"Hopeful"

Amidst the gloom, a hint of hope

KUNDA DIXIT

The message from Pokhara this week is that international isolation and increasing domestic pressure may be starting to make an impact on King Gyanendra.

Feedback from political figures and visitors who have met the king this week indicates he is weary of the political stalemate and is seeking a way out. Sources told us the king may be having second thoughts about plans to declare polls in his new year speech on 14 April after being convinced it would be needlessly confrontational.

A compromise face-saving formula for both the parties and king may be an agreement on an interim government made up of the leaders of the seven parties. The parties could accept this if the king declared that sovereignty rests with the people. Insiders say the palace and the parties are now under intense pressure from diplomats to meet halfway.

These hints of conciliation come amidst the visit of US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Donald Camp who met the king in Pokhara on Wednesday. Camp was refused permission to meet UML Leader Madhab Nepal on Thursday but he told a press conference: “We are hopeful that there will be a return to democracy in Nepal.”

Till now the king had successfully portrayed himself as a bulwark against the Maoists to garner support from hawks in the American and Indian establishments. China has also sent strong signals with the rescheduled visit to Kathmandu by State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan this month during which he reportedly wants to meet opposition leaders. But even they appear to have realised an interventionist monarchy is detrimental to stability. The aid cuts and arms embargo imposed after 1 February were beginning to bite, and that could have tipped the balance.

An indication that the parties may be willing to give the king wriggle room is that they have not announced any major stir till mid-April. Three months after their 12-point agreement, the parties and the rebels are meeting again this week in New Delhi to reaffirm commitment to their fragile pact. The parties want the Maoists to withdraw their blockade and strike calls as well as stop using socket bombs which have killed and maimed many children (see p 8-9). The rebels, on the other hand, feel the parties are getting cold feet. Party sources say they will try to convince the Maoists to return to a ceasefire and thus remove the rationale for the palace’s militarisation and crackdown on democracy.

The parties had so far insisted on restoration of parliament or a rollback to October 2002 but look likely to accept an all-party interim setup to negotiate with the Maoists and take the country to elections under a monarchy that returns to its constitutional role.
The 7-party quagmire

The alliance owes the Maoists a debt of gratitude

It is clear that political developments have overtaken the 12-point pact between the Maoists and the seven-party alliance. The parties are unable to follow through from the pact simply because doing so would mean even greater rampage of its beleaguered cash. The NC and the rest of the alliance are now captives of their own folly.

GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha

The seven-party alliance owes the Maoists a debt of gratitude. Had the Maoists not threatened to unleash their brutality against voters and candidates in the recent civic elections the seven parties would have had to suffer the greatest humiliation of all. Without such mortal threat, voter turnout would have easily exceeded 51 percent, which, in turn would have meant more than the total rejection of the parties’ call for a boycott. Thanks to the Maoists the alliance was able to avoid a repeat of the past year. The parties are unable to follow through from the pact simply because doing so would mean even greater rampage of its beleaguered cash. The NC and the rest of the alliance are now captives of their own folly.

There are other indications that the monarchy has dealt itself a moral blow in the past year. The landmark Supreme Court decision dismissing the RCCC was a polite way of saying ‘republic’. A legal-political definition of ‘republic’ refers to a form of government based on civic virtue, liberty, non-arbitrary rule and a mix of representative and permanent government with constitutional checks and balances. By that logic, a political definition of the monarchy cannot still exist in a republic but it has no place for active monarchy.

Local royalists, dealing with speaking for the palace have of late toned down their rhetoric. But accepting a constitutional role is a precondition for a palace-parties rapprochement. It implies that the king will have to abandon his interventionist ambitions and dump dummy parties set up by handpicked henchmen. Instead, they find themselves in a desperate situation with their wishes. It is their greed for money and power are at stake.

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Kapil Bhattarai, email

I couldn't agree more with Pravin Rana (Guest Column, "What intervention?", #288). I guess it is more or less a question of how this drama on streets of Kathmandu and elsewhere, while reading the same news again and again, tried of politics, of literature that it simply shouldn't want to talk to king. Right now the Nepal people want genuine honesty from all concerned: the palace, political leaders, Maoists and international players. Of course, before Nepal turns into a living hell.

Niraj Ohja, email

Ambassador Moriarty is peddling the same brand of delusional thinking that led the US in the 1960s to destabilise two, torture prisoners and lie to the world. His regime is unconcerned with the deaths of thousands of Asians as long as it fits in with their agenda. They are trying to divide the parties and give the king a stronger hand and pretend that they support democracy.

Suresh Kumar Lama

There is something really wrong with your columnist CK Lal. No doubt he is a good writer but his columns in the past few weeks have been blindly biased and ridiculously illogical. I am surprised by the audacity of the man to compare the monarchy with terrorists and claim "Once we get rid of one, the other will automatically cease to exist." (State of the State). Mr Lal has lost his rationale, logic and reason. On the other hand his writing refutes his own often repeated claim that the monarchy has been buried and the right of expression has been curtailed in the country. It was mistaken that Mr Lal was a mature and responsible columnist. It appears that Mr Lal's column is just the mirror image of those poor political cadres in South Asia, who are just writing only to appease their masters.

Supratu Nepal, email

As a Nepal studying in India and in my classes at the business schools, I keep on coming across different economic conditions here and slowly gaining a powerful position in the world. The only thing that makes me worried is that my country is headed for a steep downfall. After reading your editorial (As if there is no tomorrow, #288) it occurred to me that we just can't seem to take advantage of India's vast consumer market and do better for ourselves. We can't stop fighting amongst ourselves. All the Nepalis seem to really living fighting amongst ourselves. All the Nepalis seem to really living

Nawal Gorkhali, email

ICONIC THAMEL

I read the very negative article on the Himalayan Times ("Lean and mean in Thamel", #288) that exaggerates the problems. Every popular tourist destination has its share of problems: Pataya, Bondi Beach, Waikiki and so does Thamel. Naturally, when there is honey, there are bees. The only magnetism of such tourist

delusions remain unchanged. Thamel is still the cleanest place in Kathmandu. One-way traffic is smooth except near the Himalayan Bank. Businesses are doing well: shops get high rental and most importantly Thamel still has its nostalgic cosmopolitan aura and charm that attracts tourists from all over the world. The choice of restaurants, cake shops, bakeries, souvenirs, boutiques, book stores and high concentration of travel, trekking, rafting and adventure small agencies obviously make Thamel one of the most vibrant and lively tourist destinations in Asia. Thamel is a result of a labour of love by local entrepreneurs who've put in decades of hard work to put it on the world tourist map—despite no help from the government. Thamel is not a tourist bubble that came up by accident. Hotels in Thamel are not makeshift accommodations, they are built and created as homes away-from-home. Thamel is Nepal's pride. Please don't dent its image. Help keep alive its iconic image as a dynamic international tourist destination for many years to come.

Trihan Agnih, Thamel

RANG DE BASANTI

Kanak Marx Dixit is hopelessly wrong in his analysis of Rang De Basanti. Is it possible that generation gap has finally caught up with him? It looks like the only political conclusion he could draw from the movie is that it instigates violence. I would instead argue that the movie was more about raising political awareness among the younger youth than about violence and it seems to have done just that. There has been no clear study to show that any movie is capable of provoking violence to the extent Mr Dixit seems to suggest and in all fairness, people in general take movies for what they are: just movies, a fiction. Obviously, any normal person ought to be capable placed politicians on the road to transparency and accountability.

