Alms race

The army and the rebels are arming themselves to wage a war the country can ill afford

Despite the high-profile rehearsals this week for the Shivaratri military parade on Tundikhel (above), the Royal Nepali Army seems to be feeling the pinch of the foreign arms embargo at a time when the Maoists look to be on an arms procurement spree. The RNA’s main suppliers, India, UK and the US, suspended transfers of lethal hardware after 1 February 2005 and the army has tried to make cash purchases from alternative sources. However, the disclosure by an Indian minister to parliament in New Delhi Wednesday that Nepal had asked for a resumption of military aid shows the army’s anxiety about weapons shortfalls. Meanwhile, the Maoists are now depending not just on weapons captured from the army but buying AK47s abroad.

Press Freedom for Peace and Democracy

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WAR IS NOT METAPHOR, WAR IS DEATH, DESTROYED, RUINED LIVES, CHILDREN ORPHANED, WOMEN WIDOWED

Nepal’s two wars

IN GUNS AND ROSES

In times of crisis and calamity, it is human nature to look for a savour. Nepalis, too, yearn for a shielding arm who will banish our troubles and extricate us from the mess we are in. A recent example of this is the ongoing war. Since the royal coup, there was a sense of expectation for King Gyanendra’s Democracy Day message to the nation last Sunday. After all, the Maoists instead of building on the public relations success of their interview offer by declaring another ceasefire until it is annouced more blockades and a ‘decisive final strike’ in April. As it turned out, the royal address was milder and more positive than we had hoped. The word ‘democracy’ was used 19 times in the 340-word document and the king made what appeared to be a heartfelt appeal to the political parties to negotiate and strengthen ‘multiparty democracy’. But, alas, it was too little too late. If the same speech had been made on Democracy Day last year, there may have worked. The political parties would have been under public pressure to join hands with the king. If it had been made before 1 February, 2005 it would have rendered a royal coup unnecessary. King Gyanendra still has the chance to go into history books as someone who acted in the best interest of his kingdom to restore democracy and peace. One can’t expect without the other. All he has to say is: “Sovereignty rests with the Nepali people.” Is it too much to ask? It would allow the king to sit undisturbed on his throne, hand governance back to an interim setup acceptable to all sides which can prepare for genuine elections and lay the groundwork for a peace process. But if he waits any longer, even this offer will be too late.

A dispassionate analysis of the past year will prove that the royal takeover hurt none more than the monarchy itself. It set off an extraordinary republican wave, pushed to the UK and Northern Ireland 30 years and independent nation with an army. We want to see a united, developed country (free from corruption) Nepal. We want to see a united, developed country (free from corruption) Nepal. We want to see a united, developed country (free from corruption) Nepal.

Since Sher Bahadur Deuba is out and about I want him to (no rubber stamp) as the prime minister of Nepal. If it were not for the Maoist coup or the Rana brothers, the elections would have been held earlier. It was an action of the king with whom he is to maintain journalistic ethics. Where else would you get a salary-drawing civil servant in active duty employment of journalism? A second full-time career as an independent journalist who blasts his own day-time employer for lack of freedom and has the hypocrisy to preach journalistic ethics to his readers? The credibility of Lal’s messages are damaged by the fact that he is out of touch and the RNA’s inability to provide continuous security to villagers. In this conflict, if ever there is no possibility of a solution by arms. Each side can demonstrate that it is making progress according to their criteria of success but, by the same logic, notwithstanding tactical gains, neither will be able to

TRAVEL WARNING

Your news item ‘End travel warnings’, #286 blaming foreign travel operators, trekking agents and operators just go to show that the private sector is getting the attention that it deserves. The parties, king and Maoists. It is a classic hat trick: brandishing classic hat trick: brandishing

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Unethical ethics are to nationality what morals are to a society. #286. The bottom-line question for the Nepali people is this: is the need for one man to have more power worth the continued misery and torment of an entire people among whom it fights. Such disclosure is necessary if Lal himself is to maintain journalistic ethics. Where else would you get a salary-drawing civil servant in active duty employment of journalism? A second full-time career as an independent journalist who blasts his own day-time employer for lack of freedom and has the hypocrisy to preach journalistic ethics to his readers? The credibility of Lal’s messages are damaged by the fact that he is out of touch and the RNA’s inability to provide continuous security to villagers. In this conflict, if ever there is no possibility of a solution by arms. Each side can demonstrate that it is making progress according to their criteria of success but, by the same logic, notwithstanding tactical gains, neither will be able to

BLYND ALLEY

Every time I log on to the Nepali Times (www.nepalitimes.com) there is more evidence pointing to the failure of current politicians of every hue to grasp the nettle. The reality is that to have peace today’s terrorists have to become tomorrow’s political party. It has taken the RNA in Nepal 30 years to get the sides in that conflict to accord a simple fact. Currently I see the political situation in Nepal not much different than Nigeria—endemic political corruption, vested interests lining their own pockets, pocket-book looking and repressive law making. Respect is essential. Especially to an agent of the state who has no choice without respect. Stop blaming everyone else. The situation that we have is the all disillusion of the people’s problem and only you can resolve it—not the king or the RNA. The problem is up a blind alley that any pain they feel is them banning their heads against a brick wall. Is it not time that the Nepali people rediscover their spirit? Peter Thomas, email

I do not agree with the original writer of your translation ‘Amusing election’, #286. The writer is trying to discourage true Nepalis from participation in the election. You also take the trouble to congratulate both those who participated on the election as candidates and voters. We want to see a true and genuine Nepali democracy in Nepal, not one that is imported from other countries. It must be firsthand democracy. We want to see a united, peaceful, disciplined and developed country (free from corruption) Nepal.

