of their choice and ski straight down the mountain toward a concave jump (which can be as high as 13 ft) that hurl them into the air. They perform a variety of twists and somersaults in mid-air, and then attempt to ‘stick’ the landing upright.

Nepal Pashmina Industry

Top Pashmina Export Award winner 1999/2000/2005

Blankets

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**ABOUT TOWN**

**EVENTS**
- Abouna A film by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun. 19 February. 5:30 PM Nepal Tourism Board
- The Historicity of Limbu Ethnic Revival by Dr. Ramesh Dhungel. 17 February. 4PM. Social Science Baha
- Kathmandu Chorale is beginning rehearsals for its Spring Concert. Rehearsals will be held at the British School hall, Sanepa, from 20 February. 7:10 PM.
- Facilitation and Presentation Skills at MOKSH LIVE, 19 February. 7:30 PM. 3256212
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpal.
- Live Music at New Orleans Cafe. 4700311
- Best of jazz - CS Trio and Friends. Nek’s Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. Free entry. 4703124
- Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- Live at Jalempati. 3426268
- Fusion- The bar at Dwarika’s presents south Indian Food. 17 – 25 February. Garden Terrace Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Terrasse at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Great Dining Options at Al Fresco.
- **DIY**
- Madras Express south Indian Food. 17 – 25 February. Garden Terrace Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Stupa View vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, expresso & latte. directly at the Boudha Stupa. 4480082
- Maki Newa Bhutu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4439798
- Mexican and Italian food at Fusion Cafe, Lagankhel. 5542035
- Great Dining options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu. every Saturday, 4452122.
- The Shangri-La Express. Weekday dinner and drink specials.
- Wonderful Wednesdays at Fusion, Dwarika’s, happy hour 5-9PM.
- Breakfast at 1905 Kantipath, New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily. Omelettes made to your gourmet style.
- BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6.30 AM-9.30 PM. 5521610
- Breakfast With Birds lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Cafe. 4375929

**GETAWAYS**
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, award winning relaxation in Pokhara Reservations. 435 1500
- Junglewalks, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebascamp@yahoo.com
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Star Cruises/Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500.00 only. 2012345.
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivaspur Heights Cottage. 9851012245

**MUSIC**
- The Cloud Walkers at Rox Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar
- The Rusty Nails at MOKSH LIVE, 19 February. 7:30 PM. 3256212
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpal.
- Live Music at New Orleans Cafe. 4700311
- Best of jazz - CS Trio and Friends. Nek’s Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. Free entry. 4703124
- Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- Live at Jalempati. 3426268

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**Nepali Weather**

- The wintry weather associated with the polar vortex has subsided over the central Himalaya, allowing the weather to become more seasonal. However, the weather in the highland areas remains cold with temperatures expected to drop further in the coming days. In the eastern regions, the weather is expected to be cloudy with occasional rain, while the western regions are likely to experience sunny conditions with temperatures continuing to rise. The air quality in most parts of the country is expected to improve, with a slight increase in pollution levels in the Kathmandu Valley due to the ongoing construction activities. The overall weather forecast suggests a stable and relatively pleasant weather pattern, with no significant weather changes anticipated in the coming days.
VICTORIOUS: Newly elected Kathmandu Mayor Raja Ram Shrestha waves to supporters after being sworn in Monday.

SOUTH INDIAN TASTE: Soaltee Crowne Plaza Executive Assistant Manager F & B Pralhad Raj Kunwar on Thursday introduces the chef team for the hotel’s Madras Express South Indian Food Festival that runs until 25 February.

BATTLEFIELD: Villagers living along the Siddhartha Highway in Nawalparasi on Saturday describe last week’s Maoist-army battle that took place literally on their doorsteps. A bombed out troop carrier still sits on the road.

HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN: Ex-Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba jokes with the media at his house on Monday after being freed from prison following the Supreme Court decision to dissolve the RCCP.

GREVING: The wife of UML cadre Umesh Thapa breaks down at his cremation at Pashupatinath last Friday. Thapa was killed by a soldier as he demonstrated in Dang on Election Day.

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Over the years, we media watchdogs have watched with growing alarm the erosion of journalistic values in this country as the fourth estate abandons its hallowed principles and becomes obsessed with mammon and mammaries.

To make matters worse, certain lazy, young reporters who have requested anonymity because they are ashamed to call themselves mediapersons still insist on just reporting the facts and leave out all their bigotry, prejudice and preconceived notions.

Whatever happened to good old fashioned bias? Where is the editorialising? If journalists don’t have the intestinal fortitude to stand up to what they believe in and back that up with views masquerading as news then I’m afraid I consider it a shame to any longer remain in this profession.

So, to make up for letting you down we in the media are giving you a totally unbiased rundown of the week’s events. (Editor’s note: the opinions expressed in these snippets of news are the reporter’s own and in no way reflect the prevailing situation in the country.)

Deuba released again

Ex-ex-ex-prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was released from detention Monday and it is our considered opinion that he should be made prime minister once more. The man deserves it.

It is this correspondent’s neutral and unbiased opinion that Deuba has more experience than most other politicians and would be the ideal candidate. “After all, he has made all the mistakes he can possibly make and it is likely he will make them again, so at least with him we know what we are getting,” this correspondent said to himself aloud in the course of reporting this objective bit of news.

And if you don’t agree with me, you can stuff it.

Prachanda grants yet another interview

Comrade Awesome has granted a record-breaking 157th interview this week to the Kiribati Chronicle thus making him the most interviewed public figure after Manisha Koirala.

The Maoist supremacist has now covered nearly all the countries and territories in the world with Sao Principe and Torne Daily News and the Galapagos Gazette among the latest papers to interview him. “Now we need to get into the backlog of interview requests from papers in sub-Saharan Africa,” said a subterranean spokesperson speaking from an undisclosed hideout in India.

A request by Larry King for an interview, however, was turned down since his surname means he could have a royalist bias.