What it in fact shows is how the circumstances pushes these youths, who are full of zeal to commit such a crime. Mehra does not make an attempt to portray these youths as some sort of savours but they too become a wasted victims and he does make a killing sentiment, that all youth are just like them, through their violent death. In doing so he tries to tap into the raw emotions of today's youth and people if nothing else in a debate. If Mr Dixit did manage to sit and watch the movie till the end, he will find that it leaves the audience with more questions than answers: how can the young generation make a difference? J Hart, email

KUNAL LAMA

Applause to Kunal Lama's well-placed vitriol ("Pico makes an ass of himself", #288). It would have been better if it had been published in Times of India. I had written the following letter to the Time editor

but it wasn't published. His essay "A Tale of Two Kingdoms, Pico Iyer interestingly suggests that as Bhutan is opening up to tourism, Nepal is closing up. True, due to Nepal's unstable political situation, there has been a drop in tourism. But it's not so that "strains are silent after"—at least not in the vibrant capital Kathmandu where the beat still goes on till the wee hours. Catering to the exclusive niche upper-end domestic market still limits the number of tourist arrivals, while Nepal welcomes any and all with open arms. And while it may have been true that 16 years ago, Nepal incarcerated Christian missionaries, it is doubtful whether missionaries of any stripe would be welcome in tiny Bhutan. The so-called Hindu kingdom of Nepal is actually a multi-cultural society where Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims live in harmony. Furthermore, in Nepal the media is free to criticise the government and even the monarchy—no freedom not enjoyed by its neighbours. While Bhutan may desperately enjoy its hot flavour-of-the-month tourism status, there is no need to denigrate Nepal as a perennially attractive destination.

Daniel B Haber, Kathmandu

What a coincidence to read Kunal Lama's retic to Pico Iyer, because I had written a similar letter to Time which the editors in their wisdom didn't get to publish. Maybe you will, just to show Mr Lal is not alone. After reading Pico Iyer's piece on Bhutan in your latest issue I paired me to see the author become the latest victim of the King of Bhutan's public relations stunt of promoting 'gross national happiness' and abdicating his power. Iyer admits to having fallen into the trap of the Bhutanese nation's traditional method of telling the world how great it is by running Nepal down. Nepal has its problems and it is trying to resolve them by having democracy restored. But please don't compare Nepal to South Asia's police state. Besides, it is hard to swallow that "gross national happiness" when it comes from a regime that has made at least 110,000 Tharu and Gorkha people unhappy by driving them out of the country. This the world's biggest genocide in terms of capita terms and it was masterminded by King Jigme of Bhutan.

Ina Petersen, email

EVEREST

The story you carried on the 85-year-old British woman trying to climb Mt Everest with her dachshund ("Cos it's there", #288) was not a hoax but an elaborate publicity campaign to advertise mountain sports products by Mamut. They advised mountain sports and climbing fanatics all over the world to criticise the owners of using equipment which is so good that it can cause loss of common sense. They are like Mary Woodbridge, who bought herself a Mamut jacket and suddenly found herself wanting to conquer Mount Everest.

J Couture, email

Aaaaarrrggh! It was all an advertising stunt for Mammut jackets. This is worse than learning Santa Claus doesn't really exist.

S Gorkhali, email
Load shedding till 2015

Question is what can we do till then to make a bad situation bearable?

Nothing in the pipeline

The NEA may like to blame this year's winter drought for the power shortage but even if it was normal rainfall this winter we would still be in a crisis.

The 70MW Middle Marsyangdi which should have come on stream this year has been delayed by the conflict and is still two years away. No other major power project has come online since 2002. The only reservoir-type project being contemplated, the 750 MW West Seti, is meant only for export. Upper Karnali, another quick turnaround project, is so far from load centers in Nepal that it makes sense only for selling power to India. Both are at least 10 years away.

The NEA had foreseen this crisis and three transmission lines to link with the north Indian grid were being prepared last year. But like other aid projects it became a casualty of the February First royal takeover. The peak season for power consumption in north India is June-July when Nepal has surplus power and in Nepal it is February-March when the Indian grid is off peak—making power trading with India feasible.

The quickest project that can be turned around is the 30MW Upper Tama Kosi that can be finished in four years. But in its eagerness, NEA may have bungled this project too by trying to go it alone. At a seminar last month in Oslo which brought together Norwegian and Nepali investors interested in the Upper Tama Kosi, the NEA put off potential investors.

The NEA says it has already invested in studying Upper Tama Kosi, could inject more capital, take active part in construction and guarantee the power purchase. It proposes to begin road construction this year, complete detailed design by 2007 and start the civil construction by 2008. NEA says it has lined up $150 million in loan commitments, will fund the road and detailed study itself and will get more finance as it goes along. It says it may even take a minority stake in a foreign joint venture.

The Norwegians who are involved with Nepal partners in the $150 million Khimti project had invited the NEA as the license holder to Oslo to see how and under what conditions the project could be taken forward. However, they were said to be sceptical about NEA doing such a large project itself. The Oslo meeting failed to identify the way forward on financing and conditions under which the Norwegian company Stalkratt would be interested in investing in Tama Kosi.

PEOPLE WITH POWER: Some areas of Kathmandu never have power cuts. According to NEA sources they are Royal Palace (pictured), Kirti Nabha, Khanapani Sansthan, Teaching and Kanti Hospital, RNA Headquarters and barracks and the NEA Central Office in Ratna Park.

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It's finally come to this: the 650 MW electricity generation capacity the national grid can only put out 260 MW. Demand is surging at 60 megawatts a year and no new major capacity has been added for the past four years. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to calculate that power cuts will be with us for at least another 10 winters. It may be longer if new projects are not extended even further. The question for consumers is what to do till then? Aside from buying a diesel generator and investing in solar-charged batteries for household lighting, the only other thing is to hope that the existing capacity is managed properly.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) admits losses through leakage and pilferage is more than 25 percent—one of the highest in the region. Reducing these losses by just half could save up to 80MW and reduce the current 17 hours a week load shedding in Kathmandu Valley alone loses 6 MW to pilferage.

The proposed restructuring of NEA into regional distribution centres could cut these losses. In Pokhara electricity theft was cut to nine percent after a regional distribution wing was set up. The planned community electrification will also reduce pilferage because local management is more efficient. To reduce demand, time-of-day pricing would work. Tariffs could also be seasonally fixed—more expensive in peak winter months and cheaper during monsoon when there is excess capacity.

“The idea is to make price work as a policeman,” says former Water Resources Minister Dipak Gyawali, “and that was exactly what we had recommended to the Tariff Fixation Commission in 2003 but the idea was totally ignored.”

Differential tariffs would make it attractive for investors to get into reservoir projects since they can sell electricity at higher cost during peak hours and seasons. At present, except Kulekhani, all hydropower depends on water levels in rivers which is down drastically due to the five month drought.