R P Gurung, Italy

THANKS TO Prithi Narayan Shah the Great and the Nepali Army, we are a sovereign and independent nation with an unbroken history since 1744. The RNA is a symbol of nationalism and unity. These soldiers with leadership, prestige and courage have served in peace-keeping, relief, preservation and development of this nation. In the process of doing so, they have given countless lives. I just wanted to ask, if the so-called human rights organisations ever considered the rights of the soldiers who serve this nation.

The soldiers who clear booby-trapped road blocks, patrol the highways, streets and villages, making it possible for food and other necessary items to be transported into the capital and other parts of the country so that the human rights organisation members can feast on, while these soldiers continuously work day in day out to protect fellow citizens from the rebels who have tortured, killed, extorted from innocent, hardworking people. It is surprising that not a word comes out about these people who know nothing other than to throw stones, burn tyres and destroy property in the name of democracy. I think it would not be too much to ask the likes of Charan Parsai and Gopal Sharwakot to show a little more respect for the soldiers who serve and pay the ultimate sacrifice and yet ask for nothing in return.

Yelamber, email

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Professor Moriarty strikes again

The aftershocks of the ambassador’s speech still reverberate in the Nepali media

S o you thought you had heard everything there was to hear about the municipal polls? Hear this.

In the run up to the elections, an Indian TV reporter from Doordarshan decided that he had to have an exclusive coverage of a Maoist attack on an army camp to depict the insurgents’ intensity of opposition to elections. An advance party of the channel chose volatile Nawalparasi as the setting of the event. The crew mobilised some villagers to act as Maoists (presumably with the promise of pocket money) and convinced an army unit to play along for the camera.

Had everything worked as planned, viewers in India would have seen a sensational report from Nepal’s war zone. But a slightly tipsy soldier thought the camp was under real attack and opened up with his AK-47 at the ‘Maoists’ hitting and wounding a pretend-Maoist. Fortunately, the journalist was also a bit unsteady and rushed the fallen actor-writer to a border town for treatment. But the Indian nursing home refused to touch the patient for fear of getting involved in the Maoist attack on an army camp to depict the insurgents’ intensity of opposition to elections. The Maoist attack on an army camp to depict the insurgents’ intensity of opposition to elections.

The aftershocks of the Moriarty speech still reverberate in the Nepali media. And every time it threatens to die down, His Excellency shoots off another letter which the editors dutifully print. Unlike the utter failure of the chairman-king’s shoe-string budget. It has succeeded brilliantly in stealing the limelight, but the future belongs to the people.

Letters

Nepal Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters to letter to the editor in the subject line.

Ambassador James Moriarty soon had the avalanche of images, he decided to resign from his position. His Excellency’s geopolitical maneuvers have been widely seen as a means of diverting attention from the Maoists’ impact on the lives of rural people. Caught in the no-man’s land of a nasty and brutal conflict, they yearn desperately for peace. This can only be achieved by following the well-established pattern of people sitting round a table and negotiating a political way out.

In Nepal, as elsewhere, whenever an army unit is mobilised, the only questions are: when, and how many more young Nepalis will die in the interim?

Sam Cowan is a retired British general who knows Nepal well. A killer analysis appears in the March-April issue of Mail Southasian.
The RNA brass is increasingly concerned about an escalation of Maoist attacks since the end of the ceasefire as well as their threat to hit urban centres in the coming months.

So far, the army has been able to pinpoint the exact strength of the rebel force by calculating the number of guns they have looted from the security forces. But on 30 January the army showed video footage of an AK47 it says was captured from Maoists. It also recovered 9,000 rounds of AK47 ammunition in a major haul a few weeks ago in Chitre Bhanjyang, between Syangja and Kaski.

“We don’t use AK47s so where did the Maoists get them from?” army spokesman Nepal Bhushan Chand asked. The suspicion is that the rebels have now started procuring assault rifles from Kashmir and the Indian northeast. The rebels also appear to have far too much ammunition for their captured Indian INSAS rifles than they would have got from raids on army bases.

The AK47 bullets did not have any mark of origin but it is suspected they are from a former Soviet bloc country. Army sources say the guns are being smuggled through Rudrapur in the Indian state of Uttarakhand and through jungle corridors along the border between Banke and Bardia into the western hills.

“We know that the arms including AK47s are carried by bicycles from Rudrapur to Thaplyalkhada in Kanchanpur, mostly at night,” another top security official told us, “the guns are stored in a place called Chhap and then transported to other districts using Indian-plated trucks.”

If it knows all this, why isn’t the army stopping it? A senior police official in the midwestern region told us the police doesn’t have the strength to counter the smugglers. “These are notorious gangs we can’t match them,” he says. Local journalists who have reported on the arms smuggling in the past have been threatened. “We get anonymous calls warning us not to poke our noses into it,” a Kanchanpur-based reporter told us.

Security agencies believe crossborder arms traders are now very active in Nepal and could possibly be working as double agents supplying arms to the rebels and selling information to the army as well. But the army says the information is usually too late.

The army did capture a huge haul of weapons, explosives and Indian-made detonators nearby the Kosi Barrage in January and two weeks ago it caught a group of Maoists with AK47 rifles in Nawalparasi. That was when the alarm bells started ringing.

“We have an AK47 even in our flag, we have been buying the rifles as and when necessary,” admitted Maoist former Central Committee member, Comrade Athak in a phone interview. But he refused to say where the guns were bought.