The Water Resources Ministry and the NEA are now paying for twiddling their thumbs and not launching any major project since King Gyansum took over in October 2002. Still, all they are doing is fixing load shedding schedules, imploring consumers to make voluntary cutbacks or knocking out street lamps.

They are asking consumers to switch to compact fluorescent lamps because a 11W light is as bright as a 60-W incandescent bulb. If half households (making up 40 percent of NEA's clients) converted, the system would save at least 180 MW.

“The figures show that this is a workable idea,” said Rattas Sansar Shrestha a former member of the NEA board, “all you need to do is get your clients to use such lamps and you save huge units of electricity.”

Another idea that may have to be taken more seriously is to introduce daylight saving time in winter to reduce electricity consumption during the peak evening hours. If Nepal Standard Time is advanced by 45 minutes, there would be longer daylight hours. An additional benefit would be to eliminate the incongruous 15 minute time difference with India. If people turn on the electricity one hour later this would automatically reduce peak evening load.

NEA officials say that if there are no major rain showers in the coming two weeks usable water in KulekhanI will run out within a month and the present 35 hours of load shedding a week could be extended even further.

So, for now the only thing NEA and its consumers can do is: pray for rain.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Reduce system loss of 25 percent
- Introduce differential pricing to reduce demand
- Convert incandescent to fluorescent bulbs
- Introduce daylight saving time
- Pray for rain
NATIONAL

Getting back on track

Nepal must hitch its wagons to the Indian and Chinese locomotives

Sultan Hafeez Rahman, Country Manager of the Asian Development Bank's Resident Mission in Nepal

Nepal Times: is it possible to create a positive economic outlook for Nepal in the coming year?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Nutrition and education are major determinants of economic growth in any country, and it is essential that we address these issues. In terms of economic policy, we need to focus on creating a stable and predictable business environment. This will encourage foreign investment and help to attract much-needed aid.

Nepal Times: What do you think will be the main challenge for Nepal in the next five years?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: One of the main challenges is the political and security situation. Nepal has been in a state of conflict for many years, and this has had a negative impact on economic growth. We need to work towards a political solution that allows for the rule of law to be enforced and the economy to be stable.

Nepal Times: How do you see the country's economic performance?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: The current economic situation is challenging, but we are optimistic about the future. The government has taken steps to improve the business environment and attract foreign investment. We also expect to see growth in the tourism sector, which could provide a much-needed boost to the economy.

Nepal Times: What role can the international community play in helping Nepal achieve its economic goals?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: The international community can play a significant role in helping Nepal achieve its economic goals. We need support in terms of financial assistance, technical expertise, and capacity building. In addition, we need to work towards a peaceful and stable political environment.

Nepal Times: Is there any specific economic policy that the government should pursue?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: One key policy area is to focus on long-term sustainable growth, rather than short-term gains. The government needs to invest in infrastructure, education, and health, and work towards creating a stable and predictable business environment. This will help to attract foreign investment and create jobs.

Nepal Times: How can the private sector contribute to Nepal's economic development?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: The private sector is crucial to Nepal's economic development. The government needs to work closely with the private sector to identify growth opportunities and provide the necessary support. This includes access to finance, technical expertise, and capacity building.

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Nepal Times: How can Nepal balance its economic growth with social and environmental sustainability?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Balancing economic growth with social and environmental sustainability is crucial. We need to focus on creating a business environment that is sustainable, and invest in areas such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and education. This will help to meet the needs of current and future generations.

Nepal Times: What can be done to reduce poverty in Nepal?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Reducing poverty in Nepal requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes investing in education and health, providing access to financial services, and creating employment opportunities. We also need to work towards a peaceful and stable political environment, as this is crucial to poverty reduction.

Nepal Times: How can the government work with the private sector to achieve these goals?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: The government needs to work closely with the private sector to identify growth opportunities and provide the necessary support. This includes access to finance, technical expertise, and capacity building. The government also needs to create a stable and predictable business environment, which will help to attract foreign investment and create jobs.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal attract foreign investment?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Nepal has a lot to offer in terms of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and business opportunities. We need to create a stable and predictable business environment, and work to reduce corruption. We also need to invest in infrastructure, education, and health. This will help to attract foreign investment and create jobs.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal improve its business environment?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Improving the business environment requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes reducing bureaucratic red tape, providing access to finance, and investing in infrastructure. We also need to work to reduce corruption, as this is a major barrier to business.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal manage its natural resources sustainably?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Nepal has a wealth of natural resources, but it is important that we manage these resources sustainably. This includes investing in renewable energy, implementing sustainable forestry practices, and managing water resources. We also need to work towards reducing poverty, as this will help to reduce pressure on natural resources.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal work towards a peaceful and stable political environment?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Creating a peaceful and stable political environment requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes working towards a political solution to the conflict, reducing violence, and promoting human rights. We also need to work towards improving the business environment, as this is crucial to political stability.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal work towards reducing corruption?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Reducing corruption requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes improving the business environment, implementing stronger anti-corruption laws, and providing stronger oversight. We also need to work towards creating a culture of transparency and accountability.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal work towards poverty reduction?

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: Poverty reduction requires a multi-pronged approach. This includes investing in education and health, providing access to financial services, and creating employment opportunities. We also need to work towards a peaceful and stable political environment, as this is crucial to poverty reduction.

Nepal Times: How can Nepal work towards environmental sustainability?

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Nepal Times: How can Nepal work towards gender equality?

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Biased activists

Nepal, 12 March

When human rights activists take rides in army helicopters to observe the corpses of Maoists killed in clashes, as they did in Gaurighat of Bardiya, it is bound to provoke controversy. Activists are not supposed to use vehicles of either the Maoists or the army if they really want to maintain their neutrality. But that’s not the only controversial move that some of them have been making. Activists give speeches during Maoist assemblies, participate in the rebels’ annual celebrations, help to bargain for ‘donations’, carry mobile SIM cards for Maoist leaders and even carry messages between rebels. These are serious mistakes.

Three months ago, the Maoists made rights workers from INSEC agree to their release of an abductee on the condition that he would pay local farmers the cost of crops. ‘If we stay witness to rebel demands, carry messages for them or ride army helicopters, then we can’t call ourselves rights workers,’ says activist Sushil Lakhe from Advocacy Forum.

The problem is made worse by the booming human rights business. In the last five years, the number of rights NGOs has grown five-fold. There are also so many so-called activists who don’t even have minimum knowledge of humanitarian and human rights laws,” says rights activist Bhola Mahat.

Nepal has a higher concentration of human rights workers than elsewhere in the country. Besides the mushrooming local NGOs, there are over a dozen national and international bodies, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the ICRC and the NHRC based here. Problems arise when rights defenders in their blue jackets shout political slogans on the streets and call for all to participate in the Maoist movement. The slogans themselves raise questions about their role as independent monitors. Such political bias means that they can never be as neutral as they are supposed to be.

Student pawns

Rajdhani, 3 March

BAGLUING: The Maoists have locked up 24 community schools here to pressure the government to stop them handing over to local management. For the last few years, the government has been handing over management to communities to help promote quality education. There has been a marked improvement in several district schools. But the Maoist-affiliated student union has seen this as a threat and accused the government of shirking its duty and bungling communities with running schools. Now that this school is closed and poor village students are deprived of their lessons, principal Bishnu Prasad Sharma of Shilka Primary School in Adhikicchar VDC says the schools are merely running classes behind a closed door while lobbying with the rebels. But the Maoists have threatened schools to take their warning seriously or suffer consequences. The central government has not responded to the Baglung IEO’s request to run the schools under government management.

Explosive India

Drasti, 7 March

When security forces seized explosives the Maoists were trying to smuggle from India some months ago, it was hardly a surprise. In Morung, the rebels were caught with 273 detonators and 33 electronic detonators. The rebels are in a hurry to win their war against the state and are increasingly relying on bombs rather than guns to create maximum damage and pressurise their commitment to not engage civilians. These raw materials are easily available in India and China but while the northern neighbour has punished Maoists who were caught red handed with guns on its soil four years ago, India is helping the rebels smuggle explosives to it. If it could easily control the flow of arms. As always, New Delhi has a dual policy towards Nepal. For instance, none of the rebel leaders have safe haven in its territory and are protected by the Indian government. But if India is helping Nepal to control the Maoist rebellion in some ways, it is only because it fears the consequences on its own soil if the Maoists were to take power here. As of now, the MCG and PWG have united and Maoist leader Prachanda has called them merging into a single party.

Airport entry

Notice in Gokulpatri, 8 March

The Tribhuvan International Civil Airport Office Notice: For the information of the travelling public, vehicles which need to be imperatively go to Tribhuvan International Airport will be allowed to enter the premises after depositing the driver’s license at the airport’s Birthday Golden Gate. This provision will come into effect from 12 March.

Dell-Pokhara

Composers who are at the peak of their career, Jara Aastha, 8 March

See the king’s audiences in Pokhara are over and Prachanda’s audiences in Delhi have begun. Which means there are only two powers left in Nepal: Prachanda and the king. Both are giving audiences and both are obsessed with elections: one wants to conduct general elections, the other wants to have elections to a constituent assembly. Neither is afraid of the other. It’s just a question of deciding which kind of elections to have. And that is why both leaders’ audience and leftists are restless.

A king who was sitting in Nagarjun suddenly went to Pokhara and summoned a low of political leaders for audiences. And Prachanda, who was sitting in Rolpa, suddenly upped and left for Delhi and summoned leaders of the seven party alliance for audiences. OK, let’s say Prachanda had to go to Delhi for security reasons. But why did the king have to summon audiences? Doesn’t make any difference.

Just like Kamal Thapa and others went to Pokhara after being summoned by the king, the seven party leaders also went to Delhi after being summoned by Prachanda. The seven parties waited for an invite to Pokhara. But none came, so they went to Delhi instead. No one had any high expectations about the king’s audiences but let’s see what comes out of Prachanda’s audience.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The US does not see Nepal from India’s eyes.”

- Elizabeth Millard, Senior Director Central and South Asia at the National Security Council, in a press conference, 6 March

12 vital points

Nepal Samajawayatra, 8 March

Maist Central Committee member Agni Sapkota (Karna) says that discussion about the 12-point agreement between the Maoists and the seven parties is the result of feudal forces trying to destabilise it. Refirmming that his party is determined to implement the pact, Sapkota said firm unity between the two sides is essential. He further warned that if the revolution could not produce a democratic republic it would end in fascism and the domestic and international situation favoured such a move, the country would be ruined.

Speaking at a programme organised by the Forum for Complete Democracy in Nepal in Jalalpur, Seth Bhuneshwar Pradhan said that the Maoists are willing to compromise as much as needed to establish a democratic republic and that the 12-point agreement will not be violated. The Maoists are now completing plans to shift from Baglung to Valley, he added but admitted that military strength alone can’t do it and a political front is needed.

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Election dates

Jana Aastha, 8 March

A dinner in Pokhara between His Majesty and security chiefs has decided to announce dates for general elections during the king’s new year address to the nation on 14 April. His Majesty appears to be keen on doing this precisely because he is sure the parties will boycott it. In his last new year’s address, His Majesty had announced that general elections would be held within 2063 BS. Sources say that the strategy is to organise elections in which friendly candidates would win and use the parliamentary majority to bring changes in the constitution. A party boycott would facilitate this if it suddenly looks like the parties may take part this election may also be postponed citing security reasons. This strategy has two advantages for the palace: a) a friendly parliament can be put in place and b) the international community can be told we have democracy and even a parliament. This is already happening, a briefing for diplomats at the Finance Ministry this week had precisely that message. “We held civil polls, now we will have general elections,” state minister Roop Jyoti told diplomats, “every country has its own model of democracy, this is our model.” He also told ambassadors that the human rights situation wasn’t so bad as portrayed and they should respect democracy even when it looks like democracy may be in jeopardy. It is clear that general elections would be even more of a charade than the municipal polls and there will be even less turnout because the Maoists control the countryside and the parties dominate the urban areas.

Meanwhile, the resumption of talks between the Maoists and the political parties in New Delhi indicates that there may be a new strategy afoot. If the political parties agree to a more aggressive protest program, the Maoists may be convinced to withdraw their threat of a blockade from next week and indefinite shutdown in April. A taskforce of the political parties in Kathmandu may be getting ready in tandem with New Delhi talks to announce gherao programs in the capital and push a public campaign not to pay taxes so the regime will feel the pinch. In this case, the Maoists may suspend their activities in the towns and limit their presence to the villages. The audience with His Majesty in Pokhara this time didn’t go according to previous experience. Most of those who were given audiences had 10-15 minutes to answer a few questions and the king made it a point not to give anything away about what his plans were. So the questions weren’t “What do you think about restoration of parliament?” or “Do you think it makes sense to have general elections?” Instead the questions were general and were along the lines of “What is your opinion on the present situation?” Even the meeting with Speaker Tara Nath Ranabhat was like one between teacher and student. The king would give a subject (12-point agreement, the supreme court decision, the economic situation) and the speaker would reply as if they were answers to essay questions. Even so, Ranabhat said later he found His Majesty well aware that thing could not go on as they are. Veteran politician and supporter of active monarchy, Bishwabandhu Thapa came out disillusioned with his audience with His Majesty. Thapa says he spoke his mind about why he thought February First was a blunder and why His Majesty should take a softer line and engage with the parties. The king then abruptly said “OK, we’ll be in touch” and concluded the meeting. But the senior leader sensed the king didn’t like what he heard and asked, “You Majesty did you bring me all the way from Kathmandu just for this?” And the king replied again: “OK, if necessary, we’ll be in touch.”

MIN BAJRACHARYA
Nepali children need a new curriculum that includes bomb risk education

NARESH NEWAR

O

e of the most disturbing realities of the past 10 years of conflict in Nepal has been the increasing numbers of casualties of civilians by explosive devices. A growing number of victims are women and children who come across improvised explosive devices left by Maoists in fields, homes and trails across Nepal.

"It is possible that Nepal will be ranked among the top 10 countries in the world in a country affected with new civilian casualties due to victim-activated explosions," says mine and bomb risk expert Hugues Laurenge, who is working with UNKEF in Nepal to raise awareness about the issue.