The Maoists have said they are now more than a match for the army but admit they are still vulnerable to aerial bombardment. The RNA has turned some of its helicopters into gunships and used them with devastating effect, strafing from machine guns on sidemounted pods. Its nightvision-equipped Mi-17s are also used during Maoist attacks to drop mortar rounds on suspected rebel positions. But such attacks have often hit village houses and killed civilians as it did during a major battle near Phaparbari in Makwanpur in January. (See: ‘Targeted’, #284)

There are fears of further escalation following Prachanda’s order to his warriors earlier this month to shoot down army helicopters. Military sources said they are aware the rebels are trying to buy anti-aircraft guns and used improvised GPMGs during recent attacks in Tansen and Panauti to try to bring down helicopters.

Asked how they would counter this, a security source told us: “We will go Tora Bora style, but we will do it carefully considering the safety of civilians and risk to helicopters from ground fire.”

“Tora Bora” is the RNA’s slang for dramas laden with explosives dropped from helicopters. Human rights organisations say they are worried about a serious rise in civilian casualties if the war enters a more intense and indiscriminate aerial phase.

When asked, army brass wouldn’t comment directly on whether the arms embargo was hurting combat readiness. But aside from the $890,000 worth of ammunition and grenades from China in December, there hasn’t been any major replenishment in the past year. The army’s field sources told us they have been economising on ammunition use and ammunition factories in Makwanpur and Sundarijal have increased production.

The army got some supplies from Pakistan and was all set to buy arms from Israel that had previously sold Galil rifles to the RNA’s paratroopers, but Indian pressure prompted Israel to scrap the deal. A source close to the issue said India and Israel had “great relations, especially in defence-related matters”. ➥
Revenue drops

Government revenue grew just 2.9 percent in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, compared to a projection of 15 percent, according to data released by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) on Tuesday. The average growth rate in the first seven months of the last five years was over 15 percent, the report quoted an official as saying. Revenue to date totals Rs 35.8 billion while total expenditure reached Rs 43.7 billion, a 14.7 percent hike over the last year. In the recent finance ordinance, Minister of State for Finance Dr Roop Jyoti cut in customs tariffs on many items, claiming the adjustment would discourage under-investing and informal channels, which in turn would contribute to realising higher revenue.

Flying again

Private carrier Air Nepal says it will resume its regular flights from 27 February after being grounded for nearly two months and finding a new Japanese partner. The airline halted flights on 24 December after becoming Nepal’s third private carrier to go international in July 2005. The recent announcement is good news for low budget travellers, including those flying to Malaysia and Bangkok for overseas work. Air Nepal says it will operate three flights weekly to Kuala Lumpur and two flights to Bangkok.

NEW PRODUCTS

LONGER LIFE YOGHURT: Kathmandu Dairy, maker of Snow fun dairy products, has launched a new type of yoghurt in a disposable container. The new yoghurt is more hygienic, tasty and has a longer shelf-life. Kathmandu Dairy has for the past 20 years continuously produced quality milk, butter, paneer, ice-cream, cheese and ghee.

ITALIAN BRAND: Baja and Bajracharya Enterprises have introduced Italian Leno glass cabinets and basins to Nepal. Made in China, the products are available in the company’s Lagankhel, Bijuli Bajar and Balaju showrooms. Their prices start at Rs 20,000.

COFFEE CANDY: Jaya Confectionery has launched its premium candy Crave in a new container. The new yoghurt is more hygienic, tasty and has a longer shelf-life. Kathmandu Dairy has for the past 20 years continuously produced quality milk, butter, paneer, ice-cream, cheese and ghee.

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Bamdeb’s reply to Jim

UML leader Bamdeb Gautam in Kanpur, 17 February

His Excellency American Ambassador James Moriarty has called the 12-point pact between opposition parties and Maoists “unfortunate.” After reading this it is not difficult to imagine why the autocratic royalists have a happy lot. The agreement with the Maoists was something we could not do even when we were in power or in the opposition bench in the parliament. Now that we have been able to bring into the agreement, all quarters except the autocratic royalists have been supportive of the pact. What has been applauded by political parties, civil society, the entire country, Nepali people and all the communities in Asia and Europe has been denounced by Moriarty.

To prove his point, he does not have anything more than a deep mistrust. This lack of trust can be cured if one stands on facts. Mistrust cannot be countered by mistrust. He has been repeatedly saying that Maoists will betray, misuse repeatedly saying that mistrust. He has been seen a history of betrayals. The incumbent monarch has violated successive agreements with the parties. With such a visit, if it is not possible to bring this to the king, and not the parties. The king should remain within the constitutional framework and should be content with what the parliament gives him. The king should not rule, he should just get the respect. If he wants more than that, he should become a common citizen.

The ambassador has once again suggested to the king that terrorism can be tackled if he joins hands with political parties. That means this country’s first priority is to eliminate terrorism. It also means that restoration of democracy is not a priority. It follows, then, that if there was no so-called terrorism in Nepal, the United States of America would not have opposed the autocratic move of the king.

Our experience over the past ten years proves the ambassador wrong in his belief that the alliance between the king and the parties will end so-called terrorism. This violent movement was born and even grew when the monarch, parties and even the international community were standing together. It was during this period that terrorism grew and spread. Going back to the same situation is the wrong prescription to resolve this crisis.

King’s way

Speaker Tammath Ramahath in Godakarna, 21 February

If the parties are really worried about the country, democracy and peace, they must come for talks. Without talks, democracy will not survive nor will peace return. If there is no country, where will the parties proclaim their “political”? To save the country we also need to activate the constitution. The provisions identified in the constitutional system can be corrected in the constitution, which can also accommodate several demands made by the Maoists. The king’s Democracy Day message demonstrated that he supports cooperation between constitutional forces and is committed to saving the constitution. At a time when the parties are persistently on the streets, His Majesty’s message has opened the doors to understanding and peace. However, moving toward a constituent assembly will invite further divisions and crisis. The recent interviews of Maoist chairman Prachanda made it clear that the seven opposition parties are in an odd position now. The points for peace in the 12-point pact that they signed with the Maoists are welcome but other provisions are quite troublesome. UML leader Jaswant Bhatta says that the recent criticisms of the pact reflect our constitution and are just the arguments we need at this point of time.

Chopper war

Disopleft, 14 February

The Maoists are commemorating the tenth anniversary of their war for a re-evaluation of their military strategy. They have concluded that they can defeat the army's crack units if they leave the streets but they are worried about the army’s air capability. Prachanda these days is said to stay in Nepal but he doesn’t travel in big formations in the day time precisely because of the danger of an aerial attack. That is why he has given instructions to his forces to commemorate the tenth anniversary by shooting down an army helicopter and that his way the rebels have positioned GPMGs on strategic hilltops. In the past, the Maoists have suffered great losses in helicopter bombardments and some of their attacks have turned into defeats because of aerial retaliation by the army. Reports say that in their latest attacks the Maoists have placed big guns on hilltops to foil helicopter retaliation by the army. In the Beni attack in 2004, the Maoists lost more forces during the post-battle phase than during the battle itself. Sources say the Maoists suffered a defeat in Krahi with 83 dad and 317 injured because of aerial counterattacks by night-vision equipped helicopters. Recently, Comrade Sunil was killed in Rolpa during a helicopter attack and his forces suffered casualties despite camouflage fatigue.

IMF

Saravan, 23 February

One of the key partners in Nepal’s development process and International Monetary Fund has pressured the government to take appropriate measures for the establishment of peace. It has suggested that the government’s attention should be shifted to the fact that poverty alleviation efforts would be unsuccessful until and unless there is progress in the political and security situation. The IMF’s latest suggestion has come under its regular assessment of its member countries.

The fund’s message is politically soft but has an economic message and between the two there should be no uncharacteristically strong. The IMF’s conclusion is that the king’s speech talked about financial irregularity and in practice the economic structure of the country has turned into dehymal in the last one year. It has also concluded that the donors and the international community that the fundamental support to the IMF is kept in the dark and the government’s non-transparent activities are on the rise.

After the king took over one year ago, the directors of the IMF had called a meeting on 9 March and had warned in black and white that the donors would not continue their assistance if the government did not commit itself to three main programs: financial sector reform, implementation, and creation of an environment so that the donors funding the poverty alleviation efforts will continue their assistance.

Under the financial sector reforms, immediate actions against willful defaulters in the financial sector, privatisation of the public enterprises that have been becoming an issue in the state’s coffers and pricing of petroleum products at par with the international market were the issues prioritised by the IMF.

The commitment toward the financial sector reform and fiscal discipline, the United States by the IMF has been based on the principle that poverty alleviation is important in the country because other donos make their decision whether or not to continue their assistance, even after making sure that there is the fund’s presence. Moreover, the donor community heavily relies on the IMF for the economic indicator of the country.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Former chairman of Rajbari Standing Committee Keshar Jung Rayamajhi in Annapurna Post, 21 February

“The king has to leave his role as chairman of the council formed by him.”

24 FEBRUARY - 2 MARCH 2006 #287

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Caught between two armies

Samaya, 23 February

The country is caught between two armies. But the king’s worries must be growing with the national and international media constantly highlighting Prachanda’s statement while being severely critical of the monarchy. It’s not really a surprise that the Maoists are gaining political opportunity with the king being isolated from the international community. But the real danger is the demonisation of the RNA especially after the rebel attacks after the end of the four-month unilateral ceasefire in January. They seem to lack the ability to counterattack. Lack of political vision, the king’s continued attacks on the political alliance and Maoist offensives have been directly affecting the army’s junior cadres, who seem to wonder why they should die and for whom?

The king’s leadership has failed to rally the RNA. Still, Information Minister Sri Shamsher Rana is under the illusion that he can preserve his power by threatening journalists by using anti-terrorist laws. The Maoists have been cleverly talking about peace and democracy. They have even shown willingness to give up arms with mediation by India and the international community. But it remains to be seen how far they are committed or willing to prove themselves. The irony was that the Maoist militants were escalating military activities at a time when Prachanda was talking about peace, thus taking advantage of low morale in the RNA.

It will benefit the Maoists if the king fails in his moral responsibility to honour the decision given by the Supreme Court about the RCCC. The problem is that a certain gang inside the palace is propagating the view that king was behind the SC’s decision. This rumour has been spread to denounce the independence of judiciary and the courage of the SC to stand up for justice.

But for the parties, their suspicion about the rebels is still the same. Neither the rebels nor the king have recognised their existence. Although Prachanda in his interview admitted crimes committed by the Maoists that is really not enough. He has still failed to explain the mass killings in Madai, which he has interpreted as an internal matter by claiming that he has suspended the culprits from the party.

He has tried to keep mum about his row with Babu Ram Bhattarai by brushing the issue under the carpet. If he really believes that the Maoist party will be joining the mainstream politics, then he has to give the public reason to trust him.