Nepal already has the world's second highest rate of children killed or injured due to explosive devices. Figures show the casualties among children in the country is much worse than even Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and Burundi. Of the total number of people killed by victim-activated explosions in 2005, more than half were children. However, these have often been misinterpreted by the media, human rights activists, UN personnel and security forces and other individuals.

The issue of landmines has been often exaggerated with rumours, the most popular being that they are planted in the villages controlled by Maoists. The only anti-personnel landmine exploded. Fortunately, both survived. There have been cases of soldiers wounded after stepping on landmines within military bases. However, it isn’t the army’s landmines but the Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) used predominately by the Maoists that have been responsible for the killing of most civilians. These include socket bombs, booby traps, pressure cooker bombs, pipe bombs and bucket bombs. Most socket bombs are homemade and easily manufactured with the help of 70-80 grams of commercial explosives and dynamites available in India. Recent hauls of explosives and detonators in Morang and Bhairawa show the rebels are bringing huge quantities of explosives into the country.

One of the deadliest events was the detonation of a bucket bomb under a passenger bus in Madi, Chitwan last June in which 40 passengers were killed and 70 injured. This wasn’t a landmine or anti-vehicle mine but a homemade IED.

"This is a new problem as we see it, very violent and unexpected and the size of the trauma cannot be measured," warned Laurenge.

The number of deaths from explosives may seem small but it carries a disproportionate share of civilian casualties. In 2005 alone, the number of new casualties among civilians due to victim-activated explosions was 142 in 29 districts compared to only 58 among Maoists and security forces. The civilians were injured or killed when they unintentionally activated the explosive devices or were standing close to someone who did.

"There is a strong need to raise awareness on how one can avoid casualties when there is the opportunity to do so," explains Laurenge. The rules are simple:

- Avoid areas where clashes recently took place as there will always be stray socket bombs being everywhere
- Do not touch mud blocks or unattended bags and don’t stay close to military convoys
- Teach children what socket bombs, pressure cooker bombs and pipe bombs look like and warn them

Asmita Chapagain was blown up by a booby trap mine while she was cycling close to a military convoy just before a battle in Nawalparasi last month (see: ‘Daughter slaughtered’ #296). Although there is still no evidence of how the bomb exploded, there are reasons to believe that it was either triggered by the Maoists or exploded when a booby-trapped roadblock was disturbed.

Educating civilians about the dangers of explosions has become more urgent with the Maoists on a blockade campaign along the highways. Maoist flags, banners and the king’s effigies are often booby trapped. Security forces trying to remove these objects have often become victims of blasts.

Even bodies of combatants after a battle can be booby trapped or bombs in their possession can go off during removal. A dead soldier’s booby-trapped body blew up during cremation at Pashupati last year injuring several people.

Then there are the unexploded ordinances (UXOs) which are becoming a major hazard as Maoist and RNA weaponry
COLLATERAL DAMAGE: The remains of the bus in Madi in Chitwan that was blown up by a bucket bomb explosion triggered by the Maoists in June 2005. Forty passengers were killed and 70 injured. Phul Kaji Pradhan, 14, (above with his mother in hospital) was playing near a road when a pressure cooker bomb used by the Maoists for the Panauti attack last month exploded. (See: 'The longest night', #287)

becomes more sophisticated. The army is frequently dropping mortar rounds and drums filled with explosives (Tora Bora) from helicopters on Maoist positions, if they don't explode on impact for some reason they could kill civilians later. Many battlefields are also littered with socket and pressure cooker bombs, a large number of child casualties in the past years have been due to children playing with UXOs, women touching them while collecting firewood.

“It can be deduced that the conflict, through the presence of explosive devices, has generated new risks for children in their immediate vicinities, sometimes in their own houses,” explains Laurenso. While combatants should be required not to leave behind explosives, the only thing that will save the children is if they know the dangers lurking around their homes, schools and playgrounds. It’s time to take bomb-risk educations seriously.

KNOW YOUR BOMBS

PIPE BOMB
A simple improvised explosive device which is a pipe filled with an explosive material. The pressure of the burning explosive material ruptures the pipe resulting in a sudden, explosive release. The rupturing pipe creates metal fragments, which can cause injury.

LAND MINE
This is a self-contained explosive device which is placed onto or into the ground, exploding when triggered by a vehicle or person. The name originates from the practice of sapping, where tunnels were dug under opposing forces or fortifications and filled with explosives. Land mines (euphemistically called area denial munitions) are used to restrict enemy movement in times of war. Tactically they serve a purpose similar to barbed wire channeling the movement of attacking troops in ways that permit the defenders to engage them more easily. From a military perspective, land mines serve as force multipliers, allowing an organized force to overcome a larger enemy.

Anti-personnel land mines or APLs are widely considered to be ethically problematic weapons because their victims are commonly civilians, who are often killed or maimed long after a war has ended. Removal of landmines is dangerous, slow and costly. However, some countries maintain that land mines are necessary to protect their soldiers in times of war.

BOOBY TRAPS
This is an antipersonnel device, such as a landmine or grenade, placed in a building or in a noncombat area that has a psychological draw for enemy soldiers. The term comes from the implication such a trap will be set off by a foolish person (a booby). A booby trap is distinguished from a land mine by the fact that it is an improvised weapon, perhaps made from an artillery shell or a grenade or a quantity of high explosives, whereas a land mine is manufactured for its specific purpose. A booby trap may be buried in the manner common with land mines or not. Though as a rule it is concealed in some fashion and set to be detonated by means of pressure or a trip wire.

UNCIF is using its famous Meena cartoon character to spread awareness among Nepali children about socket bombs and mortars (see pic). The metal pipe is closed at both ends with steel or brass caps containing the filler. A fuse is inserted into the pipe with a lead running out through a hole in the side or capped end of the pipe. The fuse can be electronic with wires leading to a timer and battery or can be a common wick used in most consumer fireworks.

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Demystifying The Long March

Author retracts Mao Zedong’s journey that is part of China’s founding myth

Every nation has its founding myth. For Communist China, it is the Long March—a story on a par with Moses leading the Hebrews’ exodus out of Egypt. I was raised on it. The myth can be stated succinctly: The Red Army was surrounded and besieged by Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government. Pursued and harried by their enemies, they crossed high mountains, turbulent rivers and impassable grassland with Mao steering the course from victory to victory. After two years and 10,000 miles of endurance, courage and hope against impossible odds, the Red Armies reached northwest China. Only a fifth of the 200,000 soldiers remained, worn out, battered but defiant. A decade later, they fought back, defeated Chiang Kai-shek and launched Mao’s New China. How does China’s founding myth stand up to reality?

In 2004, seventy years after it began, I set out to retrace the Long March. It remains a daunting journey, through areas little changed to this day: inaccessible and desperately poor. Of the 40,000 survivors, perhaps 500 are still alive. It could barely support the ‘promised land’ was not as envisaged as such. How you should respect the truth. Though daily passed through shaking fingers, the myth could be different. How you should respect the truth. The Marchers didn’t know where they would end up. There were constant debates about the final destination. When they converged in north China in October 1936, it was hailed as the end of the March. But the promised land was not as envisaged. It could barely support its own population, let alone the Red armies. Scared and hungry, they had no choice. They had not arrested his father and would not release him until Huang agreed. He thought of deserting but stayed for fear of being caught and shot. Many did run away.