Let’s hope the Maoists will now be more open to criticism about their wrongdoings and policies. But the bottomline is that the Maoists will never be able to take political advantage if they do not proceed in a democratic manner.

Ten years toll

Killed by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
<td>6310</td>
<td>4699</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: INSEC

Target: Education

FATALITIES and damage to the education sector in the past ten years of conflict.

Teachers killed by Maoists : 84
Teachers killed by state : 136
Students killed by the Maoists : 136
Students killed by the state : 195
District Education Offices destroyed : 17
Schools destroyed : 67
University destroyed : 1

Source: INSEC
When Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher abolished slavery he used money from Pashupatinath to compensate slave owners. Indeed, the temple, perhaps one of Nepal’s largest landowners, could still be a last resort today in times of national need. King Girbanaya Yuddha Bikram Shah gave 2,000 ropanis of land to the temple trust for its use which today includes sacred spots such as Gorakhnath, Biswanath, Guheswori, and Kirateswore. Green parks like the Bhandarkhal Ban, and the forest surrounding Guheswori function as Kathmandu’s lungs as the city groans and grows.

The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) was created in 1988 to manage the real estate belonging to Nepal’s patron deity. The same year it was also included as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It’s tasks included not only safeguarding the area’s historic flavour but also preserving its cultural and religious significance.

In 2000, a 10-year master plan began work shifting squatters, tearing down at least 100 illegal buildings. That angered some people. “The problem with the removal of illegal squatters was not just due to the way PADT handled it but also because of the lack of foresight with the local administration, which approved some as local residents and denied others,” says freelance journalist KB Prem Vikari. However even critics now agree that the Trust has done commendable work. PADT Chairman, industrialist Basanta Chaudhary, has been a key force in pushing the project. “We have our challenges. With temples like Pashupati, which has the sentiments of one billion Hindus worldwide attached to it, we have to...”
The name of the Lord

balance social and religious obligations,” he told us. Half the masterplan work has been completed and the effect can already be seen in the clean wide streets and the management of the shops.

Plastic has been banned, the Bagmati flows cleaner because of sewage control upstream. A one-stop shop for cremation rites has opened in Arya Ghat and an electric cremation is on the way. The ground outside the temple is being paved with granite and marble and a proper park is being constructed. Stone waterspouts where the faithful can wash before and after praying actually have water flowing through them.

Money was never a question. The faithful have their own ways of thanking the Lord and they go beyond making offerings to the main temple. The issue was always lack of resolve to improve the situation. There were small hiccups along the way like when devotees were prevented from performing prayers in Kirateswor Mahadeb. They built a shrine on a mound next to the temple and then constructed a shed to protect the shrine from the elements. But the PADT demolished the shed because it did not conform to architectural guidelines.

“Except for the handling of the illegal squatters and construction case the trust has done great work,” says Prabin Thapa, a 23-year-old tourist guide from the area. But the PADT has one more major case to solve before it can declare the master plan a complete success—the temple’s legendary treasury, the keys to which traditionally lie with Bhatta priests from South India.

There is a good reason why the main priests of the official protector deity of Nepal hail from South India. In times of national mourning, such as the recent deaths of the royal family, the rules of mourning apply to every Nepali Hindu but not to the Bhattas. According to the shastras, a priest in mourning is not pure enough to perform purification and religious rites but foreign priests can.

The Bhattas get the money donated to the main temple, which according to some is less than that collected from outside the main temple, which goes to the Raj Bhandari priests. This state of affairs has erupted into controversy every now and then, in part due to nationalistic sentiments but also because the handling of the temple’s money is not transparent enough. A thorough and transparent auditing of the temple’s treasury is one issue that the Trust is now looking forward to solve.

Established in 1882 as Pashupati Pakshala by King Surendra Bikram Shah, the present day Pashupati Bidadashram is the country’s oldest and only government-run old age home. This is where 230 elders, 140 women and 90 men, spend their final days happy that they can breathe their last in peace at the lord’s doorstep. Residents need to be above 65 and have a recommendation from local officials certifying that they do not have a caretaker, are poor and in weak health. Twenty staff are employed here to look after residents’ food, health and cremation, also paid by the government. This year’s budget is Rs 6.8 million. “I have an extended family. These old people are living history, the gods who speak. The one who doesn’t is inside,” says administrative head Arjun Prasad Gautam, whose major preoccupation today is finding the space to accommodate 230 elderly people comfortably. The PADT renovated three wings of the Bidadashram but it is not sufficient and Gautam is now pushing for a plan to construct a modern building with full facilities.

Last days at the lord’s doorstep

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Empty heartland

By SUBEL BHANDARI
in THAWANG

Here in Rolpa’s capital spring is setting in, on the high ridges the rhododendron buds are out early this year. But there isn’t much activity in the villages: many families locked up their houses and left for the safety of the tarai in the last 10 years of conflict, and even the senior comrades aren’t around in the cradle of the Maoist revolution. The shops are shut, only four young boys were playing in the volleyball court which on a previous visit was packed. The Royal Nepali Army carried out a search operation here in December, an offensive that prompted the Maoists to withdraw their unilateral ceasefire. Many villagers who fled that offensive still haven’t returned. The Maoist warriors have also been deployed to the cities for an impending ‘big strike’. The 10th anniversary of the Maoist movement therefore passed quietly and without much fanfare in the district where it all started. Last year Comrade Bikash had told us he would see us back in Kathmandu in three years time. Bikash is nowhere to be seen but Comrade Inkaar, head of the ‘village people’s government’ rides over in a white horse to tell a group of journalists that the 10th anniversary celebration has been postponed by a week to 18 February for unspecified reasons. In Thawang itself the Maoists had called a strike to mark the ceasefire. Many villagers who fled that offensive still haven’t returned. The Maoist warriors have also been deployed to the cities for an impending ‘big strike’. The 10th anniversary of the Maoist movement therefore passed quietly and without much fanfare in the district where it all started. Last year Comrade Bikash had told us he would see us back in Kathmandu in three years time. Bikash is nowhere to be seen but Comrade Inkaar, head of the ‘village people’s government’ rides over in a white horse to tell a group of journalists that the 10th anniversary celebration has been postponed by a week to 18 February for unspecified reasons. In Thawang itself the Maoists had called a strike to mark the

Panauti residents will never forget a night of terror that brought the war to their doorstep

The longest night

By MALLIKA ARYAL
in PANAUTI

The Maoists have headed for the towns, leaving their base areas deserted. The longest night Panauti residents will never forget a night of terror that brought the war to their doorstep. The Royal Nepali Army carried out a search operation here in December, an offensive that prompted the Maoists to withdraw their unilateral ceasefire. Many villagers who fled that offensive still haven’t returned. The Maoist warriors have also been deployed to the cities for an impending ‘big strike’. The 10th anniversary of the Maoist movement therefore passed quietly and without much fanfare in the district where it all started. Last year Comrade Bikash had told us he would see us back in Kathmandu in three years time. Bikash is nowhere to be seen but Comrade Inkaar, head of the ‘village people’s government’ rides over in a white horse to tell a group of journalists that the 10th anniversary celebration has been postponed by a week to 18 February for unspecified reasons. In Thawang itself the Maoists had called a strike to mark the

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The Maoists also looted a municipality building the base outside town. At the time of the attack 25 people were killed and 500 were injured.
Why not to kill the minister

Bollywood’s Rang de Basanti is revolutionary chic and dangerous

The run of anti-Pakistan films out of Bollywood peaked a few years ago with predictions like the infamous ‘Gadar’, which seem like a bad memory today—like Kargil. The Hindi film market expands and roses in the upper as well as expatriate classes, more complex themes are being addressed. The release last month of Rang de Basanti stunning Aamir Khan confirms this trend and it challenges the introverted, nihilistic worldview of the English-speaking college youth of India/Southasia.

The story is about a fun-loving band of Delhi University students whose members revel in drinking beer and exchanging smart one-liners. Their attitude towards politics and public service drips with self-serving cynicism, until a rookie filmmaker from London comes by and ropes them into acting in an amateur production about martyred fighters of the Indian freedom struggle. So far so good and the larger portion of the film by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra is devoted to the self-discovery of these spoilt brats.

The film draws a parallel—in sepia and Technicolor—between the militancy of Bhagat Singh and his hardy band against the British colonialists back in the 1920s and the Delhi youngsters becoming conscious of their societal responsibilities. But then the comparison is taken literally too far and that is where Rang de Basanti turns dangerous because of its immaturity and illogic.

Bhagat Singh went about assassinating colonial administrators in a freedom struggle and Mehra authorizes by having his modern-day protagonists stalk and murder a minister guilty of corruption in a military deal. The kids then hole up in the studios of All India Radio and are picked off one by one by commandos, which again projects an image of a police state at the Indian centre that seems ingenious and out-of-whack.

This departure cannot be defended as being merely a presentation of Bollywood fantasy because while the standard masala film has no pretensions, this one arrogates for itself the high moral ground from which it looks down on the Indian landscape with distaste. It proposes to the gullible, privileged youth this route of becoming more ‘connected’ to their political and social surroundings. This is a far cry from the students of Delhi University who became politicised and joined the Naxalite movement in the villages. What Rang de Basanti proposes is a Delhi-based act of terror by the elite against the elite, a Coca-Cola revolution whose hero, incidentally, is Coke’s commercial front man in real life.

But what a horrific example to provide to audiences all over—that it is okay to contemplate murder of politicians on the road to transparency and accountability. There is a childlike naivety in the script that can only come from the filmmaker’s own distance from the reality of ground-up politics.

This is the sanctified urban attitude that finds Bihar’s Lalu Prasad Yadav a subject of continuous ridicule. After finding itself on the down and sticky end, the script does try to wriggle out of the situation by suggesting that idealistic youth joins the Indian Administrative Service or the police force but then it has the actors pull the trigger.

The core of the film’s thesis lies in a false juxtaposition. It turns history and political science on its head as it forces a parallel between fighting the colonial state and fighting the democratic nation state—if it is patriotic to assassinate the colonial administrator so it is patriotic to murder a modern-day politician who is on the take. Had the protagonists sought to find non-violent ways to humble the politician, this film would probably have come out ethically sound but director Mehra had a need to see the historical analogy go full circle and its dastardly end. If Bhagat Singh’s cavalier shot the gora sahib, Aamir Khan and his band of Delhi University three decades ago who became politicised and joined the Naxalite movement in the villages.

The plot has taken a naive yet dangerous turn with the fact that this is a Bombay blockbuster adds to the potential damage. Simply put, Mehra and his cohort were too intellectually lazy they did not see the difference between a fight for independence and the need to have accountability and probity in present-day governance.

Rang de Basanti is revolutionary chic, from Bombay. It is anti-humanist, anti-social and in promoting violence it provides an answer that is more gruesome than the problem identified. The only thing left is to hope that the young adults who watch Rang de Basanti in cinema halls or on the small screen will take it as the standard Bollywood fantasy.