Six weeks into the March, Mao’s First Army was reduced from 90,000 to 30,000 troops. The loss is still blamed on the Xiang River Battle, the Army’s first big engagement of the March. But at most 15,000 died in battle. The rest vanished. Another battle, over the Dadu River, is the core of the Long March legend: 22 brave men supposedly overpowered a regiment of Nationalist troops guarding the chains of the Luding Bridge with machine guns and opened the way for the Marchers. Mao told Edgar Snow, author of Red Star Over China, that crossing the Dadu River was the single most important incident during the Long March and today it is eulogised as such. But documents that I have seen indicate that the general who commanded the division that crossed the Dadu River first told Party historians a very different story. “This affair was not as complicated as people made it out to be,” he said. “When you investigate historical facts, you should respect the truth. How you present it is a different matter.” So the legend lives on. There was only a skirmish over the Dadu River. The local warlord, who hated Chiang Kai-shek, let Mao pass. As a reward, he was later made a minister in the Communist government.

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Mayadebi’s meditating son

Ten months into his fast, Ram Bomzon’s mother is worried about her son’s health

DIPAK RAUNIYAR
in BABA

“Hundreds of people come here every day, they worship him and they tell me ‘your son is god’,” she says, “but my heart is hurt...” Mayadebi’s lips quiver, her eyes brim with tears, she chokes and can’t continue.

Mayadebi, 35, is worried about her son, Ram Bomzon, who is now known as the holy Buddha of Bana and is attracting devotees from all over Nepal and even India and Thailand. While a lot has been written about the boy whose name has spread all over the world with newspapers and Discovery Channel media, not much is known about his parents.

Mayadebi Bomzon and her husband Bir Bahadur Tamang have five sons and four daughters. Ram is the fifth. Since he was a baby, Mayadebi remembers, Ram was special. He was born on a full moon night 17 years ago and is attracting devotees from all over Nepal and even India and Thailand. While a lot has been written about the boy whose name has spread all over the world with newspapers and Discovery Channel media, not much is known about his parents. Mayadebi Bomzon and her husband Bir Bahadur Tamang have five sons and four daughters. Ram is the fifth. Since he was a baby, Mayadebi remembers, Ram was special. He was born on a full moon night 17 years ago and

Although Ram’s brother and a member of the local committee were stung by the fire, they said nothing happened to Ram. Mayadebi remembers Ram stopping going to school. She followed a Lama and went to monastery. Her mother lost track of him and she never gone near her son since he started fasting. “I’m too scared,” she tells us, “I am afraid of what I might see. After he left school, I was afraid my son was going to be a good-for-nothing, after he started meditating the neighbours said that he had gone mad. But now I’m just worried about him.”

Last summer there was a big storm, many trees in the village fell but nothing happened to the trees around the meditation site. Ram has been bitten twice by snakes. His father went to see him and Mayadebi was worried her son would die but he survived. Mayadebi used to be hard of hearing but says she can now hear quite well. She doesn’t know how that happened but she says it must be because of the her son’s meditation.

The only witnesses to the spontaneous combustion incident in January are Ram’s brother, a member of the local committee and a shopkeeper. Ram’s hair was reportedly singed by the fire but Mayadebi got nothing out of it. Posters depicting Ram sitting cross-legged under the tree are in high demand. A VHS tape of an incident on 18 January in which Ram’s body reportedly caught fire is also being sold.

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Mayadebi’s meditating son

The village of Ratnapur in the jungle of Bana now resembles a carnival town. There is a bus park, tinny shops, restaurants, lodges for hundreds who come from far and wide to pay their respects to the ‘holy’ boy. Even those who just come out of curiosity are drawn to the sight of the thin boy in a brown robe, his face dirty, nails overgrown and hair tumbling down his face—sitting still as he has since April in the embrace of a tree trunk.

There are inevitably those who have taken commercial advantage but Mayadebi gets nothing out of it. Posters depicting Ram sitting cross-legged under the tree are in high demand. A VHS tape of an incident on 18 January in which Ram’s body reportedly caught fire is also being sold.

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Puja comes back

The nine-year-old made it further than the 20 percent of Nepali children who never enroll in primary school

This is not the story I planned to write. That one was about the small girl who arrived in Kathmandu a few years ago to work as a house in Dili Bajar and to go to school. Her family was from Sindhupalchok but her father drank heavily and was off on a binge most of the time. Her mother could barely look after her two daughters and this girl, who everyone at the new house called Puja. At nine years old she was rough around the edges but rather than engage, stepping up on a wooden stool to scrub dishes at the sink and burning herself under a mound of clothes that she would tote upstairs to dry on the rooftop. Despite prodding, Puja said little, speaking mostly with a smile at it up her round face.

But then the transition to her new life wasn’t trouble-free, a few months after she arrived the house owners did a snap inspection of her bedroom and found a cache of soap, towels and other household items the girl had squirrelled away to take home when she left. But as weeks and then months went by, the theft looked more and more like an isolated event and it soon became obvious that she was a favourite playmate of the infants who often crawled around the house.

The school session arrived and Puja donned a green uniform, stuffed books and other supplies into a backpack and headed out the door down to the main street to join the stream of other children cackling and wandering to school. Her first day was intimidating—she was placed in kindergarten because she could barely read and write and when the teacher asked her real name she couldn’t remember. She was dubbed ‘Saniskriit’.

School seemed to boost the girl’s confidence, she was now more likely to answer questions with a quiet word, and she often sat outside with her books doing her homework. In no time her Nepali reading and writing surpassed that of a foreigner living in the next house and she would happily grab one of the Nepali newspapers lying around and begin reading aloud in front of him.

About a month ago one of Puja’s relatives arrived with news that her mother was critically ill in hospital. Despite being eternally absent when most needed, her father had managed to return long enough to press his desire for a male child on his wife and she was about to give birth. The relative could give few other details but the situation was urgent so the girl was told to pack quickly and was sent away with some emergency money. As days went by we feared the worst. Puja’s mother had died and that the girl, age 11, had become a mother to her baby brother.

The implications were all too obvious: without even a Class One education, there was little chance Puja would get a good job and strong odds that she would grow up to live a life much like her mother’s. Surveys have shown that just one extra year of schooling beyond the average can boost a Nepali woman’s earnings by 20 percent. An educated woman anywhere in the world, is 50 percent more likely to get her kids immunised against childhood diseases.

Puja had made it further than the 20 percent of Nepali children who are never enroled in primary school. She couldn’t count herself among the 15 percent of school kids who drop out in Class One. About a week after Puja left, the gate to the house in Dili Bajar swung open and there she was, eight feet above, stretching on the branch of a tree to pick flowers for the puja room, flashing that familiar smile. Her mother was retrieved and Puja said she had quite enough to press her desire for a male child on her wife and she was about to give birth. The relative could give few other details but the situation was urgent so the girl was told to pack quickly and was sent away with some emergency money. As days went by we feared the worst. Puja’s mother had died and that the girl, age 11, had become a mother to her baby brother.

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India gets US nod on nukes
MK Gandhi would not have taken India nuclear, nor sought the atomic blessings of the US

H ow much of the satisfaction of being ‘India’ can present-day India take, if there is cause for satisfaction, that is? Much of the heritage of what is today the nation-state of India derives of course from the ‘Indian civilisation’ to which the contribution has been made by regions as far afield as (present-day) Tibet and Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Burma.

The ‘smiling Buddha’ nuclear explosion of 1974 at Pokhran and the IHP-engineered Pokhran-II explosions of 1998 were actions that went against the civilisational attributes of the Subcontinent.

This need to go nuclear has emanated from an incomprehensible and unjustified sense of inferiority harboured by the Indian power elite. Unhappy with the ‘third world’ stigma that represents the reality of the majority population, it has reached out for artificial markers of modernity that are brittle and unconvincing. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would not have supported the 1974 test nor the 1998 explosions. He would most likely have gone into a protest fast and satyagraha against their regressive message. Raheenmullah Tagon would have written a ballad against the misuse of the name of the Sakayamunni to announce the fission at Pokhran-I.

Boy, are the strategic thinkers happy to be part of the nuclear club, to be able to discuss ‘throwweights’ and ‘mutual assured destruction’, ‘delivery vehicles’ and ‘failsafe systems’. The world has been there, done that but the boys with their toys are thrilled.

Among them is one elevated to be president of the republic. Having grown up as brown power when your children are not better fed? Power when your children are not becoming a better world power and would you really need them to become a nuclear weapon? Do you going to use those nuclear-tipped missiles against? Do you harbour by the Indian power elite.

India is becoming and what the western understanding of what the American and European elites want to see in the face of their Southasian neighbours, in the face of their Southasian neighbours? Suddenly, the nuclear anointing of India, at the cost of nuclear non-proliferation, is the most recent manifestation of American and western understanding of what India is becoming and what the Indian power elite has been there, done that but the boys with their toys are thrilled. Among them is one elevated to be president of the republic.

Today I call for greater action to involve women in decision-making at all levels—from the top of government and the United Nations down to the basic unit of society, the family, and foremost in matters related to their own lives.

Research shows that while much progress has been made, millions of women are still denied the opportunity to make even the most basic decisions about marriage and childbearing. At September’s World Summit, world leaders agreed to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015 as critical for the attainment of gender equality and the other Millennium Development Goals to improve maternal health, reduce child mortality, combat HIV/AIDS, and reduce poverty. Reproductive health and rights are fundamental to women’s empowerment.

Today, on International Women’s Day, I would like to encourage greater dialogue within societies, communities and families, between women and men and between young and old. We need to talk to each other and find ways to advance mutual respect, mutual communication and spiritual responsibility. Gender equality should be inscribed into national law and translated into investments in national budgets. UNFPA is committed to promoting sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights, women’s empowerment, male involvement and responsibility, and gender equality. Today we salute the women and men who are working towards these worthy goals.
**Raves for Rafael**

Passionate slugger more than a match for Federer

After Rafael Nadal beat Roger Federer in last weekend’s finals of the International Series in Dubai, he burst into tears. It was more than just his victory over the world’s number one—Nadal had overcome a career-threatening injury to his foot. After a break out year in 2005 in which he won eight tour events including the French Open, these were difficult days for the fast rising player but adversity brings out the best in champions. Obviously Nadal’s victory over the Swiss star in just his second tournament of his comeback is a major statement that he is healthy and ready to build on last year’s result.

It is hard not to like Nadal. He has great passion for the game, with his intensity and competitiveness reminding us of the legendary Jimmy Connors. The way he charges onto the court for the warm-up and bounces up and down before the coin toss reminds you of a prizefighter. He has the body language of a champion. Look at his eyes and his focus and concentration are intimidating. Nadal is also one of the fittest players on the ATP tour and has raised the bar for fitness training.

Born in Manacor, Mallorca, he showed great athletic skills at a young age. Nadal was very good at soccer and tennis but realised early that he had a special gift on the tennis court. Being left-handed, he had a huge advantage over other players. With the talent he possessed and his huge work ethic, it was not a surprise to many in tennis’s inner circle to see his meteoric rise. At just 19 years of age, he has an astounding 131-40 record, 13 singles titles and $4,808,579 in prize money. With endorsements, it is safe to say he has earned over $10 million.

Footwork, fitness and physical strength are the foundations of Nadal’s game, enabling him to run around and hit his favourite shot (forehand) and dictate the pace of a match. His ability to manipulate the topspin and the amazing head speed of his racket makes him a very dangerous player on any surface. To top it off, he has a solid backhand, adequate volleys and a great touch. It was breathtaking to see the drop shot winners he produced throughout the fortnight of the tournament of his comeback is a major statement that he is healthy and ready to build on last year’s result.

**GAME POINT**

Sujay Lama

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**THE ROUTE**

**Sunday 12 March**
8AM - Flag off from Himalayan Java Thamel by Ms Nepal, Sugarika KC
1PM - Lunch at River Side Spring Resort Kurintar
5PM - Overnight at Sirens Club Resort Naryanghat

**Monday 13 March**
9AM - Brunch at Naryanghat
2PM - Arrival at Lakeside Pokhara
7PM - Dinner at Boomerang with concert

**Tuesday 14 March**
9AM - Gathering at Boomerang, Hotline
1PM - Lunch
7PM - Dinner at Paradise

**Wednesday 15 March**
9AM - Back to Kathmandu
1PM - Lunch at Trisul Centre
4PM - Amice Kathmandu Club Page 3

**Bullets against bullets**

Himalayan Enfielders saddle up for their Kathmandu-Pokhara peace ride

**ALOK TUMBHANGPHEY**

In the world of motorbikes, the legend of the Royal Enfield is told via tales of long, lonely rides along empty highways. Until recently the only people crazy enough to handle these addictive machines were tourists on the happy trail who crossed into Nepal from India and sold their Bullets in Kathmandu once they went broke. But after five years, this beauty of a bike has acquired a cult following here, with the now famous Himalayan Enfielders an ever growing group of passionate riders eager to rumble through the majestic Himalayan scenery. “We have some of the best biking country as our backyard and riding through the beautiful countryside on the roof of the world is a pleasure you can’t get anywhere else,” says club founder Binod Chettri, who has perhaps more miles on his Bullet’s odometer than any other rider in the country. A long time road warrior, Chettri has led three tours to Tibet as well as driven a Mercedes Benz from Germany to Nepal alone.

On 12 March the Enfielders set off on Ride Nepal 2006, a motorcycle rally in search of what the country needs most in these dark, bouncy, peace. First launched in 2001, the event is an attempt to promote peace along with tourism. It’s not a race, participants actually stop and talk to locals along the highway. And it’s not just for Bullet riders—everyone with or without a motorbike can be a part of this three-night-four-day tour which will motor to Pokhara for two days of festivities that includes a motocycling skills competition, boat races, a barbecue and a concert by the Enfielders in-house band. Manu Raj Bhurtel has fired up his engine for all the Enfielders peace rides. “As a rider it’s a uniquely amazing experience. It not only helps to promote tourism but also helps to reduce the negative effects of the conflict, giving the message that it’s OK to ride.”