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Post-modern western

Although it may never be screened in Nepal, it’s worth getting a DVD of Brokeback Mountain

A t first blush it would seem that there’s no more hidebound movie genre than the Western, which has been with us since the dawn of narrative film and has accumulated as many clichés as it has tumbleweeds. But in fact, as the quintessential American form, the Western has shown a remarkable elasticity. The Taiwanese-born, American-educated director Ang Lee comes to his new film, the post-Western Brokeback Mountain, having already made a pre-Western with the 1999 Ride With The Devil.

Brokeback Mountain is a lush, haunting, bittersweet film about love and loss and the impossibility of being true to one’s desires. You might go into the movie expecting to snicker at its stars or at a Hollywood intent on politicising even the most sacrosanct of film genres. But you’re likelier to come away stirred, haunted and deeply moved.

The film opens in 1963, when Jack (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis (Heath Ledger) are hired to spend the summer looking after a flock of sheep. Over time—more than a decade—their lives change but they keep revisiting the scene of their youthful love, grasping for something that brought them happiness and which they could never fully own, not in this life, not in this world. It’s a simple story but it’s elongated to more than two hours by Lee with an emphasis on gorgeous photography and a laconic, musical score by Gustavo Santaolalla. And that’s as it should be, really, as the film is about the most human of all impulses and its fleeting recurrence. Beautiful, poetic, mournful, at once rich and spare, Brokeback Mountain takes a daring conceit and creates of it an overwhelming work of art that should speak to anyone capable of love.

The experts say...

Top tips from some of the world’s best

Practice

“Spend more time preparing and less time regretting” – Virginia Wade

It is no fun grinding out on the practice court but there is no short cut to getting better. My best students are always the hardest workers.

Concentration

“Keep your mind, above all, on the bloody ball!” – Roy Emerson

Great players are able to focus and execute on big points. The fitter you are, the easier it is to prolong concentration on the tennis court. One way of doing this is to keep your eyes on the strings between points and on the ball during a point.

The Serve

“You’re service usually determines whether you will win or lose the match” – Pancho Gonzales

This is the shot that begins every point of every game of every match. It is not the power that is important but the consistency and accuracy.

Strokes

“Never equate losing with failure” – Arthur Ashe

This is the shot that begins every point of every game of every match. It is not the power that is important but the consistency and accuracy.

Strategy

“Keep the ball in play and keeping it deep will inevitably lead to errors by your opponent” – Nick Bolletieri

At all levels of tennis, this is the number one strategy. Next time you watch a tennis match keep a track of unforced errors, forced errors and winners. You will be surprised to see that even at the professional level the difference in winning and losing is which player keeps more balls on the court.

Winning and losing

“Never regret losing with failure” – Rod Laver

It is human nature to second-guess our decisions about everything. We cannot change the past. You are in control only of what is in front of you.

Life

“You can’t change the last point, so forget it. Win the next one” – Rod Laver

You are in control only of what is in front of you.
**EXHIBITIONS**
- Climate Change exhibition at British Council. 13-25 February, 9AM-5PM. 4410798
- Hiding The Balls, by Peter Schrader. Bhakapuri Da rbar Square. 26 February. 9AM-5PM.
- Performance Blowing up The Balls By Peter Schrader. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 5PM.
- Spectrum of Moments photo exhibition by Sushma Amrit. 17 February to 1 March. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM - 6PM.

**EVENTS**
- Kathmandu Chorale is beginning rehearsals for its Spring Concert. Rehearsals will be held at the British School hall, Sanepa, from 20 February. 7.10PM.
- Facilitation and Presentation Skills a forum by AVON. 18 February, 1pm - 5pm. FNCCI, FNCCI complex, Toku. 2041674
- An indigenous technology on the verge of extinction youth forum. 3-5PM. Martin Chaudhuri.

**MUSIC**
- Live music by STUPA featuring COZMA and DJ SANI. 24 February. 7:30 PM onwards. 5526212.
- Ombrate Shivathatari bonfire party. Free entrance. 6PM onwards. 5526212.
- Classical Music at Jatra. 26 February. 6:30 PM. 4256626
- Sangeet with Bhim Birej. 24 February. 1411289.
- The Cloud Walkers at Ros Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4492124
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4256626
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Latin) 8PM at Upstairs.
- Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4701324.
- Best of jazz JCI trio and Friends. Nik's Place. Every Tuesday.
- Jatra Friday nights. live music by Siron. 4256622.
- Unplugged sessions with Strings. Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- Uncork the Good Times Fusion- The bar at Dwarika’s presents Ciny and Par-e-jat 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. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

**DINING**
- Madras Express south Indian Food. 17 - 25 February. Garden Terrace Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Maki Newa Bhutu for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Sing. 4439784.
- Great Dining options at At Fresco, Bhukra, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Barbeque at Le Meriden. Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- The Shangri-La Express Soups, make your own sandwiches and choice of dessert only for Rs 399. Everyday from 11AM - 5PM. The Shanghai Garden.
- Wonderful Wednesdays at Fusion. Dwarika’s presents Ciny and Par-e-jat 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. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448
- Breakfast Near Bhaktapur. Breakfast buffet at Dwarika’s. 5:30 AM.
- Breakfast at Park Village Resorts & Spa, Budhanilkantha. 5:30 AM.
- Breakfast With Birds lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire.

**GETAWAYS**
- Club Himalaya Chicho Chiso Hawama package from Rs1700 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0008, 668-0083.
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. award winning recreation 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, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- Star Cruises/Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500.00 only. 2012345.
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

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**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Raghav Shastri (Nana Patekar) is a caustic, instinctively witty cabaret artist who needs 30,000 rupees by the end of the day. Jai Mittal (John Abraham) is an equally witty heir to a resourceful business family who also needs a lot of money—3 billion actually. That too by the end of the day. To get the cash, Jai needs to contend his father’s will in court and he needs Raghav’s cabaret to take him there. For his part, Raghav needs a rich sucker he can find as a passenger. The two meet and a predictable cab ride kicks off a rollercoaster journey that leaves you laughing and on the edge of your seat.

Call 4442220 for show timings. www.jainepal.com

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**NEPALI WEATHER**

- **KATHMANDU**
  - 21-22  21-22  21-23  21-24  21-25
  - **Sat**  **Sun**  **Mon**  **Wed**  **Fri**
- **MAUSAM BEED**
SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST: Nabil Three Star Football Club goalkeeper Upendra Man Singh waves from behind the wheel of his new car, the prize for being named top player in the Martyrs’ Memorial San Miguel A Division League, on Tuesday.

A LITTLE DIRTY FUN: Riders roar through dirt in the Kathmandu-Bungamati-Lele-Godavari-Lubhu off-road ride organised by Bikers Nepal last Saturday.

LENDING A HELPING HAND: Volunteers from Kathmandu high schools with Habitat for Humanity help dig the foundation of a house for needy locals of Chapagaon on Wednesday.

When a group of like-minded Nepalis in the US got together to launch www.samudaya.org in January 2005 they were looking to start a discussion forum where Nepalis could come together and talk about issues ranging from politics to music in cyberspace.

Then February First happened. And ever since, Samudaya’s work has been more towards spreading awareness amongst the youth for democracy, pluralism and free press. “We are critical towards the current regime and this government assumes that if we are against them, we must be with the other side. What they fail to understand is that we are critical of anyone who is against democracy,” says Sarhana Shrestha, 23, a multimedia designer from New York who runs samudaya.org in her free time.

Sarhana is a new breed of committed Nepalis who are using the Internet to bring international Nepalis together with a common commitment to the future. But back in Nepal, the royal regime promptly blocked samudaya.org, it remains among a dozen websites that can’t be accessed from Nepal.

But that problem can be overcome. Samudaya and other blocked sites can be accessed to several proxy sites, as well as through a mirror site, www.everybodybreed.com. Sarhana says one doesn’t need to be in Nepal to do something for the country. “Just because you are away does that mean you stop caring.” she said during a visit to Kathmandu this month. The Samudaya team wants to break the myth that young people can’t, and shouldn’t, work for social reform whether at the grassroots or policy levels. Samudaya has also started Creative Dissent Nepal, a movement of people working towards supporting and promoting democratic ideals through participatory, creative and non-violent activism.

In Kathmandu for a brief visit this month, Sarhana told us it conviction: “A new Nepal is possible but young people need to be involved.”

Mallika Aryal
Regular readers of this column will have discerned by now that every year or so they are required by law to mandatorily read through yet another article about Kathmandu’s traffic situation. At the rate this metropolis is expanding the rules of the road need to keep pace. What was perfectly acceptable road behaviour last year (turning turtle at Koteswor intersection) could be illegal this year. So, here is our biannual traffic rules update:

- A valid or invalid national driving license is required. Driver needs to cut out this article and present it as proof he/she has read it before getting a compulsory endorsement stamp from the Department of Potholes and/or Cavities of His Majesty’s Government.

- Expats can use a valid national driving license from the following countries where driving conditions are similar to Nepal: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guatemala and Mali. Expats from all other countries need to sit for a written exam and a driving test which includes trick streetwise in Kathmandu

situations such as being required to parallel park in unparallelled situations.

- Anyone who fails to honk incessantly while driving could have his/her license revoked. Honking is a necessary part of alerting road users outside hospitals and schools about your presence and failure to toot your own trumpet could lead to untoward mishaps.

- Alert: The rule on the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving has been changed yet again. It is not more legal to speak on the phone while driving, but only if it is a Nepal Telecom set since everyone knows it doesn’t work anyway.

- Taxis are henceforth allowed to park, but only at road junctions and only if they block all vehicles going in and out of a side street. A taxi that parks on the kerbside leaving ample room for through traffic is liable to prosecution for Waste of Public Space. Buses, being public transport, can load and unload passengers anywhere including in the middle of the road provided they are blocking traffic for a distance of not less than two kilometers in both directions while doing so.

- In case an outrider appears with sirens blaring indicating the imminent arrival of a VVVVIP in a tearing hurry, drivers are allowed to climb into nearby traffic islands to get out of the way. Failure to do so means you may be sidewiped by a speeding Harley Davidson.

- Since pedestrians continue to ignore bridges to cross the city’s major thoroughfares, the bridges have now been opened to all terrain motorbikes and 4-WDs wishing to extricate themselves from traffic jams by making legal overhead U-turns.

- The rule on driving on the left side of the road has been revoked by royal ordinance. All full-drawn and broken centerlines have been erased so drivers can now drive on whichever side of the road they fancy, exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to the Freedom of Movement recently upheld on the road outside the Supreme Court Building.

- Some roads have concrete barriers along the centerlines. These are for motorcyclists to practice the giant slalom.

Armoured Personnel Carriers, Anti-aircraft Batteries and Main Battle Tanks on their way to the Shivaratri Parade at rush hour have right of way and anyone who has a problem with that is liable to be booked under the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Act and used for target practice.