It has become tradition that the Enfielders hold their annual ride during Holi and this one in Pokhara is sure to be a colourful event.

**THE WORLD IS TRUST**

Himal Khabarpatrika is Nepal’s largest-circulated news magazine by far. We deliver a comprehensive daily snapshot of daily life in Nepal to our readers. From news and events to sports, pop culture and lifestyle, we cover it all.

*Note: The information in this magazine is for entertainment purposes only.*

*If you believe the information in this magazine is misleading or incorrect, please contact us at info@himal.com*

**ALOK TUMBHANGPHEY**

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MalaMalam Weekly is about the struggles and survival of people in a small town. Lilaram, one of the town’s inhabitants has a business of selling MalaMalam Weekly Lottery Tickets. One day, while watching TV at a local tea stall, he learns that one of the tickets he had sold has in fact won the One Crore Rupees Bumper Prize. Lilaram breaks a party for his 105 customers on the condition that they bring along their tickets as an invite to the celebrations. As luck would have it, the winner turns out to be Lilaram himself. Lilaram decides to pay him a visit. He finds Anthony dead in front of the TV with the lottery ticket still in his hand! What follows from thereon is a roller coaster ride of unusual events with surprising twists & turns at every stage.

Call 4442220 for show timings          www.jainepal.com

**About Town**

- **EXHIBITIONS**
  - Incidental Meeting paintings by Celia Washington (UK)
  - Sunila Rana (Nepal) & Montserrat Clauells (Spain)
  - Cadenza Collective
- **DATING**
  - Steak at Olive Bar & Bistro
  - Beat the heat at Singma Restaurant
  - **MUSIC**
  - The Cloud Walkers at Bikas Bar: Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu
  - Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
  - **DINING**
  - Strawberry Time at Olive Crowne Plaza
  - Mexican and Italian food at Soaltee
  - **EVENTS**
  - Best of Jazz at Namba Bar, Park Village Resorts & Spa
  - Live Music at Namba Bar, Hotel de l’Annapurna
  - **TRAVEL**
  - Nepal Packages from Rs.65,500 only. 2012345.

**Kathmandu Valley**

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**THINGS TO DO**

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HAPPENINGS

DON’T YOU DARE: Police arrest visually impaired demonstrators taking part in a rally on Tuesday demanding jobs. More than 100 were briefly detained.

HAPPY SONG: Tharu girls in Divyaamager Chitwan in their traditional costumes sing a song celebrating the first anniversary of the Tharu Ethnic Museum in the village of Sisai.

ARTISTS’ CHILDREN: The Chitrakar community organized an art workshop for their children at Mangal Bajar on Saturday so they get a headstart in their ancestral profession.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Nepali musicians and celebrities paid a surprise ‘office warming’ visit to Himalmedia’s brand new premises on Tuesday.

Differently-abled

Sudarshan Subedi was eight when he developed a limp. His village in Parbat was a 10 day walk from the hospital in Kathmandu so he got no treatment. Today, at 42, polio has become a part of Sudarshan’s life.

Sudarshan’s father was determined that his son should receive an education and rallied his fellow villagers into opening a local school. Even as a boy Sudarshan remembers being determined to overcome his physical disability, he used to play goalie in football matches and applied himself to his studies. After graduation, Sudarshan’s heart went out whenever he witnessed others like him being mistreated and he was determined to redress this injustice.

Working on his thesis for a law degree, Sudarshan came across a clause in the law that provided free education to those with physical handicaps. He applied for this but got only half a fee waiver. Sudarshan challenged this in court and won the case that set a precedent for others.

Sudarshan then set up the Disabled Human Rights Commission (DHRC) in 2000 through which he hoped to change the system. “There were over 500 organisations working for differently-abled people but they looked at us as charity cases and we wanted to change that view,” he says.

DHRC has been working in advocacy and spreading awareness about the rights of the disabled through a newsletter called Apanga Awaj and radio programs. For his perseverance and commitment for the rights of the disabled, Sudarshan was awarded the Asoke Fellowship last year.

For many, this would be the time to bask in the glory and take a back seat. But Sudarshan says his struggle is just beginning: “People say they are aware about the needs and rights of the disabled but it doesn’t show in their behaviour. We don’t need charity, we need our rights as citizens and inclusion in society.”

Aarti Basnyat

Radisson Spring BRUNCH

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Look at the brighter side of loadshedding

To tell you frankly, I’m getting sick and tired of listening to some of you who have insisted on criticizing at every possible wedding reception in the past week the current loadshedding regime. Thankfully, people like you are in a minority and an overwhelming number of Nepalis are happy to have become creatures of darkness. We hole-heartedly welcome loadshedding because we see its brighter side. You may well ask, so what are the positive aspects of power cuts? Wha, not so fast, can’t you see I’m thinking? As I was saying, all you need is a positive mental attitude to take advantage of our return to the pre-industrial age. In fact I would go as far as to say that it’s actually empowering. If people for 35 hours a week is the single most outstanding achievement of the post-Royal Takeover dispensation and we should all be singing hosannas (if we aren’t already) in praise of he who made this possible.

There is even more delightful news that the people may have to do with even less power than they have at present which can only mean that, god willing, the little power there is will be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. But, as the adage goes, let’s not get too excited about that and start counting our chickens before they die of a mysterious flu-like epidemic.

So, thank you for waiting. As promised, and totally off the top of my head, here are some reasons why loadshedding is good for our country:

1. Current loadshedding timetables are very complicated and one needs a PhD in Plasma Physics to figure them out. With the layman in mind, future schedules will be much simpler: ‘Power supply every alternate day for 15 minutes.’

2. Nepalis will be watching less television. This means that instead of engaging in our national pastime of fondling the remote, we will be indulging in a new national pastime of playing interactive games with each other in the dark. As a result, the country will see a new baby boom and a demographic bulge to quadruple the nation’s GDP by 2025.

3. Nepal Tourism Board will use the Berlin Travel Mart this week to unveil its new promotional campaign under the slogans: ‘Once Is Not Enough. Take Another Trip to the Dark Ages’ and ‘Visit Nepal—The Heart of Darkness’.

4. Nightvision goggles will no longer be a restricted military item but an essential consumer electronic gadget for everyday home use. This will facilitate finding one’s way from the bedroom to the bathroom and taking accurate aim in the general direction of the waterloo. Important: Reminder for Male Nightvision Customers: As a Courtesy To Fellow Passengers Please Don’t Forget to Lift the Seat. Kids can catch up with their homework using nightvision equipment and one can go bar-hopping in Thamel again without the threat of inadvertently finding oneself neck-deep in an open manhole.

5. Loadshedding means less time wasted aimlessly surfing the net. The time saved can be employed in taking long walks with kith and kin and ensure strong family bonding. My particular favourite is to stroll along the Bagmati Promenade and inhale the full aroma of our very own Sewage Canal.

6. The proposed 32-storey skyscraper coming up in Jawalakhel will be a symbol of national pride since it will be the tallest erection in South Asia when it is completed by 2015. But since projections show loadshedding will still be in force then, it will enter the Guinness Book as the tallest building in the world without a functioning lift.

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit